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## **Thoroughly Exploring Secularism in an Islamic Perspective: History, Dynamics, and Interpretation of the Qur'an**

**Eka Cahyani M Djamil<sup>1</sup>; Eka Galih Rahayu<sup>2</sup>; Fahmi Fahreza<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Secularism, a concept that emerged in the West and spread throughout the world, including Indonesia, has become a subject of debate in relation to religion, especially Islam. This research aims to explore the definition of secularism, its development in various fields, the changes that arise as a result, the interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to secularism, and scholars' perspectives on this matter. Through a qualitative method, this research utilises secondary data sources, such as journal articles and books, to provide a deeper understanding of this topic. The results show that secularism is considered as the separation of human affairs from God's affairs in all aspects of life, including education. Yusuf Qardhawi expressed his concern over the influence of secularism and atheism in the Islamic world, fuelled by colonialism and modernity. In the context of Qur'anic verses, this study found references to secularism in Surah Al-Isra' and Surah Hud. In this context, the contrast between worldly and afterlife orientations, as well as warnings against mere worldly pleasures, take centre stage. As such, this study provides a deep insight into how Islam understands and interprets secularism.*

**Keywords:** *Secularism; Qur'an; Islam.*

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<sup>1</sup> UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia, Email: [ekacahyanidjamil1763@gmail.com](mailto:ekacahyanidjamil1763@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia, Email: [galihe296@gmail.com](mailto:galihe296@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia, Email: [fahmifahreza931@gmail.com](mailto:fahmifahreza931@gmail.com)

## Introduction

The interplay between secularism and Islam is a multifaceted and intricate topic that has garnered significant scholarly attention[1]. In the context of the contemporary world, where the boundaries between religion and state governance are continually negotiated and redefined, understanding secularism from an Islamic perspective is crucial[2]. This exploration is not merely about juxtaposing secular principles with religious doctrines; it involves a deep dive into the historical evolution, cultural dynamics, and interpretative frameworks of the Qur'an that shape the Muslim world's view of secularism[3].

Historically, the concept of secularism has its roots in the Enlightenment era of the West, where it emerged as a response to the dominance of religious institutions over political and social life[4]. This movement advocated for the separation of church and state, promoting a public sphere where rationality and individual freedoms could flourish independent[5] of religious constraints[6]. However, when this Western model of secularism intersects with Islamic societies, it encounters a complex landscape where religion is not only a matter of personal faith but also a comprehensive way of life that governs all aspects of existence[7].

The dynamics of secularism within Islamic contexts are shaped by a variety of factors, including colonial legacies, socio-political developments, and indigenous movements for modernization and reform. Different Muslim-majority countries exhibit diverse attitudes towards secularism, ranging from outright rejection to attempts at harmonizing religious principles with secular governance. These variations reflect the unique historical and cultural trajectories of each society, as well as the different ways in which Islamic thought has engaged with modernity.

Central to this discourse is the interpretation of the Qur'an. As the foundational text of Islam, the Qur'an provides guidance on all aspects of life, including governance, justice, and social relations. Interpretations of the Qur'an, however, are not monolithic; they are influenced by the context in which they are produced, the methodologies employed by scholars, and the objectives they seek to achieve[8]. This plurality of interpretations opens up a space for dialogue and contestation about the place of secularism in Islamic thought and practice.

In this exploration, we will delve into the historical background of secularism, examine the dynamics that influence its reception in the Islamic world, and analyze the various interpretative approaches to the Qur'an that inform Muslim perspectives on secularism[9]. Through this comprehensive study, we aim to shed light on the nuanced and evolving relationship between

secularism and Islam[10], providing insights into the ways in which Muslim societies navigate the challenges and opportunities of modernity[11].

Secularism is often thought of as an ideology that separates religion from the world. Secularism first emerged in the West and then spread throughout the world, especially the Islamic world and Indonesia. The main purpose of secularism is to separate human matters from the cause of God in all aspects of existing life, including in the field of education, and consists of three main components, namely, the abolition of sacredness, the politics of blasphemy, and the deconsecration of values[12].

