

POL 310 - Religion and Politics in the United States

9:30-10:20am MWF

Room: Buttrick Hall, Room 215

Fall 2023

Last updated: August 10, 2023

Instructor Information

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Office hours: Thursdays 10 am - 12 pm

Course Overview

This course discusses the ways in which religion and politics intersect in the United States. The topics that will be covered include the relationship between church and state; the connection between an individual's religion (i.e., their beliefs and behavior) and their political attitudes and behaviors; how political candidates make use of religion; churches as political communities; the rise of the "Religious Right" and Christian nationalism; and the intersection of religion and politics for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. The course will highlight important concepts and theories as well as the measures and data that scholars use to study the influence of religion on American politics.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop an understanding of the role that America's religious traditions have played in contemporary politics
- Think critically about the ways in which religion influences politics and politics influences religion
- Examine the intersection of religion and politics through a social scientific perspective, generating questions and ways to answer them.
- Apply the theories and concepts from religion and politics research to current events

Work and Assessment

Course expectations: Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussions. This course has both a lecture and a discussion component. The lectures will incorporate the readings assigned for that day/week. I expected you will have completed all readings prior to class and will come prepared with comments and questions. Readings can be accessed through the library resources or, when not available through the library, via Canvas.

- A note of caution: many, if not most, of the readings come from academic journals and books, mostly from political science but also from sociology. You will find that many of the articles are quite technical and they can be hard to follow even when one is familiar with the methodology. Do not despair. Make sure to understand, and wrestle with, the main ideas presented in a piece. Pay attention as well to how the authors support their arguments with data without getting bogged down by technical details.

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

A+	(97-100)	C	(73-76)
A	(93-96)	C-	(70-72)
A -	(90-92)	D+	(67-69)
B+	(87-89)	D	(63-66)
B	(83-86)	D-	(60-62)
B -	(80-82)	F	(0-59)
C +	(77-79)		

Final grades will be calculated based on the following components:

Participation (20%): All students are expected to be active participants in class discussions. Our learning experience will be enhanced if you come prepared and ready to share your comments, insights, and/or questions from the material covered in the lectures and readings with the rest of the class.

- Attendance policy: Attendance is part of your participation grade, and while there is no separate grade for attendance it is a prerequisite for in-class participation. That said, to accommodate for unforeseeable circumstances, you have three *unexcused* absences that will not affect your participation grade. Please let the instructor know about any excused absences you anticipate during the semester. Note that students who are absent, whether excused or not, are still expected to submit the weekly summary corresponding to that class period.

Weekly summaries (20%): Each week for eight weeks, you will summarize one article from the week's readings (the reading appears in bold font on the course website). Since there are more than eight weeks in the semester, you can skip some weeks. It is up to you to decide which weeks to skip. The summary must be no longer than three-quarters of a page (single-spaced, 12-point font). These summaries must be submitted via Canvas before class time on the day the reading was assigned.

Three Short Papers (10% each): You will be writing three short papers (approx. 4-6 pages) throughout the course. These assignments will require you to think about how what we learn in class relates to what you can observe in your political environment (also known as the "real world"). You can find a short description of each paper below (detailed instructions will be provided on the course website):

1. *Congregational visit paper (4-6 pages)*: students will attend two religious services of a religious tradition or denomination other than their own and will write about how politics is (or is not) addressed, directly or indirectly, in that particular congregation.
2. *Campaign memo (4-6 pages, single-spaced)*: students will write a campaign memo on the political attitudes and behaviors of Latinos/as. Students must provide sufficient background, provide clear takeaways, and propose strategies for a political campaign to appeal to Latino voters. The audience for this paper is a political campaign staff.
3. *Op-ed (3-5 pages)*: students will write an op-ed on a topic of their choice. Students must make a clear argument and use class material to help them organize their essays or provide context to the situation.

Papers must be submitted via Canvas. Late submissions will be penalized: half a point (out of 10) if turned in late but on the same day and one point for each 24-hour period after the due date.

Midterm and Final Exam (15% each): There will be a midterm and a final exam that students will complete in the classroom. These exams will assess your familiarity with the terms and theories in the religion and politics literature that we will have covered in class.

Course Conduct

A common saying advises never to discuss politics or religion in polite company. In this class, we will discuss politics *and* religion and we will do so in a respectful environment. As is bound to be the case when we talk about religion, we will discuss many topics that might be controversial or of a sensitive nature for some or all in our group. Our goal in this class is to have constructive discussions about how religion and politics intersect. Derogatory comments toward other students or to members of a particular religious group will not be tolerated.

