



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 331 Religion and Politics in the Contemporary World

Course Description & Aims:

This course outlines the interaction of religion and politics in the contemporary world; the relationship between religion and society, the different types of religious organizations and movements, their social roles, and their impact on society. The impact religious ideas, practices, and organizations have on the social, political, and economic processes. The focus will also be on the role of religion in the formation of individual, communal, and national identity. Using a comparative and transnational approach, the impact of religious traditions on the internal sociopolitical structure of different states and their role in shaping power relations on the international level will be assessed. Finally, it examines the contemporary relationship between religion and the state with the help of case studies from selected countries. Students will be able to examine, analyze and critically discuss the politicization of religion in the contemporary world and its consequences.

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Office Hours: TBA (see schedule SSD office)

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Understand and examine the interaction of religion and politics in the contemporary world.
2. Analyze political narratives in different religions
3. Develop knowledge on the conflict between religion and politics
4. Assess the major issues and controversies engendered by religion in relation to global, national, and local politics.

Assessment

Assessment	AI Level*	% Grade
Participation	AI-1	10%
Group Activities	AI-2	20%
Midterm Assessment	AI-1	20%
Final Exam	AI-1	50%

Topics

Topic No.	Topics
1	Introduction
	The concept(s) of Religion and Politics
2	Approaching Religious Controversies – Conflict Analysis I
	Approaching Religious Controversies II – Conflict Analysis II
3	Dress & Symbolism
	Case Study
4	Religion & Constitutional Status
	Case Study
5	Education & Science
	Case Study
6	Freedom of Religion
	Case Study
7	Midterm Assessment Prep
	Midterm Assessment
8	Sex, Gender & Life and Death
	Case Study
9	Nations, Identities & Multiculturalism
	Case Study
10	The Rise of Non-Belief
	Case Study
11	Controversy Management & Inter-faith Dialogue
	Discussion Session
12	Final Exam preparation
	Summary & Review
13	Final Exam

Special Note:

This course deals explicitly with the issue of religion and its role in politics. It takes an approach that concentrates on the contentious debates and controversies that the religion-politics intersection generates. The class will be conducted in an atmosphere of respect for people's right to believe in their chosen or inherited faith. However, the course content is going to highlight areas where religion and politics generates controversy. As students in a higher education institution, it is expected that you will be able to handle such issues as mature adults. You will encounter ideas and opinions that differ from your own. The class will not tolerate hateful comments about people on the basis of their religious tradition. However, efforts to censor or stifle legitimate criticisms of religious doctrines or beliefs will not be tolerated either.

Topics & Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introduction & the Concepts of Religion & Politics

Topic description: This week students will be introduced to the course outline, course requirements, and their expected input. Basic concepts are defined (the study of religion, diversity, politics, and globalization); central issues such as religion and sociological traditions, secularization, religious marketplace are outlined; and tensions within the study are introduced.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to understand the continued role of religion in the daily lives of people as well as in global politics.

Readings and activities:

- Kurtz, R.L (2016). Religious Life in the Global Village. In Chapter 1 of *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. 4th ed. Sage Publications.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (2006). Thinking Globally About Religion. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.003.0001
- Helm, T & Zuckerman, P (2013) *Studying Religion and Society: sociological self-portraits*, Routledge. New York
- Bruce, S (2003) *Politics & Religion*, Polity Press. Cambridge

Activities:

As part of the first activity students are required to find examples of religious controversies. Student groups will be allocated on Day 1 and on Day 2 of Week 1 you'll be tasked with offering definitions of core concepts.

Week 2: Approaching Religious Controversies

Topic description: This week we will explore the central methodological approach used throughout the course. Our analysis of various public controversies around religion needs to be undertaken *systematically*. Both of the classes during this week will be focused on outlining a basic analytical rubric that we can apply to all the areas of controversy.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be introduced to and become proficient in using the conceptual framework we will use to examine religious controversies.

Readings and activities:

- Jeong, Ho Won (2000) *Peace and Conflict Studies: an introduction*. Ashgate. Aldershot
- Webel, C & Galtung, J (2007) *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*. Routledge. London

Activity – Students will become familiar with the dominant approach used to study the tensions between religion and politics throughout the course. This week is pivotal, and it is important that students engage.

