Religion and World Politics

For millennia, religion—and religious differences—have given rise to broad-based efforts to improve societies—and to tear them down. Organized religion has given alms to the disadvantaged and joined in movements to improve collective living conditions for people near and far. At the same time, many wars and other bloody conflicts have been carried out in the name of one religion or another. Today the shape of religion worldwide continues to change, with secularism on the rise in the West, Christianity thriving in the Southern Hemisphere, and Islam growing in numbers and significance across the globe. What relevance does religion have in world politics today?

This course is designed to examine and critically analyze the nature of the relationship between religion and various aspects of world politics. We analyze how religion affects politics among the masses and at the elite level, and we ask why religion and politics are so thoroughly interwoven worldwide by examining the religion-politics relationship in theoretical, empirical, and especially cross-cultural perspective. In doing so, we will encounter a range of themes that are relevant to the broader study of world politics and of politics in general.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course has two objectives. The first is to gain a substantive understanding of why and how religion and politics intersect, both in theory and in practice. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Define religion concretely.
- Identify basic reasons why religion and politics continue to influence one another across time and cultures.
- Describe the general contours of religious diversity worldwide.
- Explain what secularization means and why it is such an important concept to understand in the 21st century.
- Explain how and why individual- and societal-level religious affiliations and levels of religiosity affect political attitudes and behaviors worldwide.
- Explain how and why religious divisions so often give rise to conflict.

The second objective of the course is to improve your critical thinking, writing, and verbal skills by engaging in a variety of thinking and writing activities.
Readings

Required Readings:


PDFs of additional readings (indicated below in course outline) on our course Canvas site

Case Study Books (you will use one of these):


Office Hours

My office is located at 230-G Brackett Hall. I will hold office hours on [dates and times], or by appointment.

The most efficient way to contact me is via email: laurao@clemson.edu. You may also reach me through the Political Science Department office (864-656-3233).

In the unlikely event that I need to cancel or delay the start of a class meeting, I will make every possible effort to notify you in advance via email. However, if ten minutes have passed and I have not appeared for a scheduled class meeting, you will be free to go.
Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who need accommodations should make an appointment with the Director of Disability Services to discuss specific needs within the first month of classes. Students should present a Faculty Accommodation Letter from Student Disability Services when they meet with instructors. Student Disability Services is located in Suite 239 Academic Success Building (864-656-6848; sds-l@clemson.edu). Please be aware that accommodations are not retroactive and new Faculty Accommodation Letters must be presented each semester.

Grades

There will be a total of 100 points possible in this course. Grading will follow this scale: A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = 59 and below.

As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson’s vision of this institution as a “high seminary of learning.” Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.

Anyone caught engaging in any form of academic dishonesty will receive a grade of F in the course.

You may not reuse work from previous or concurrent college classes without my explicit consent. See me if you have any questions.

Your grade for the course will be based on the following:

1. Exams (45 points)

Two exams will be given. The first exam, which will be worth 20 points, will be held in class on [Date]. The second exam will be held during finals week on [Date and time]. This exam will be worth 25 points because I will be adding a 5-point essay question in which you will be required to reflect on the course in a cumulative manner.

Makeup exams will not be given except under the most extreme circumstances. To have any chance of being given a makeup exam, you must provide me with written documentation of a severe emergency that prevented you from taking the exam with the rest of the class.
2. Research Project (40 points)

You will complete a multi-part, semester-long project about one of four six studies: Lee, *Religion and Politics in the Middle East*; Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*; Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*; Wilde, *Vatican II*; Yang, *Religion in China*; Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*. The project will force you to work both collaboratively and independently to improve your thinking about the topic you choose in a variety of ways. There will be three sources of points attached to this project:

a. *Group Presentation (10 points)*

On [Dates], we will have 20-minute group presentations about your case study. You will be expected to summarize the book for the class and identify ways in which it helps illuminate broader themes we are studying this semester.

b. *Group Annotated Bibliography (10 points)*

By [Date], your group (consisting of all students who are working on the same issue) will complete an annotated bibliography of sources that go beyond the book you are studying for your case study. I want each group to find at least ten sources (books, articles, news stories, opinion pieces, etc.) that are relevant/related to some aspect of your case study book. A great place to start looking is in the works the author him-/herself references. For each source, provide an accurate bibliographical citation and a few sentences summarizing the information contained in the source. Any source (printed or online) is acceptable, but you must include:

1. A mixture of academic and non-academic sources.
2. At least one source that is primarily historical and at least one source that is primarily contemporary.
3. At least one source that is primarily empirical and at least one source that is primarily normative.

