

POLS 299-F06: Religion in American Politics

<https://pols299.fall25.equezadallanes.com/>

Section 01: 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM TuTh

Section 02: 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM TuTh

Stein 316

Fall 2025

Instructor

Enrique Quezada-Llanes

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Office: Fenwick Hall 323

Office hours: [M 9-11 am](#) and [Th 3:30-5:30 pm](#) and by appointment

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

Required Text:

- Putnam, Robert and David Campbell. 2010. *American Grace*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 

All other required readings are linked below or are stored in a Dropbox folder (). I will provide the link to the folder via Canvas.

Course Expectations

Students are expected to attend class and participate during 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.

Course Workload

As a course with a course count of one, you are expected to spend 8-10 hours of work each week (not including our two 75-minute weekly course meetings).

Assignments and grades

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

Grade	Range	Grade	Range
A	94–100%	C	74–76%
A–	90–93%	C–	70–73%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	84–86%	D	64–66%
B–	80–83%	D–	60–63%
C+	77–79%	F	< 60%


Final grades will be calculated based on the following components:

Participation (10%): 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 unforeseeable circumstances, you have two *unexcused* absences that will not affect your participation grade. Any additional absences will hurt your participation grade. If you accumulate four *unexcused* absences in the semester, you will forfeit your entire participation grade. Note that students who are absent, whether excused or not, are still expected to submit the weekly summary corresponding to that class period. (Absences due to extenuating circumstances will be considered separately. Please refer to the [College's Class Attendance Policy](#) for the college-wide policy on absences and be in communication if a situation that will keep you from attending class for an extended period of time arises.)

Weekly summaries (15%): Each week for 10 weeks, you will summarize one article from the week's readings (the reading assigned for a summary has a  after it in the course schedule). There are 13 weeks in the semester where you can write a summary, so you can skip 3 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 on Canvas before class time *on the day the reading was assigned*. Please see the [guide](#) on the course website for the format of these summaries.

Congregational visit paper (30% total): You will write an empirical research paper (4-6 pages, double-spaced) similar to the ones political scientists publish in academic journals. For this assignment, you will attend at least one religious service of a religious tradition or denomination other than your own and will write about how politics is (or is not) addressed, directly or indirectly, in that particular congregation. The paper will be broken down into the following parts that you will submit throughout the semester:

1. *Front end of paper (2-3 pages, 7.5% of final grade):*

This portion of the paper includes the motivation, research questions, literature review, theory, expectations, and methodology. This will be due early in the semester for you to do your best and get feedback.

2. *Full draft for peer review (4-6 pages, 7.5% of final grade):*

After collecting data for the paper, you will submit a full draft of the paper for peer review. Another student will provide feedback on your work and you will do the same for them.

3. *Final draft (4-6 pages, 15% of final grade):*

After the peer review, you will submit the final draft of the paper. I expect you will have included the feedback you received on the first portion of the paper as well as the feedback from your classmate.

Op-ed (15%): You will write an op-ed (600-1,200 words) on a course-related topic of your 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 within 24 hours and one point for each 24-hour period after the due date.

Midterm and Final Exam (15% each): There will be a midterm and final exam where you will answer three medium-length questions. Both the midterm and final exams will be in-person. 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 or come by my office. 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 (really, they should be called “student hours”). In addition, if my office door is open, feel free to stop by. Please note that I will not be “pre-grading” assignments, but I am happy to look over your work together 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 “POLS 299-F06 Regrading request - [Name of assignment].”

Academic Integrity and Generative AI Policy

All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and

intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. Students in this class are required to read the full text of the [College's Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to abide by its standards.

Unless otherwise noted, you are expected to complete all coursework independently without the use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini). Because this course emphasizes using writing as a tool for learning and a vehicle for developing a unique writerly voice, using AI tools runs counter to our goals for writing assignments. Because the assumption in this course is that all writing students submit is original to them, cases where students turn in AI-generated content will be considered cheating.

Course Accessibility and Academic Accommodations

The College of the Holy Cross is committed “to providing students with disabilities equal access to the educational opportunities and programs available at Holy Cross in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Massachusetts laws.”

Any student who feels the need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) to discuss support services available. Once the office receives documentation supporting the request for accommodation, the student would meet privately with Accessibility Services to discuss reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

The office can be reached by calling 508-793-3693. If you are already registered with Accessibility Services, please be sure to get your accommodation letters and deliver them to your instructors in a timely fashion. Instructors need at least 4-5 days advance notice to be able to facilitate the process of receiving testing accommodations.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important. If you are having trouble managing your coursework and are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the College has resources you may find useful. Please reach out to [Student Wellness Education](#) or the office of [Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

Title IX

If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please talk to any faculty or staff member with whom you feel comfortable. Faculty and staff members want to support you and have been trained to help. They will also inform the Title IX office so that you learn about options available to you. If you do not want college administrators to know what you have experienced, you may speak to a chaplain or counseling services with complete confidentiality. They will not tell anyone what

you share with them unless you give your express permission. You may contact the Title IX Office directly at titleix@holycross.edu.

