Gov 94go: The Politics of Religion in Liberal Democracies: American Exceptionalism, European Secularism?

Fall 2021

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In contrast to the expectations of the secularization thesis’ proponents, the evidence for a decline in religion’s contemporary political salience is extremely equivocal. Indeed, multiple indicators suggest religious belief and belonging are currently experiencing a marked political resurgence; even among the most developed countries of the world partisan fault lines often appear drawn along religious dimensions. Why might this be the case today, when by the middle of the 20th century a great many social scientists were predicting that the influence of faith over the public square would eventually fade into obscurity and irrelevance as modernity advanced?

This course begins by examining the broad theoretical contours of the role religion plays in shaping political processes, then applies these insights to an analysis of how religion has influenced political realities in the United States (frequently considered “exceptional” in its religiosity) and Europe (widely understood to be a “secularized” continent). It concludes by considering what the implications are for democratic governance when religion stakes an overtly political claim.

Gov 94go is designed with three goals in mind: a) to provide students with the tools necessary to think critically about religion’s role in politics and the tensions that accompany it in pluralistic societies; b) to introduce students to the relevant literatures and discourses in the field; and c) to survey political trends involving a substantive religious component across the United States and the European Union.

Course Requirements:
1. Class Participation (35%): As this is a discussion-based course, students are expected to attend all class meetings (obviously, emergencies do occur; if you find yourself in this situation, contact me as soon as you are able), keep up with weekly readings, and actively participate in discussion.
2. Written Assignments (50%): Students will have the option of writing either a) two mid-length papers (10-12 pages each, double-spaced) addressing pre-assigned prompts or b) a longer research paper (25-30 pages, double-spaced) on a topic selected in consultation with me. Students must inform me of their choice in writing (email is fine) by the third week of class.

Two paper option: 1st paper due Oct 20, 2nd paper due Dec 8th
Research paper option: due Dec 8th

3. Internet Postings (15%): Beginning the second week of class all students will be required to make short (approx. 1-2 paragraph) weekly postings to the Gov 94go discussion blog. These may take the form of reflections concerning the assigned readings, analyses of news items which relate to the role of religion in contemporary U.S. or EU politics, or thoughtful responses to material posted by others. Postings are to be made no later than midnight before each scheduled class meeting.

Academic Integrity/Collaboration Statement:
Students are encouraged to discuss politics and religion outside of class time, but are reminded that all assignments must be completed independently (this includes the readings). Students are also cautioned that no form of collaborative writing is permitted and that all assignments handed in for evaluation must properly acknowledge and cite sources. Gov 94go has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:
Students needing accommodations because of a documented disability must present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) to me by the second week of the Fall term. The matter will be kept strictly confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

Late Paper Policy:
Students must turn in assignments on time in order to receive full credit. In exceptional circumstances extensions may be granted at my discretion, but these must be approved beforehand. Unexcused late papers will be marked down two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g., A to B+) for each full day they are late.

Course materials:
The following books are required (make sure you get the correct edition):
   Arlie Russell Hochschild, Strangers in Their Own Land (New Press, 2016)
   Peter Berger, Grace Davie & Effie Fokas, Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations (Ashgate, 2008) (*this book is for the optional Dec. 8 session*)
   Timothy Byrnes & Peter Kazenstein, Religion in an Expanding Europe (Cambridge UP, 2006)

Note: We read significant portions of other books that you are not required to purchase because they are available online through HOLLIS.
In addition, during certain weeks you will be provided with “case study” portfolios consisting of recent news articles and similar materials. These supplemental readings allow us to apply the theories we have studied to real-life events and afford us the flexibility to evaluate interesting happenings (e.g., the response of religious groups to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign) as they unfold.

Finally, we will also be making use of two databases:

Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (http://religions.pewforum.org/)
The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life also maintains an informative Website (http://pewforum.org/)

The World Values Survey (WVS) (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/)
Online data analysis is free and does not require registration

Discussion Topics and Readings:
Meeting 1: Intro (Recorded and posted online—please watch before first in-person class!)

Meeting 2: The Secularization Thesis Revisited, Part I (Sept. 8)

Meeting 3: Secularization Reconsidered, Part II (Sept. 15)

Meeting 4: The American Case (Sept. 22)
Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (http://religions.pewforum.org/)
(Review the findings, paying close attention to the dimensions of inter-group variation)
World Values Survey (WVS) (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/)
(At a minimum, look at religious attitudes in the U.S. and compare them to five European countries in the latest WVS round)


**Meeting 5: How “Exceptional” is America? (Sept. 29)**
*Case Study Portfolio #1 (distributed no later than the prior class)*


Samuel Huntington *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2005), pp. 81-106.


**VIEW:**
Here’s What’s Making America Less Religious
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbqo8r3mpdQ.

**Meeting 6: The Rise of the Religious Right in U.S. Politics (Oct. 6)**
*Case Study Portfolio #2 (distributed no later than the prior class)*


**VIEW:**
Donald Trump Speech at Dordt University, Iowa (watch from 41:57 to end):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATuWvlYwdEY

**Meeting 7: The United States and the “Culture Wars” (Oct. 13)**
*Case Study Portfolio #3 (distributed no later than the prior class)*

Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (New Press, 2016), parts I-III.


**Recommended:**

**VIEW:**
Patrick Buchanan's Speech to 1992 GOP Convention:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO5_1ps5CAC (Part I)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pICypNXHKbg&feature=related (Part II)

**Meeting 8: Europe as a Historical and Religious Concept (Oct. 20)**

Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, trans. Thomas Dunlop,
Meeting 9: Is European Secularism Overstated? (Oct. 27)
Case Study Portfolio #4 (distributed no later than the prior class)
World Values Survey (WVS) (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/)
(Compare religious attitudes among at least five European countries of your own choosing, utilizing both the aggregated four-wave dataset and the latest stand-alone dataset)

Meeting 10: The European Union and Religion (Nov. 3)
Case Study Portfolio #5 (distributed no later than the prior class)
José Casanova, “Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration,” in Byrnes & Katzenstein (eds.) Religion in an Expanding Europe (Cambridge UP, 2006), ch. 3.

Meeting 11: Muslims in Europe (Nov. 10)
Case Study Portfolio #6 (distributed no later than the prior class)
Bassam Tibi, “Europeanizing Islam or the Islamization of Europe: Political Democracy vs. Cultural Difference,” in Byrnes & Katzenstein (eds.) Religion in an Expanding Europe (Cambridge UP,

**Meeting 12: Democracy, Liberalism, and Religion (Nov 17)**


**Meeting 13: The Challenges of Pluralism (Dec. 1)**


**Meeting 14: Tying Things Together (*optional meeting in reading period* Dec. 8)**