Week 3: Dress & Symbolism

Topic description: One of the core elements of religious belief is that of religious expression, ideas around dress and symbolism. This week we'll look at the controversies generated around such expression and interrogate the basis of that expression.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to understand the role played by religious expression in religious controversies, and the manifestations of religious dress and symbolism.

Readings and activities:

- Cumper & Lewis (2008) "Taking Religion Seriously?" Human rights and hijab in Europe – some problems of adjudication, *Journal of Law & Religion*, 24 (2), pp 599-627
- Helver (2012) *The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion*, Oxford University Press

Week 4: Education & Science

Topic description: This week we explore the flashpoint of education and science. While efforts have been made by some to view the spheres of religion and science as complementary, or at least non contradictory, controversies around the intersection of religion and education provision continue to abound. Separately, but related, is the failure to bring science and faith into some kind of equilibrium. We explore these topics throughout the week.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to understand and analyze why religion and science continue to be the focus of controversy.

Readings and activities:

- Mout, N & Stauffacher, W (2010) *Truth in Science, the Humanities and Religion*, Netherlands. Springer
- Proctor, J (2005) *Science, Religion and the Human Experience*, Oxford. Oxford University Press

Week 5: Freedom of Speech

Topic description: This week students will reflect on the high-profile tensions around the clash between freedom of religion and freedom of expression. The post 2001 debate around this has been particularly pronounced and we'll explore these issues in some depth.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to reflect on the tension points between the question of faith and belief and increased debates around the issue of freedom of expression.

Readings and activities:

- Malik, M (2011) Religious freedom, free speech and equality: conflict or cohesion?, *Res Publica*, Vol 17, pp 21-40
- Ekins, E (2017) *The state of free speech and tolerance in America*, CATO Institute
- Holzaepfel, C (2014) 'Can I say that? How an international blasphemy law pits the freedom of religion against the freedom of speech' *Emory International Law Review*, 28 (1), pp 597-648

Week 6: Freedom of Religion

Topic description: International human rights law, codified after World War Two, has granted freedom of conscience, religion and belief in various specific instruments. This week, students will examine the tension points between the freedom to believe and manifest that belief and other freedoms that can often compete.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to reflect on the question of freedom of religion and belief and consider the nature of interaction between that freedom and other freedoms.

Readings and activities:

- Taylor, P (2005) *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press
- Blackford, R (2012) *Freedom of Religion and the Secular State*, Oxford. Wiley Blackwell

Week 7: Midterm Assessment

Topic description: This week, students will get an opportunity to test their skills with regard to the analysis of controversies around politics and religion. This will be conducted under exam conditions and you will be briefed on the process during the first class of the week. The second class will be the assessment. You must be in class for this.

Week 8: Sex, Gender & Reproductive Health

Topic description: This

Expected learning outcomes: For students to understand the intersection of religion and the politics of sex and gender. We examine the role played by religious organizations in the formulation and implementation of public policies around sex, gender and reproductive health.

Readings and activities:

- Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining girls' bodies in the European Multicultural society, *European Journal for Women's Studies*, 13 (2), pp
- Marshall, Roy & Slim (2021) 'Religious engagement in Development: what impact does it have?' *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 19 (1), pp 42-62
- Glasier et al (2006) 'Sexual and reproductive health: a matter of life and death', *Lancet* Nov 4: 368(9547), pp 1595-1607

Week 9: Nations, Identities & Multiculturalism

Topic description: This week we draw together many of the debates highlighted previously and situation them in the wider debate around identity, nationalism, multiculturalism and xenophobia. contemporary perspectives.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to understand the historical and current issues surrounding religious fundamentalism, human rights, and terrorism.

Readings and activities:

- Fox, J., & Sandler, S. (2004). Transnational Religious Phenomena. In *Bringing Religion into International Relations*. Ch. 5. pp 83-113.
- Kiwan (2013) *Naturalization Policies, Education & Citizenship: Multicultural and multination policies in international perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan

Week 10: The Rise of Non-Belief

Topic description: In this final taught class, students will be introduced to the rapid emergence in the last couple of decades of a more robust version on non-belief. We explore the rise of new atheism, agnosticism, and the challenges these pose to traditional beliefs. The class will explore the crisis of faith being experienced in many developed economies and societies and the implications of this for the religion politics nexus

Expected learning outcomes: For students to be aware of the multifaceted and changing relationship between religion and those who organize around a non-religious or secular moral framework.