Communication Policy

If you have questions about class in general or about a specific assignment, you can email me. You can expect a response within 24 hours (unless you email me on Friday). Students are also more than welcome to attend office hours, as this is time set aside specifically for you. Please note that I will not be “pre-grading” assignments, but I am happy to answer clarifying questions about them either via email or, preferably, during office hours.

Regrading Policy

If a student wishes to appeal a grade, they must do so in writing within one week of receiving their graded assignment back. The student must indicate clearly what part of the

assignment's grading they disagree with, making sure to respond to the instructor's comments in that section and making their case for why they should not have been deducted points. These requests should be done via email and the subject name should read "POL 3XX Regrading request - [Name of assignment]."

Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns

Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns, so you may indicate the pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation (*you are not obligated to do so*). If you use a chosen name, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not, however, tolerate repeated comments that disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name.

Honor Code

Students are expected to do their own work and to cite sources appropriately. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. In other words, students will be held to the standards of the Agnes Scott Honor System to which they agreed when enrolling at this institution.

Disability Resource Center

If you are a student with a disability—physical, medical, psychological, or learning-specific—and have not connected with Accessible Education to discuss your accessibility needs, please visit the [main Office of Accessible Education webpage](#) to learn more about accommodations, helpful resources and support, available through the Office of Accessible Education. Students who register for accommodations during the semester should schedule a meeting with me after accommodations have been approved by the Office of Accessible Education.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important; if you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the [Wellness Center](#). Agnes Scott College provides cost-free mental health services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, please contact the Wellness Center and ask about their [Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

Center for Writing and Speaking

The Center for Writing and Speaking offers one-on-one appointments with trained peer tutors who can help you improve your written and oral communication skills. You are encouraged to use this resource when working on your class assignments to make your arguments more compelling, your sentences clearer, and persistent grammatical errors nonexistent. You can schedule an appointment at <https://www.agnesscott.edu/center-for-writing-and-speaking/index.html>.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Course Schedule

Week 1 - Introduction and the Religious Landscape

August 23

- Syllabus

August 25

- Wald, Kenneth and Allison Calhoun-Brown. 2018. "A Secular Society?" In *Religion and Politics in the United States 8th Edition*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. (Chapter 1: pp. 1-19; skim Chapter 2).

Week 2 - The Religious Landscape and the Relationship Between Church and State

August 28

- Hertzke, Allen D., Laura R. Olson, Kevin R. den Dulk, and Robert Booth Fowler. 2018. "Church and State in the Courts." *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices. 6th ed.* New York, NY: Routledge. (Chapter 12)

August 30

- Davis, Derek H. 2001. "Separation, Integration, and Accommodation: Religion and State in America in a Nutshell." *Journal of Church and State* 43: 5-17.

September 1 - NO CLASS. I will be at APSA.

Recommended viewing:

- *Hail Satan?*, directed by Penny Lane. 2019. Hard Working Movies/Magnolia Pictures.

Week 3 - How Did We Get Here?

September 4 - NO CLASS. Labor Day.

September 6

- Putnam, Robert and David Campbell. 2010. "Religiosity in America: Shock and Two Aftershocks." *American Grace*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Chapter 4: pp. 91-133).

Discuss congregational visit paper.

September 8

- Hunter, James Davison. 2006. "The Enduring Culture War." In *Is There A Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*. James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe (eds). Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press (Chapter 2: pp. 10-41).

Week 4 - How Religion Affects Politics

September 11

- Djupe, Paul A., and Christopher P. Gilbert. 2009. "A Theory of Religious Influences on Political Behavior." *The Political Influence of Churches*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (Introduction: pp 1-20.)

September 13

- Brewer, Mark D., Rogan Kersh, and R. Eric Petersen. 2003. "Assessing Conventional Wisdom about Religion and Politics: A Preliminary View from the Pews." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42(1): 125-36.

September 15

- Campbell, David E. 2004. "Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement." *Political Behavior* 26(2): 155-80.

Week 5 - Mobilization and Vote Choice

September 18

- Putnam, Robert and David Campbell. 2010. "Religion in American Politics." *American Grace*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Chapter 11: pp. 369-418).

September 20

- Wald, Kenneth D., and David C. Leege. 2010. "Mobilizing religious differences in American politics." In *Religion and Democracy in the United States: Danger or Opportunity?* Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson (eds). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 11: pp. 355-381)

September 22

- Campbell, David E., John C. Green, and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2011. "The Party Faithful: Partisan Images, Candidate Religion, and the Electoral Impact of Party Identification." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(1): 42-58.