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. 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 which disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name.

Center for Writing and Writer's Workshop

The Center for Writing offers one-on-one appointments with trained peer consultants through their Writer's Workshop who can help you improve your 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://holycross.mywconline.com/>.

Recording of Classes

Please note that, consistent with applicable federal and state law, this course may be video/audio recorded as an accommodation *only* with permission from the Office of Accessibility Services. Students are not permitted to record the contents of this class under any other circumstances.

Syllabus Change Policy

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

Schedule


Week 1 - Introduction and the Religious Landscape

Tuesday, August 26

- [Syllabus](#)

Thursday, August 28

- Wald, Kenneth and Allison Calhoun-Brown. 2011. "Religion in the American Context" In *Religion and Politics in the United States 6th Edition*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. (Chapter 2). ❖



- Smith, Gregory A., Alan Cooperman, Becka A. Alper, Besheer Mohamed, Chip Rotolo, Patricia Tevington, Justin Nortey, et al. 2025. “Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off.” *Pew Research Center*. 
- This report has a lot of different parts. Make sure to skim through all of them and take note of anything that catches your attention.

Deadline




Short reflection due Friday, August 29, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 2 - Secularization Theory

Tuesday, September 2



- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2011. “The Secularization Debate.” In *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 1). 
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2011. “The Puzzle of Secularization in the United States and Western Europe.” In *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 4). 

Thursday, September 4

- Hoover Green, Amelia. 2013. “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.” 
- 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.  
- We will discuss the [Congregational Visit Paper](#)

Week 3 - The (Messy) Relationship Between Church and State

Tuesday, September 9

- Gorski, Philip S. 2019. “The Civil Religious Tradition and Its Rivals.” In *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 1) 
- Gorski, Philip S. 2019. “The Hebraic Moment: The New England Puritans.” In *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 2) 

Thursday, September 11

- Bellah, Robert N. 1967. “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus* 96 (1): 1–21. 

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

Week 4 - The (Messy) Relationship Between Church and State (cont.)

Tuesday, September 16

- Kruse, Kevin Michael. 2016. "'Government Under God.'" In *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. New York: Basic Books. (Chapter 3) ✖️🖋️
- *Hail Satan?*, directed by Penny Lane. 2019. Hard Working Movies/Magnolia Pictures. 📺 (will watch in class)

Thursday, September 18

- Hertzke, Allen D., Laura R. Olson, Kevin R. den Dulk, and Robert Booth Fowler. 2018. "Church and State in the Courts." In *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*. 6th ed. New York, NY: Routledge. (Chapter 12) ✖️
- NPR. June 30, 2024. "How will Louisiana's Ten Commandments classroom requirements be funded and enforced?" 📺
- Jaden Edison. July 22, 2024. "Texas' Christian-influenced curriculum spurs worries about bullying, church-state separation" *KBTX3* 📺

Week 5 - How Did We Get Here? Historical Context

Tuesday, September 23

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

Thursday, September 25

- Layman, Geoffrey. 2001. "Cultural Conflict in American Society and Politics." In *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Introduction.) ✖️
- Layman, Geoffrey. 1997. "Religion and Political Behavior in the United States: The Impact of Beliefs, Affiliations, and Commitment From 1980 to 1994." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61(2): 288-316. ✖️

! Deadline

Front end of congregational visit paper due Friday, September 26, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 6 - How Religion Affects Politics

Tuesday, September 30

- Smith, Gregory Allen. 2008. *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests*. Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press. (Read Introduction and Chapter 1). ❖
- Djupe, Paul A., and Christopher P. Gilbert. 2009. "A Theory of Religious Influences on Political Behavior." In *The Political Influence of Churches*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (Introduction: pp 1-20.) ❖

Thursday, October 2

- Smith, Gregory Allen. 2008. "The Influence of Priests on Parishioners' Politics in 2004." *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests*. Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press. (Chapter 5) ❖ ✎
- We will discuss the data collection for the Congregational Visit Paper

Week 7 - Mobilization and Vote Choice

Tuesday, October 7

- Putnam, Robert and David Campbell. 2010. "Religion in American Politics." *American Grace*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Chapter 11: pp. 369-418.) 📖
- McDermott, Monika L. 2007. "Voting for Catholic Candidates: The Evolution of a Stereotype." *Social Science Quarterly* 88(4): 953-69. ❖ ✎

Thursday, October 9

- Midterm Exam in class.

