The popularity of heavy metal music and hip hop in the contemporary Muslim world does not reflect a decline of religion in Muslim life. Contrary to many expectations, secular modernity did not displace religion. Contemporary Muslim culture does, however, reflect continuing transformations of the relationships between religion and politics, and between tradition and modernity. Although analysts sometimes use “religion-politics,” “tradition-modernity,” and “religious-secular” as labels for describing separate, contrasting, and competing elements in society, most parts of contemporary Muslim communities are not either religious or secular (or traditional or modern), they are both. One can be both modern and religious.

In the 21st century, although Islamist militants get the most attention for combining religion and politics, hip hop hijabis along with Muslim democrats are both important examples of basically non-violent syntheses of the religious and the secular. In the early 20th century, religion was seen as the enemy of modernity and secularism, and by mid-century, modernity and secularism (and associated movements like secular nationalism) were viewed as the successful alternatives to religion. However, the transformations of modernity itself by the 21st century mean that in the 21st century, relations between religion and politics have changed from old-style secularist competitions to new syntheses of religion and the secular, reflected in both Muslim politics and pop culture. This evolution is not distinctively Islamic but rather is also part of the global development of multiple modernities and post-secular religion.