Week 6 - Religious Language in Politics

September 25

Peer reviews.

September 27

- Coe, Kevin, and David Domke. 2006. "Petitioners or Prophets? Presidential Discourse, God, and the Ascendancy of Religious Conservatives." *Journal of Communication* 56: 309-330.
- Albertson, Bethany L. 2015. "Dog-Whistle Politics: Multivocal Communication and Religious Appeals." *Political Behavior* 37(1): 3-26. *Look for main ideas; you can skip paragraphs here and there.*

September 29

- Some of my own work. Sorry!

Congregational visit paper due September 29th at 5 pm on Canvas.

Week 7 - Midterm exam

October 2

- Review for Midterm Exam

October 4

- Midterm Exam

October 6

- First day of presentations

Week 8 - Presentations

October 9 - NO CLASS. Fall break.

October 11

- Second day of presentations

October 13

- Third day of presentations

Discuss campaign memo.

Week 9 - Black Protestants and the Black Church

October 16

- McDaniel, Eric L. 2008. *Politics in the Pews: The Political Mobilization of Black Churches*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Chapter 3: pp. 55-77).

October 18

- McClerking, Harwood K., and Eric L. McDaniel. 2005. "Belonging and Doing: Political Churches and Black Political Participation." *Political Psychology* 26(5): 721-34.

October 20

- No reading assigned

Week 10 - Latino Catholics, Latino Protestants, and Religious Minorities

October 23

- Leal, David L. 2010. “Religion and the Political and Civic Lives of Latinos.” In *Religion and Democracy in the United States: Danger or Opportunity?* Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson (eds). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 10: pp. 308-352).

October 25

- Molina, Alejandra. 2020. “Latino Protestants More Conservative, Supportive of Trump than Latino Catholics, Poll Finds.” *Religion News Service*. <https://religionnews.com/2020/12/01/latino-protestants-more-conservative-supportive-of-trump-than-latino-catholics-poll-finds/>

October 27

- Hertzke, Allen D., Laura R. Olson, Kevin R. den Dulk, and Robert Booth Fowler. 2018. “Judaism, Islam, and Other Expressions of Religious Pluralism.” *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*. 6th ed. New York, NY: Routledge. (Chapter 4)

Week 11 - White Christians and the Religious Right

October 30

- “The Evangelical Vote.” *Throughline*. NPR. Podcast. <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/23/916048798/the-evangelical-vote>

Draft of campaign memo due on Canvas by the end of the day.

November 1

- Jones, Robert P. 2020. “Remembering: Christianity as the Conductor of White Supremacy.” *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*. Simon & Schuster. (Chapter 2: pp. 25-71)
 - (Optional) Robert P. Jones and Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. NPR. Podcast. <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/30/896712611/american-christianity-must-reckon-with-legacy-of-white-supremacy-author-says>

November 3

- Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press. (Introduction: pp. 1-21).

Peer review of campaign memo due on Canvas by end of the day.

Week 12 - From Politics to Religion

November 6

- Hout, Michael, and Claude Fischer. 2014. "Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012." *Sociological Science* 1: 423–47.

November 8

- Margolis, Michele. 2018. "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html>
 - Margolis, Michele F. 2018. "How Politics Affects Religion: Partisanship, Socialization, and Religiosity in America." *Journal of Politics* 80(1): 30–43. *This is the study mentioned in the op-ed. You should skim it, especially the part describing the experiment.*

November 10

- TBD

Campaign memo due November 10th at 5 pm on Canvas.

Week 13 - A Religious Left

November 13

- Baker, Joseph O, and Gerardo Martí. 2020. "Is the Religious Left Resurgent?" *Sociology of Religion* 81(2): 131–41.
- Braunstein, Ruth, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, eds. 2017. *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*. New York: New York University Press. (Chapter TBD)

Discuss op-ed.

November 15

- Braunstein, Ruth, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, eds. 2017. *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*. New York: New York University Press. (Chapter TBD)

November 17

Week 14 - Thanksgiving Break

NO CLASS: November 20-26

- You can use Monday to work on your op-ed!

Week 15 - Where do we go from here?

November 27

- Peer reviews of op-ed draft.

Bring a draft of your op-ed to class.

November 29

- TBD

December 1

- TBD

Op-ed due December 1st at 5 pm on Canvas.

Week 16

December 4

- Review for final exam.

Final exam - Date TBD

Sometime between December 8 and 13.