



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.

Religion and society; types of religious organizations and movements and their social role and impact. Secularization and counter-secularization. Religion, politics, and the state. Students will examine; analyze; evaluate; case studies of the contemporary role of religion in selected societies.

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Assessment

Class Participation	20%
Activities & assignments	20%
Mid-term Exam	25%
Final Report & Presentation	35%

Course Learning Outcomes

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

1. To analyze and examine the interaction of religion and politics in contemporary world
2. To differentiate and analyse political narratives in different religions
3. To point out contemporary conflicts between religion and politics
4. To assess and analyse the major issues and controversies engendered by religion in relations to global, national and local politics.

Topic No.	Topic
1	Introduction
	The concept of Religion
2	Religious Diversity in Contemporary World
	Case Study
3	Religious Organizations and their social role
	Case Study
4	Religion and the Individual
	Religion and Society
5	Religion, Gender and Reproductive Rights
	Class Activity
6	Religion and Politics
	Case Study: Political Islam , Political Buddhism
7	Review
	Mid-term Exam
8	Local Religious Conflicts
	Case Study
9	Transnational Religious Phenomena
	Case Study: Palestinian-Israeli Conflict
10	Religion and Economy I
	Religion and Economy II
11	Case Study
	Presentations
12	Presentations
	Summary and Review

Assessment Methods & Criteria

1. Class Participation 20%

Students will be assessed on their active participation in class discussions, doing peer reviews, and engaging in different class activities.

2. Activities & assignments 20%

The class is a seminar based class requiring students to do short assignment with a purpose of keeping one's self updated with the current events. Students will also be required to prepare one position paper summarizing and commenting the content of the assigned reading for the particular week. The purpose is to present the understanding of the readings and guide further class discussions. Presentations are expected to be either critically analyzing an argument or applying it to a certain case study.

3. Mid-term Exam 30%

The Midterm exam will be short answer questions based on the knowledge gained during the first half of the trimester.

4. Final Research Report 35%

The final research report is where the students need to write a report based on a topic chosen earlier during the term. The research topics should be related to the contents discussed in the class. Potential topics will however be suggested by the instructor during the term. A prior approval of the topic for the final research report is required. Students need to research the topic, explore and analyze the different perspectives related to the selected issue. Students can then formulate their own recommended solutions for the issue. The length of the report is expected to be between 12-15 pages with proper referencing. A draft copy of the report (at least 75% complete) has to be submitted by week 10. During week 11 and 12, the reports will be presented by each group in class.

Introduction & The concept of Religion

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 introduced.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to survey the continued role of religion in daily lives of people as well as in global politics.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- 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.
- Wilson. D (2003), *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Activities: As part of the first activity students are required to find examples of world's indigenous cultures that have been destructed for material benefits and present them in the class.

Religious Diversity in Contemporary World

Topic description: This week the concept of religious diversity will be explored. Lectures start with three kinds of religious globalization: Diasporas, transnational religion and the religion of plural societies and explores the variations in different religious traditions and how these have changed over time.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to analyze religious diversity in the modern world and how different religions have responded to the cultural context around them.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Reading:

- Juergensmeyer, M. (2006). Thinking Globally About Religion. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.003.0001

Activities:

As part of this activity an overview of the distribution of religions worldwide will be provided. Students can access the site adherents.com rank which includes pie charts showing the faiths in terms of the number of worldwide adherents for each religion. As part of this activity, students will have to firstly point out the following: How does the global distribution of religions compare to that within the United States? Do the pie charts show what you would have predicted? What was surprising? What was something new that you learned? How does the U.S. differ from the rest of the world? How is it similar?

Second part of the activity requires students to present information on the following religions assigned to each group using internet resources:

- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism

- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Buddhism
- Taoism
- Shintoism
- Baha'i

For each religion, students will have to cover the following:

- Origins of the faith (When was it founded? Was there an identifiable founder?)
- Whether it is monotheistic, polytheistic or nontheistic
- Where in the world most of the faith's adherents are located
- Major beliefs or emphases
- Variations among followers of each religion. (Be careful not to stereotype members of faith groups; religion is a public as well as a private affair)
- Scriptures or holy texts/books
- Key figures or individuals
- Major values or rules for human behavior
- Key holidays/holy days/religious observances
- What is unique about the religion (relative to others in the list of nine)
- What is similar about the religion (relative to others in the list of nine)

Religious Organizations and their social role

Topic description: This week students will be introduced to the types of religious organizations and examples of each type. A brief sketch will be made of organized religions, their associated organizations, and how these organizations help in the advancement of their goals.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to analyze the role played by religious organizations, the relations shared between political agents and the religious organizations within different political systems.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Scharbrodt, O. Cont Islam (2018). A minority within a minority?: the complexity and multilocality of transnational Twelver Shia networks in Britain. *Contemporary Islam*. Springer: Netherlands. pp 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0431-0>
- Keersbergen, K.V. & Manow, P. (2009). *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States*. Cambridge University Press: UK.

Activity: In a group of 3-4, students search for a religious organization and define what type of organization is it and which religion does it belong to. Each group discusses the achievements and failures of their chosen organization.

