

POLS 300

RELIGION AND POLITICS

In today's world, while the myth of the wall of *separation* between state and church is stronger than ever, the relationship between religion and politics has never been more intertwined or salient across the globe. Over the last decade, the so called "global surge of religion" has shifted major political debates to the interface of religion and politics, an area often marginalized in political science. In part due to this marginalization, there has been an explosion in rushed analyses that warn us against the threat of "fundamentalism," "Global Jihad," and the "Desecularization of the world". As these accounts often promote the politics of fear and cultural war our understanding of world affairs has been increasingly shaped by variant voices that often come from a narrow perspective.

The main goal of this class is to introduce students to this infrequently visited area of political science, to equip them with the analytical tools and knowledge to better assess the foundations of the current political issues and debates and to enable them to distinguish rhetorical ideological evaluations from substantive ones. To accomplish this goal the course consists of five parts: (i) We will start by reviewing some conceptual lenses that help us to analyze why and how religious beliefs penetrate into politics. (ii) After examining the visions offered by different conceptual frameworks, we will turn to religious doctrines. In this section we will delve into the basic beliefs that separate religious doctrines from each other. As religious doctrines inform political ideologies, we will explore the main competing political ideologies based on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Under this section we will also try to answer why rival religious ideologies emerge from the same religious doctrine. (iii) Equipped with basic knowledge about the doctrine, we will turn to the social context of political-religious ideas and ask "When and how do sacred ideas become relevant to politics?" (iv) The main characteristics and beliefs of *Political actors* who use religious paradigms for political ends will be another focus of our learning. Central to this part is the question of what separates religiously driven political actors from others? Do our terms (religious moderates, fundamentalist activists etc.) allow us to capture their positions accurately? Why do some activists turn their religious ideas into unquestioned political commitments? (v) The last section of the course will be dedicated to religious groups and parties in countries ranging from Lebanon to Israel. Although the class will cover all three religions, the emphasis will be on Islam and Judaism. Among others, the readings will include some original religious texts and samples of how religious ideologues use them for political purposes.

The class is structured as a seminar, therefore, students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss and engage in a dialogue. There will be at least three guest speakers, religious leaders from different religious communities. All students will be required to write a comprehensive research on a religious group of their choice (Hizbollah, Gush Eminent, Muslim Brotherhood etc.) and present their research in class.

The optional readings are available from UIC's book store. All other readings will be available via Blackboard.