

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Stage II manuscript entitled, "*Mechanisms of Secularization: Testing Between the Rationalization and Existential Insecurity Theories.*" I found it highly engaging and intellectually stimulating.

The manuscript provides a well-considered analysis of the need to clarify two competing explanations of the secularization process. Starting from Stage 1, the research design is well-conceived, and the proposed approach is well-suited to test the hypotheses effectively.

The Stage 2 manuscript has successfully delivered on all the promises outlined in the approved Stage 1 version.

The following comments are minor, and I hope they will help the authors further improve the readability of the manuscript:

- As I understand it, there were no major deviations between the approved Stage 1 manuscript and the Stage 2 version. However, I believe the manuscript would benefit from including a table documenting any changes, even if minor. This table could be included as an appendix or a supplementary document.
- In the Stage 2 manuscript, one sentence in the abstract section reads: "*However, when re-assigning participants from insecure to secure environments and vice versa, we found strong support for the existential insecurity theory.*" Similar notes appear elsewhere in the manuscript. However, the Stage 1 manuscript indicated that toward the end of the experiment, participants were expected to respond based on the reversal of the environment scenario, aimed at "...assessing how sensitive participants are to our manipulation and how flexible their group choice is." This suggests that the interpretation of the results in Stage 2 arose from observed patterns, which were not entirely anticipated in Stage 1. It might be helpful to clarify this point in the discussion section or via a footnote.
- The pilot study could be moved to the supplementary materials or results document.
- As a reader, I find it easier to comprehend results presented in table format, as reading through large blocks of text can be cognitively demanding. The authors might consider presenting the main results in tables for greater clarity.