In a country that has Islam as its legal basis, freedom of religion is guaranteed and the sanctity of religion is maintained. This is in contrast to countries that implement secularism, where religious freedom is considered pseudo and there are restrictions on certain religious symbols. Blasphemy against religion is also still common in countries that practice secularism.

## Method

This research applies a qualitative approach using the *maudhu'i* interpretation method. Qualitative research involves a planned set of activities to interpret informants by describing, disclosing, and explaining[13]. The *maudhu'i* interpretation approach is often used in research to seek answers to the Qur'an by collecting verses that have similar goals, which collectively address a particular topic and are systematically arranged[14]. Data collection is done through literature studies, with relevant literature from books, journal articles, and other sources considered secondary data sources. In this study, the authors collected Qur'anic verses related to secularism, arranged based on the relationship of these verses, and carefully classified.

## Results and Discussion

### Understanding Secularism

Etymologically, secularism comes from the Latin word *saeculum* which has two connotations, namely time and space. The connotation of time refers to the sense of the present or present, while the connotation of space refers to the sense of the world or worldly[16]. In addition, secularism also means *fashluddin 'anil haya*, which means separating the role of religion from everyday life. This implies that religion is only concerned with the relationship between the individual and his creator.

Thus, secularism can be explained as a view that only pays attention to life in this world without regard to spiritual things, such as the existence of life after death which is actually the core of religious teachings.

In terminology, secularism is often interpreted as a principle that promotes separation between state and religious affairs. The state is responsible for world affairs and is not related to the affairs of the afterlife[18], while religion only regulates the relationship between humans with metaphysical and spiritual matters, such as the relationship with God Kasmuri, "The Phenomenon of Secularism."

### **The History of Secularism in Various Fields**

Secularism is an ideology that arises from the process of secularization. Western Europe has undergone a process of secularization over the past 250 years or so. Disillusionment with the dominance of the church in public life became an important factor in this development.

Muhammad Al-Bahy has revealed that secularism arises due to the following factors:

1. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the phenomenon of secularism occurred which was the result of a power competition between the state and the Church. Therefore, the separation between the two powers is considered an attempt to resolve the conflict both legally and philosophically.
2. The establishment of power was a major factor that encouraged secularism in the 19th century. Therefore, it is important to understand that secularism is not only a separation between Church and state, but is also an attempt to eliminate dualism by removing the role of religion as the first step in achieving independent power.
3. The study of nature and the development of science have encouraged secular intellectuals to abandon the teachings or beliefs of the Church.

Yusuf Al-Qaradawi has explained that secularism in the Western world A.D. arose due to various factors such as religion, thought, psychology, history, and empirical realities of life[21]. That is:

1. The Christian religion recognizes a separation between worldly life subject to state rule and spiritual life subject to Church rule. In Christianity, there is an understanding of the dichotomy of life between God and Caesar. This division is clearly seen in the words of Christ (as) as recorded in the Gospel: "give to Caesar what is rightfully his, and give to God what is rightfully his".
2. Religion is not bound by certain rules in dealing with various aspects of life. The Christian Association places more emphasis on the spiritual and moral values found in the teachings of the Gospel and the words of Christ, without any specific laws to regulate social interaction and daily activities.

3. The Power of Christianity. For secularists, when separating Christianity from the state, or the state from Christianity, they do not essentially eliminate Christianity or isolate its power. Because Christianity has its own superior authority. Christianity has power, status, finances, and religious leaders. Thus, Christianity has two types of power, namely religious power exercised by priests and religious leaders, and worldly power exercised by kings or presidents and government leaders and aides.
4. Church history. The history of the relationship between church, science, thought, and freedom is often controversial. There was a time when the church sank into incomprehension and rejected the advancement of science, conflicted with irrational beliefs by suppressing thought, and acted authoritarily in restricting freedom[22]. The church also once collaborated with feudal groups to oppress the people, which in turn triggered the people to rebel. In this struggle, people called for freedom from authoritarian leaders and regarded the separation of church from state as a step to free themselves from oppression.