Religion and the Individual & Religion and Society

Topic description: This week assess how religions shape individual identities and behaviors as well as the society we live in. The relationship between religion and health: social and psychological support, egalitarian vs. authoritarianism trends within religious traditions will also be assessed. The focus will be on the intersection between religion and selected

contemporary issues such as ethical, social, political, economic, and cultural issues. The impact religious faith and religious organizations have on social life as well as the impact of social processes like modernization and secularization on religious institutions and individuals will be covered.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to analyze selected religious texts, beliefs, rituals, practices. Students will be able demonstrate the various ways in which religious communities are organized and how these affect religious life.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Badica, S (2013) "I Will Die Orthodox": Religion and Belonging in Life Stories of the Socialist Era in Romania and Bulgaria. In Coleman, P. G., Koleva, D., & Bornat, J. (eds) *Ageing, ritual, and social change: Comparing the secular and religious in Eastern and Western Europe*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate. Ch. 3. Pp.43-65.
- Borchert. T (2005). Of Temples and Tourists: The Effects of the Tourist Political Economy on a Minority Buddhist Community in Southwest China. In Yang, F. & Tamney, J. (eds) *State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies*. Brill: Boston. Ch 4. Pp. 87-112.
- Ross, M. (2008), "Oil, Islam, and Women", *American Political Science Review*, 102/1.
- Turner, S.B (2011). *Religion and Modern Society*. Cambridge University Press.

Religion, Gender and Reproductive Rights

Topic description: This week students will be introduced to the understanding of gender and sexuality in the context of different religious traditions as practiced by individuals, partner's families, and communities. The focus will be on contemporary issues related to gender and sexuality as expressed within religions. Topics covered may include: women, gender roles and religious roles, sexualities and religion, gender, sexuality and religion in popular culture, masculinity and religion, HIV/AIDS and religion.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to reflect on how the overlapping conceptions and activities of religion, gender and sexuality operate in lives of people individually and as well as members of communities, and families.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Tomalin, E (2009). "Buddhist Feminist Transnational Networks, Female Ordination and Women's Empowerment." *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 81- 100.
- Olivelle, Patrick. "Celibacy in Classical Hinduism." In *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* Carl Olson (Ed.). Oxford Scholarship Online, 2007: 1-13.
- Hossain, Adnan. "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia." *Asian Studies Review* 36.4 (2012): 1-13.
- Ishak, Mohd and Sayed Haneef. "Sex Reassignment Technology: The Dilemma of Transsexuals in Islam and Christianity." *Journal of Religion and Health* Volume 53 (Issue 2) 2014: 520-537.

Religion and Politics

Topic description: Politics and religion are intertwined. The topic evaluates recent research on the role of religious actors, institutions, and ideologies in policymaking, state-building, political change, conflict and war. A number of case studies will be used to assess the intertwined relationship between politics and religion.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to explain the influence religion has on politics in different parts of the world. To assess the relations between religion, political mobilization, race and ethnicity, foreign policy, and political processes.

Readings and activities

Suggested Readings:

- Fox, J (2008). *A World Survey of Religion and the State*. Cambridge University Press
- Hui Yew-Foung (ed.): *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012.
- Monterescu D. and Shaindinger N. (2013) “Situational Radicalism: The Israeli “Arab Spring” and the (Un) Making of the Rebel City”, *Constellations* 19 (4).

Review and Mid-term Examination

Topic description: The first class this week will be review session followed by the midterm examination.

Local Religious Conflicts

Topic description: This session examines the various ways in which local religious conflicts cross borders and become international issues. The phenomenon has been evident since the end of the Cold War when many of the domestic conflicts became internationalized. As part of this session, the factors contributing to the internationalization of domestic conflicts will be assessed, including domestic conflicts inspiring similar groups to rebel, presence of international media publicizing the conflicts, and use of international forums among other factors.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to examine the internationalization of domestic conflicts. The role played by media and international bodies in this process of internationalization of domestic conflicts.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Fox, J., & Sandler, S. (2004). Transnational Religious Phenomena. In *Bringing Religion into International Relations*. Ch. 4. pp 63-82. doi:10.1057/9781403981127_5
- Activity: In a group of 3-4, students search for a case where local conflicts became international, define what the conflict was, and how the conflict became an international issue. Each group discusses manifestation of the domestic conflict into the need for international intervention.

Transnational Religious Phenomena

Topic description: This topic will examine the phenomena and issues with religions becoming global crossing over the state borders. Rise of religious missionary movements, human rights, and fundamentalism occur on a larger sphere with greater impact than ever. It

will discuss the tension between religion and the state from both historical and contemporary perspective.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to compare the historical and current issues surrounding religious fundamentalism, human rights, and terrorism.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Fox, J., & Sandler, S. (2004). Transnational Religious Phenomena. In *Bringing Religion into International Relations*. Ch. 5. pp 83-113. doi:10.1057/9781403981127_5

Religion and Economy

Topic description: This topic will explore the relationship between religion and economic life and development. The sub themes will include the support and shaping of economic life by religious traditions, the religious dimension of economic activities, and the economic interpretation of religious phenomena.

Expected learning outcomes: For students to survey the multifaceted and changing relationship between religion and economic life.

Readings and activities:

Suggested Readings:

- Stark, R and Roger F (2000). “A Theoretical Model of Religious Economics.” In *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. pp.193–217. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Solomon, E. (2014). “More than Recipes: Kosher Cookbooks as Historical Text.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, pp. 24–37.

Religion and Economy II

Topic description: The religious dimension of consumer culture, consumer capitalism, and the sacredness of consumption will be assessed further.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to explain the dynamics of capitalism and its relations with the economy of religion.

Readings and activities:

- DeChant, D. (2002). “Consumption and the Religious Imperative.” In *The Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.

Final Research Report Presentation

Topic description: This week students will present their final research report based on a topic chosen earlier during the term. The research topics should be related to the contents discussed in the class or based on potential topics suggested by the instructor during the term.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to conduct research on their own, to explore and analyze the different perspectives related to the selected topic/issue. Students can then formulate their own recommended solutions for the issue.