Readings and activities:

- Zuckerman, P (2009) 'Atheism, secularity, and well-being: how the findings of social science counter negative stereotypes and assumptions, *Sociology Compass* 3 (6), pp 949-971
- Bauman, Z (1994) *Alone Again: Ethics after certainty*. Demos [Online]
- Cotter, Quadrio & Tuckett (2017) *New Atheism: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Debates*, Springer

Week 11: Controversy Management

Topic description: This week, we explore options for transforming controversies around religion and politics into constructive opportunities for engagement. We revisit (or explore) the 'policy process' and consider ways that stakeholders can engage in policy discussion around contentious issues – or determine whether or not this is even possible.

Expected Learning Outcomes: For students to engage with policy making process and critically explore issues around contentious issues within the parameters of religion and politics.

Readings and activities:

- Birkland (2015) *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts and Models of Public Policy*, Fourth Edition, London. Routledge
- Zittoun, P (2014) *The Political Process of Policymaking: a pragmatic approach to public policy*, Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan

Week 12: Summary and Review of the Course

Topic description: This week is devoted to a review of the course, discussion of the topics and approaches raised and any concerns about the final exam (Wk 13).

Week 13: Final Exam

Topic description: This week students will undergo their final examination.

Appendices

*MUIC Policy for AI Use in Assessments

To align with MUIC's AI Policy on Teaching and Learning, this course follows a structured approach to AI usage in assessments to promote responsible engagement with technology while maintaining academic integrity. The permitted level of AI use is specified for each assessment activity:

AI Assessment Level		Description
1	<i>No AI</i>	The assessment is completed entirely without AI assistance in a controlled environment. Students rely solely on their existing knowledge, understanding, and skills.
2	<i>AI Planning</i>	AI is used for pre-task activities like brainstorming, outlining, and initial research. The focus is on using AI effectively for planning, synthesis, and ideation, while students independently refine and develop ideas.
3	<i>AI Collaboration</i>	AI is used to assist in completing tasks, including idea generation, drafting, feedback, and refinement. Students critically evaluate and modify AI outputs to demonstrate understanding.
4	<i>Full AI</i>	AI can be extensively used to complete tasks, with students directing AI to achieve assessment goals. Critical thinking and engagement with AI for problem-solving are essential.
5	<i>AI Exploration</i>	AI is employed creatively to solve tasks, generate novel insights, or explore innovative solutions. This level encourages students and educators to co-design unique AI-driven assessment approaches.

Lecturer's responsibility for course work grading

The responsibility for grading coursework lies solely with the course lecturer. All grades awarded reflect the professional judgment, academic expertise, and independent evaluation of the lecturer to ensure fairness, accuracy, and integrity in the assessment process.

Student's Acknowledgment of AI Use

For any assessment permitting AI (Levels 2-5), students must include an AI Acknowledgment Statement when submitting their work. Failure to disclose AI use where applicable may result in penalties or an F grade:

I acknowledge the use of [provide AI tool used here] to

- *Generate ideas, outline, and for initial research*
- *Data analysis and visualization*
- *Language and grammar assistance*
- *Programming and coding*

- Design graphics, layouts, or presentations with AI design tools
- Generate visual or multimedia elements
- Customize content formatting
- Create music, sound effects, or other audio elements
- Generate citations or bibliographies
- Others (please specify)

..... [Student's Signature]

..... [Student's Full Name]

Assessment Criteria:

1. Classroom Participation 10%

Classroom participation is based on attendance, preparation for class and the quality of students' participation in class discussions.

Assessment Criteria – Participation

<i>The student regularly attends class and can provide relevant documentation for any absences. The student is always prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student proactively contributes to class on a regular basis by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating an exceptional understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	9-10 points Excellent (A)
<i>The student regularly attends class and can provide relevant documentation for most absences. The student is often prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student actively contributes to class frequently by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating a good understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	8 points Good (B)
<i>The student usually attends class and can provide relevant documentation for some absences. The student is sometimes prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student occasionally contributes to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating a fair understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	7 points Fair (C)
<i>The student usually attends class and can provide relevant documentation for some absences. The student is only rarely prepared for class with assignments and required readings and does very rarely contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	6 points Poor (D)