Yusuf Qaradawi pointed out that the challenge of secularism for the Islamic world involves not only the struggle against the concept of secularism itself, but also against atheism. This stems from the impact of colonialism which has deeply damaged Islamic values[24]. It is thought that ideas such as modernity, westernization, and modernization will seek to infiltrate the Islamic world, potentially weakening Islam and undermining morality[25]. Therefore, Yusuf Qaradawi said that he is very worried about Muslims today who are like *Muslim Jughrafi*, i.e. people who live in the Islamic world but whose thinking is far from Islam Yusuf Qardhawi, *Al-Islam Kama Nu'minu Bihi*. Nahdhah li al-Thib'ah waal-Nasyir wa al-Tawzi, 1999..

As a result, Jews and Christians were unhappy with Islam's significant success. They deliberately spread propaganda aimed at undermining the understanding and morality of Muslims[27]. Their goal is to tear down Islamic values that have been passed down from one generation to the next. As Allah has said in the glorious Qur'an:

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَلَئِنَّ آتِبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

120. Jews and Christians will never be willing to you (Prophet Muhammad) so that you follow their religion. Say, "Surely God's guidance is (true) guidance." Indeed, if you follow their passions after knowledge (truth) reaches you, there is nothing for you the protector and helper of Allah. (Al-Baqarah/2:120)"Qur'an Kemenag RI," n.d.

Therefore, Islam will face the challenge of understanding secularism and modernization that will emerge in the Islamic world. Opponents will always try to undermine Islamic values from time to time[29]. But Islam will remain authentic to answer the challenge of secularization carried out by Westerners or even Islam itself is threatened with secularization[30]. As a result, Islam will experience a dark age of superficial understanding and moral decline.

For example, what happened in Turkey in the nineteenth century. Massive secularization wiped out Ottoman civilization and made Turkey a secular state[31]. The government carried out reforms by implementing "Kemalist Values" which consisted of six principles, namely: revolutionism, secularism, ethicism, populism, nationalism, and republicanism Azra et al., "The Role of the Qur'an in the Thought and Dynamics of Secularism."

### **Dynamics of Secularism**

As we know, over time and the times, the way of thinking of humans also continues to develop following the times they face. However, that is no reason for a Muslim to ignore the teachings of Islam in his life[32]. In this modern era, the greatness of Islamic values is declining, accompanied by the spread of misleading teachings carried out by individuals who are ambitious to weaken the values and norms of Islamic teachings. They spread rumors and propaganda aimed at destroying the understanding of Islam, destroying morals and trying to destroy future generations of Muslims, especially the younger generation of Muslims.

It can be explained that secularism has the same meaning as loving and pursuing the goals of the world. But unfortunately, there are groups that constantly carry out propaganda aimed at distancing Muslims from Islamic values. They use various means, such as creating shows containing doctrines that are contrary to Islam. In addition, they also control social media to spread slander about Islam, which is currently known as *Islamophobia*[33]. In this way, they seek to portray Islam as a religion associated with hatred and violence, thus creating an understanding that Islam is a religion of terrorism[34]. In addition, they also try to indoctrinate Muslims through lifestyle, in the hope that they will follow the western trends that are popular today. The purpose of all their propaganda is to eliminate Islamic values in Muslims, especially future generations of Muslims Azra et al., "The Role of the Qur'an in the Thought and Dynamics of Secularism."

### **Qur'anic Verses on Secularism**

Secularism in English is *secularism* and *secularite*. In Arabic, it can be interpreted as *al-Ilmaniyah*. However, according to Sheikh Yusuf Qardhawi, the definition of secularism only uses sentences *al-Ilmaniyah* is still lacking depth.

According to him[35], the use of the word *al-Ladaniyah* and *al-Duniawiyah* It is more appropriate to define secularism, because the essence of secularism is not only related to conflicts over the afterlife but is not at all connected to religious affairs.