A style guide will be provided in class and on our course Canvas site.

c. *Final Analysis Paper (20 points)*

Each of you will (individually) submit a final 10-page (double-spaced) paper in class on [Date]. In this paper, you are to synthesize and reflect upon the case you have studied this semester. Do not just write a report or summarize the core book; instead, analyze what you have learned. That said, begin by summarizing the book. Then move on to identify two or three ways in which the case covered in the book illuminates broader themes we have discussed over the course of the semester. Pull in at least half of the sources you cited in your group bibliography to help illustrate your argument. Conclude by reflecting
on the book’s strengths and weaknesses in furthering your general understanding of religion and politics in a global context.

Be advised that I take academic dishonesty very seriously and I will pursue sanctions against you if I catch you plagiarizing. You must always provide proper citation for all outside sources! In the absence of a compelling excuse (e.g. serious illness, death in the family), late papers will be penalized by the equivalent of one letter grade for each day they are late, including weekend days. You must contact me as soon as possible if you believe you have a compelling excuse for submitting a late paper without penalty, and you must provide me with written documentation of the severe emergency that prevented you from handing in the paper with the rest of the class.

3. Reading Quizzes (10 points)

Over the course of the semester, I will give at least seven short, unannounced reading quizzes in class to determine whether you have been doing the assigned readings. You will be allowed to drop at least two of these reading quizzes. Makeup quizzes will not be given under any circumstances.

4. Class Participation (5 points)

I expect everyone to attend and participate actively in this class. Therefore, I am reserving these final points of your grade as a measure of your habits of attendance and participation. I will circulate an attendance sheet on most days, and I will also keep close track of your level of attention and participation in class.

Rules regarding classroom decorum (lack of adherence will hurt your participation grade):

- You are forbidden from using a laptop or tablet during class time unless you have a documented disability that requires you to use one.
- You will not use your phone to text or surf the Internet during class time. I reserve the right to require you to put your phone away at any time of my choosing.
- Phone ringers should be turned off.
- You will not read a newspaper, magazine, or any other material not related to our class.
- You will not do work for another class.
- You will not organize your day planner.
- You will not listen to music.
- You will not arrive excessively late or leave early.
Course Outline

Section 1: Religion and Politics

A. Introduction: History and Theory [4 days]

During the first several class meetings, we will consider different ways of thinking about what “religion” is, what it means to individuals and to societies, and various theoretical approaches to studying religion’s place in world politics.

READ:
- Rowe, chapter 1
- Fox, chapters 3, 7

B. Religious Diversity: Comparing Faith Traditions [7 days]

“Religion” worldwide takes on myriad shapes and sizes. We will distinguish among major religious traditions in the world today, with emphasis placed on the three monotheistic traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and polytheistic Asian religions. Attention also be given to the growing number of people worldwide who do not affiliate with any religion.

READ:
- Rowe, chapters 2, 4-7
- Fox, chapter 8
C. Different Models of Religion-State Relations [4 days]

There are a wide range of ways in which states address organized religion that range from unfettered religious freedom to theocracy to official religious suppression. How can we understand the variety inherent in the relationships between religion and states? We will consider different models of how religious markets are managed in cross-national context.

READ:

- Fox, chapter 2

The first exam will be held in class on [Date].

Section 2: Politics and Religion

A. Religious Freedom and Human Rights [5 days]

Religion is restricted, sometimes quite forcefully, in some parts of the world. Countries where religious freedom thrives tend to view religious suppression critically—and inject this perspective into their foreign policy. Meanwhile, suppression of religious freedom often correlates with suppression of basic human rights, which is also a matter of deep contention in world politics. We will investigate both of these topics in this section of the course.
B. Mass Political Movements and Religion [5 days]

We will explore some of the prominent ways in which religiously affiliated groups, nongovernmental organizations, and social movements have achieved success in promoting their political agendas in the 20th and 21st centuries. Special emphasis will be placed on liberation theology and its relationship to social and political change in Latin America.

READ:
- Fox, chapter 6

C. Conflict, Terrorism, and Religion [5 days]

Religion and conflict have gone hand in hand for millennia. What compels people to commit violent acts in the name of religion? We will study a range of cases, but will place special focus on recent violent acts undertaken by radicalized Muslim extremists.

READ:
- Fox, chapter 9
- Rowe, chapters 9, 10
The second exam, which will cover material since the first exam plus one final essay, will be held on [Date and time].