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

Fall 2016

**PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

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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 developed countries of the world partisan fault lines often appear to be drawn along religious dimensions. Why might this be the case today, when by the mid-twentieth century a great many social scientists were convinced that the influence of faith over the public square would 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 held to be a “secularized” continent). Our purpose in doing so is to assess the degree to which religion affects present-day public life in comparative context. The course concludes with a consideration of what the implications are for democratic governance when religion stakes an overtly political claim.

GOV 94go is thus designed with three goals in mind: a) to provide you 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 you to the literature and discourses in the field; c) to survey political trends which involve a substantive religious dimension across the United States and the European Union.

Course Requirements:
1. Class Participation (35%): As this is a seminar-format 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 assigned prompts or b) one longer research paper (25-30 pages, double spaced) on a topic selected in consultation with the instructor. Students must inform me of their choice in writing (email is fine) by the second week of class. Please be aware that these decisions are binding.

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, short analyses of pertinent 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 on Monday before each scheduled class meeting.

Laptops/Mobile Phones:
Unless you have a documented learning accommodation, the use of laptops is not permitted. Cellphones and other electronic devices must be turned off for the duration of the class.

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—sharing pooled notes instead of reading the texts yourself is not acceptable. Students are also cautioned that no form of collaborative writing is permitted.

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 minor extensions may be granted at the instructor’s 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):


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 2016 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: Introduction (Sept. 7)**

**Meeting 2: The Secularization Thesis Revisited, Part I (Sept. 14)**

**Meeting 3: Secularization Reconsidered, Part II (Sept. 21)**

**Meeting 4: The American Case (Sept. 28)**
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 Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Poland, and Romania in the latest WVS round)

Meeting 5: How “Exceptional” is America? (Oct. 5)
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. 12)
Case Study Portfolio #2 (distributed no later than the prior class)
Robert B. Fowler et al., Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices (Westview, 2013), ch. 4-5.
VIEW:
Senator Ted Cruz: We Stand With God Rally in South Carolina
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eo2BeSUaplC.
Susan Jacoby on Secularism and Free Thinking
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZZfYIFr2nY.

Meeting 7: The United States and the “Culture Wars” (Oct. 19)
Case Study Portfolio #3 (distributed no later than the prior class)
Morris Fiorina et al., Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America (Longman, 2010 [3rd ed.]).
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: Is European Secularism Overstated? (Oct. 26)
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)
European Social Survey (ESS) (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/)
(Assignment TBA—remember to register online for access to the data)

Meeting 9: The European Union and Religion (Nov. 2)
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.

VIEW:
Irish MEP, Gay Mitchell, on the role of religion in Europe following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj4D8UKj-S8

Meeting 10: Muslims in Europe (Nov. 9)
Case Study Portfolio #6 (distributed no later than the prior class)

**VIEW:**
Debate on Islam in Europe (Oxford Union)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyjamZvjuUQ.
(Watch at least to 50:00)

*Meeting 11: Democracy, Liberalism, and Religion (Nov. 16)*

**VIEW:**
The Religious Situation in Germany and Europe Today:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0ZR63cHLtY
(Watch at least to 48:00)

*Meeting 12: The Challenges of Pluralism (Nov. 30)*

**VIEW:**
Religion in the Age of Pluralism: Diana Eck
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkgSuuUWdPE

Meeting 13: Tying Things Together (additional class meeting tbd)

VIEW:
The Faith Debate: The Role of Religion in Politics—Institute of Politics
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNEB45GxFYo