### Q.S. Al-Isra':18

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا

### Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:

18. Who wants the present (worldly) life We move for him in this (world) what We want for whom We want. Then, we provided him (hell) Jahanam. He will enter it in a state of reprehensibility again expelled (from the grace of God). (Al-Isra'/17:18)"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

Sentence "مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ" described in Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah Az-Zuhaili Defined as those who want the life of the world that is coming soon. In this context, secularism is almost synonymous with love of the world (*hubbuddunya*), which means separating his worldly affairs from religious affairs, just as he separated his worldly affairs from the affairs of the hereafter. The life of the world became his main goal, made as the pinnacle of his knowledge so that he allocated all his efforts and abilities to achieve it. The afterlife is simply forgotten. Therefore, Allah fulfills his desires in the world, but it is a decree of God's will, which is to provide spaciousness of sustenance and enjoyment of the world. Not everyone who wants the world will get it, it all depends on God's will alone.

From the quote of the Tafsir of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is explained that Allah will reward all mankind according to the deeds they have done while living on earth. Be it a beautiful reward or a painful torment from Him. This affirms that for anyone who only thinks about the life of the world without preparing himself for the afterlife, then Allah will give everything that is desired in the world. However, the afterlife is a miserable hell. But for those who live by charity and seek Allah's mercy, they will be rewarded with kindness and accepted in the sight of Allah Azra et al., "The Role of the Qur'an in the Thought and Dynamics of Secularism."

### Reasonable Verse

As explained in the Qur'an, there is an explanation of the characteristics of people who love the world too much (*hubbu ad-Dunya*) in QS. Al-Hadid: 20:

أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّهَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ  
أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهْبِجُ فَتَرَبُّهُ مُصْفًى ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَمًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ  
اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

20. Know that the life of that world is but games, carelessness, adornment, and boasting among you and vying for many possessions and posterity. (The parable is) like rain whose crops amaze farmers, then dry out and you see yellow, then crumble. In the Hereafter there is harsh punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His mercy. The life of the world (for those caught off guard) is nothing but a beguiling pleasure. (Al-Hadid/57:20)"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

**Q.S. Hud, 15-16:**

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوفٍ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَلَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يُبْخَسُونَ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

15. Whoever wills the life of the world and its adornments, surely, We give them (in return) their deeds in it perfectly and they in the world will not be harmed. (Hud/11:15)"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا النَّارُ وَحَبِطَ مَا صَنَعُوا فِيهَا وَبِطُلَّ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

16. They are those who gain no (thing) in the hereafter except hell, in vain what they have worked (on earth), and cancel what they have always done. (Hud/11:16)"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

Word *Ad-dunya* is the basis of the word *Funds* which has the meaning of near, low, despicable, or narrow. This word appears 116 times in the Qur'an. The term is used in various *sighatnyalike Funds*, *Yudnina*, *Danin*, *Daniyah*, *adna* and *dunya*. In Ibn Kathir's tafseer, Al-'Aufi narrates from Ibn 'Abbas about this verse, that people who like *riya'* (showing off) will gain their good in the world. Thus, they will not be wronged in the slightest. Allah says that people who perform charity solely for the benefit of the world, such as fasting, praying, or tahajjud at night, are actually only doing so for worldly gain[37]. However, in His other words it is explained that the person is actually only pursuing retribution in the world, so that the charity he does becomes useless because he is forgotten by worldly affairs, and eventually he will lose money in the hereafter[38]. It is also narrated from Mujahid, adh-Dhahhak, and several other scholars.

According to Anas ibn Malik and Al-Hasan, the verse came down with regard to Jews and Christians. Qatadah said that people who make the world



their main goal in life will receive retribution for the good they do in the world. However, when they move on to the afterlife[39], there will be no more rewards given. However, for believers, they will receive retribution for their goodness in the world and will also gain rewards in the afterlife.

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الْآخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُ فِي حَرْثِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ نَصِيبٍ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

20. *Whoever desires a reward in the Hereafter, we will add that reward to him. Whoever desires retribution in the world, we give him a portion of it (the world's reply), but he will not get the slightest share in the hereafter. (Ash-Shura/42:20)*"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

It can be explained that when one pursues the world solely for pleasure, without realizing that the world is actually a place to seek His pleasure, then all one will get is the enjoyment of the world, without getting any part of the hereafter[40]. This reflects the principle of secularism, where secularism tends to tempt humans to exceed the limits set by religious teachings in religious and faith aspects.