<i>The student misses class frequently and cannot provide relevant documentation for absences. The student is never prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student does very rarely contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	4-5 points
	Fail
	(F)
<i>The student misses most classes and cannot provide relevant documentation for absences. The student is never prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student does not contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	1-3 points
	Fail
	(F)
<i>The student is absent from all classes.</i>	0 points

2. Group Activities 20%

Each week, in the second class of the week, selected groups of students will present a case study analysis of a specific controversy relevant to the course theme of religion and politics. Two groups will present their analysis of social conflicts and the class will then be open for discussion. You are expected to contribute to this. The topics will be controversial.

Assessment Criteria – Group Activities

<i>The presentation clearly and convincingly summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation is based on an excellent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is clearly structured and freely delivered in a convincing and confident manner. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) support the purpose of the presentation and are not distracting. No AI use has been detected.</i>	18-20 points
	Excellent
	(A)
<i>The presentation clearly summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation is based on a very good understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is structured and freely delivered in a convincing manner. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) support the purpose of the presentation and are not distracting. No AI use has been detected.</i>	16-17.8 points
	Good
	(B/B+)
<i>The presentation summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation attempts to base the analysis on decent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is mostly well-structured and freely delivered. The handout and the use of visual aids (if</i>	14-15.8 points
	Fair

any) support the purpose of the presentation and are usually not distracting. No AI use has been detected. **(C/C+)**

The presentation summarizes some of the main issues of the assigned case study. However, the presentation does not base the analysis on a competent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is mostly well-structured and freely delivered. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) generally support the purpose of the presentation. Occasional AI use has been detected.

12-13.8 points
Poor
(D/D+)

The presentation fails in its attempt to summarize key issues from the assigned case study. The material presented is off-topic and does not contain relevant factual information. The presentation lacks structure and is fully read-out from a prepared script and delivered in an unsatisfactory manner. No handout has been prepared. Extensive AI use has been detected.

<12 points
Fail
(F)

0 points

Midterm Assessment (20%)

There will be an in-class midterm assessment on Week 7. There will be a class to prepare you for this. The assessment will be a timed assessment

Student has demonstrated excellent knowledge of key concepts and issues relative to controversies around religion and politics.

18-20 points
Excellent
(A)

Student has demonstrated very good knowledge of key concepts and issues relative to controversies around religion and politics.

16-17.8 points
Good
(B/B+)

Student has demonstrated fair to adequate knowledge of key concepts and issues relative to controversies around religion and politics.

14-15.8 points
Fair
(C)

Student has demonstrated poor knowledge of key concepts and issues relative to controversies around religion and politics.

12-13.8 points
Poor
(D)

The student has demonstrated inadequate knowledge of key concepts and issues relative to controversies around religion and politics.

<12 points
Fail
(F)

The student did not take the midterm assessment.

0 points

3. Final Exam 40%

In the final exam, students will undergo an unseen handwritten examination. You will be presented with several impromptu questions from which you will have a choice of answers. This will be conducted in exam settings during the available slot on Week 13. During this assessment there will be no access to gadgets (computers, tablets, phones).

Assessment Criteria – Final Exam

<i>The written answer demonstrates an exceptional level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is well structured and written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are convincingly substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and theories from class and associated readings.</i>	36-40 points Excellent (A)
<i>The written answer demonstrates a reasonably good level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is well structured and mostly written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are often substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and theories from class and associated readings.</i>	32-35.6 points Good (B/B+)
<i>The written answer demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is reasonably structured and mostly written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are sometimes substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and/or theories from class and associated readings.</i>	28-31.6 points Fair (C/C+)
<i>The essay demonstrates only a basic level of awareness of the issues studied in class. However, some attempts have been made to structure the essay and it is mostly written in comprehensible English. There are occasional attempts to substantiate argumentative claims with examples or references to concepts and/or theories from class and associated readings.</i>	24-27.6 points Poor (D/D+)
<i>The essay demonstrates only a vague level of awareness of the issues studied in class and it lacks structure. However, the essay is written in a more or less comprehensible style of English. The essay is mostly descriptive and lacks argumentative qualities.</i>	<24 points Fail (F)
<i>No essay has been submitted.</i>	0 points