**Reasonable Verse**

In Surah Hud, there is a connection between verses 15-16 with the verses before and after it, namely verse 13 and verse 14.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِثْلِهِ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ ۖ وَادْعُوا مَنِ اسْتَعْظَمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

13. *In fact, did they say, "He (Prophet Muhammad) has made it up." Say, "(If so,) bring ten such suras with him (the Qur'an) that are made up and invite anyone you can (invite) but Allah, if you are righteous people." (Hud/11:13)*"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

فَإِلَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أُنْزِلَ بِعِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

14. *If they do not fulfill your invitation, (say,) "Know verily it (the Qur'an) was revealed by the knowledge of Allah and (know also) that there is no god except Him. Do you want to surrender (convert to Islam)?" (Hud/11:14)*"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

After affirming that the Qur'an is a book revealed by Allah and not made up by Muhammad as alleged by the idolaters, Allah declares that the reason for their disputes and falsehoods is lust, greed, arrogance, and worldly interests alone. Surah Hud verse 15 does not promise that Allah will give blessings to those who pursue worldly pleasures. Azra et al., "The Role of the Qur'an in the Thought and Dynamics of Secularism.". This is not only based on empirical evidence, but also because there are other verses that hinder it, as mentioned in His Word:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا

**Ministry of Religion Translation 2019:**

18. *Who wants the present (worldly) life We move for him in this (world) what We want for whom We want. Then, we provided him (hell) Jahanam. He will enter it in a state of reprehensibility again expelled (from the grace of God). (Al-Isra'/17:18)*"Qur'an of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia."

This is a very serious threat and warning to those who are not believers and too attached to materialism. They just focus their minds on worldly things, without realizing that they probably won't get anything from Him. Imam Ahmad narrated from Aisha (r.a), who heard directly from the Prophet (peace be upon him), who said:

الدُّنْيَا دَارُ مَنْ لَا دَارَ لَهُ، وَمَالٌ مَنْ لَا مَالَ لَهُ، وَلَهَا يَجْمَعُ مَنْ لَا عَقْلَ لَهُ.

"The world is the abode of the homeless, the treasure of the unpossessed, and for which the mindless accumulate wealth". (HR Imam Ahmad) **Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, Tafsir Al-Munir Volume 8, I (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013).**

## Scholars' Perspectives on Secularism

Perspectives on secularism can vary among scholars, depending on their religious beliefs and personal viewpoints. However, there are generally three perspectives expressed by scholars on secularism:

- **Positive viewpoint:** Some scholars see secularism favorably, especially in terms of religious freedom and religious tolerance[42]. They believe that the principles of secularism can help create a peaceful and harmonious environment for everyone, regardless of their religion.
- **Negative viewpoint:** Secularism can be perceived negatively by some scholars, especially if it is perceived as disregard for religion or separating religion from public affairs. They argue that religion should be an important part of human life and regulate the moral norms on which the laws and statutes of the country are based.
- **Neutral point of view:** Some scholars may be neutral towards secularism. They do not clearly side with or oppose secularism, but they wisely recognize its usefulness in various aspects of life. However, keep in mind that these are just

some of the perspectives held by scholars. Scholars have various opinions. In addition, there are also internal discussions about how religious values can be defined and applied in the modern era.

## Conclusion

In the results of this study, it was found that there are several verses in the Qur'an that discuss secularization. These verses are found in Sura al-Isra verse 18 and Surah Hud verses 15-16. In this study, it was explained that secularization is an idea that leads to secularism. This ideology is a complex problem for major powers. In addition, secularism has also become a culture for Jews and Christians influenced by the West. At that time, secularism became a solution to overcome the damage to Church leaders in the Middle Ages. Islam is the guardian of the authenticity of secularization today. This research is expected to provide benefits in knowledge of the science of the Qur'an. However, this study has limitations in searching for verses and their interpretations.

## Author Contributions

**Eka Cahyani M Djamil:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Eka Galih Rahayu:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Fahmi Fahreza:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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