Week 8: Fall Break

NO CLASS: 10/14 and 10/16

Week 9 - Black Protestants and the Black Church

Tuesday, October 21

- Harris, Fredrick C. 1999. "Blessed Assurance: Religion, Personal Involvement, and African-American Political Activism." In *Something within: Religion in African-American Political Activism*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Chapter 5) ❖
- Harris, Fredrick C. 1999. "Rock in a Weary Land: Religious Institutions and African-American Political Activism." In *Something within: Religion in African-American Political Activism*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Chapter 6) ❖

- McDaniel, Eric L. 2013. “The Black Church and Defining the Political.” *Politics, Groups and Identities* 1(1): 93–97. ❖

Thursday, October 23

- McClerking, Harwood K., and Eric L. McDaniel. 2005. “Belonging and Doing: Political Churches and Black Political Participation.” *Political Psychology* 26(5): 721–34. ❖✍
- “Where does the Black church fit in today’s Black Lives Matter movement?” *PBS*
- Mohamed, Besheer, and Kiana Cox. 2020. “Before Protests, Black Americans Said Religious Sermons Should Address Race Relations.” *Pew Research Center*. 🔗
- Mohamed, Besheer, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant, and Claire Gecewicz. 2021. “Faith Among Black Americans.” *Pew Research Center*. 🔗

Week 10 - Latino Catholics and Protestants

Tuesday, October 28

- 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.) ❖✍

Thursday, October 30

- Valenzuela, Ali Adam. 2014. “Tending the Flock: Latino Religious Commitments and Political Preferences.” *Political Research Quarterly* 67(4): 930–42. ❖
- Wong, Janelle. 2018. “The Evangelical Vote and Race in the 2016 Presidential Election.” *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 3(1): 81–106. ❖
- Axios. “Hispanic Protestants are politically diverse, survey finds”

! Deadline

Peer-review draft of congregational visit paper due Friday, October 31, at 11:59pm on Canvas.

Must complete peer-review on Canvas by Tuesday, November 4, by class time.

Week 11 - White Christians and the Religious Right

Tuesday, November 4

- “The Evangelical Vote.” *Throughline*. NPR. Podcast. 🔗

- 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. 📻

Thursday, November 6

- 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). ❖
- Baker, Joseph O, Samuel L Perry, and Andrew L Whitehead. 2020. “Keep America Christian (and White): Christian Nationalism, Fear of Ethnoracial Outsiders, and Intention to Vote for Donald Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election.” *Sociology of Religion* 81(3): 272–93. ❖ ✎

! Deadline

Final draft of Congregational Visit Paper due Sunday, November 9, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 12 - Religious Minorities

Tuesday, November 11

- 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.) 📖

Thursday, November 13



- Lajevardi, Nazita. 2020. “Access Denied: Exploring Muslim American Representation and Exclusion by State Legislators.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 8(5): 957–85. ❖
- Madrid, Raul, Jennifer L. Merolla, Aldo Yanez Ruiz, and Jean Reith Schroedel. 2022. “The Relevance of Religion for Political Office: Voter Bias Toward Candidates from Different Religious Backgrounds.” *Political Behavior* 44(2): 981–1001. ❖ ✎

! Deadline



Topic for op-ed due Friday, November 14, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 13 - The Nones

Tuesday, November 18


- 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. 
- Djupe, Paul A., Jacob R. Neiheisel, and Kimberly H. Conger. 2018. “Are the Politics of the Christian Right Linked to State Rates of the Nonreligious? The Importance of Salient Controversy.” *Political Research Quarterly* 71(4): 910–22. 

Thursday, November 20

- Schwadel, Philip. 2020. “The Politics of Religious Nones.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59(1): 180–89.  
- [Segment from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*](#)
- Cohen, Kate. October 3, 2023. “[America doesn’t need more God. It needs more atheists.](#)” *The Washington Post*

Week 14 - From Politics to Religion

Tuesday, November 25

- Margolis, Michele F. 2018. “How Politics Affects Religion: Partisanship, Socialization, and Religiosity in America.” *Journal of Politics* 80(1): 30–43.  
- Margolis, Michele. 2018. “When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs.” *The New York Times*. 
- Burge, Ryan P. 2021. “Why ‘Evangelical’ Is Becoming Another Word for ‘Republican.’” *The New York Times*. 

Deadline



Full draft of op-ed due at the beginning of class. Submit on Canvas.

Thursday, November 27

NO CLASS. Thanksgiving break.

Week 15 - A Religious Left?

Tuesday, December 2

- Baker, Joseph O, and Gerardo Martí. 2020. “Is the Religious Left Resurgent?” *Sociology of Religion* 81(2): 131–41.  

- Conger, Kimberly H. 2022. “Mobilizing the Religious Left: Linking the Movement to Individual Political Activity.” *Politics and Religion* 15(1): 197–214. ❖❖

Thursday, December 4

- Olson, Laura R. 2017. “Collective Identity and Movement Solidarity among Religious Left Activists in the U.S.” In *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*, eds, Ruth Braunstein, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams. New York: New York University Press, 97-114. ❖❖

Final Exam

- Section 01: Thursday, December 11, 3:00-5:30 pm, Stein 316
- Section 02: Monday, December 15, 3:00-5:30 pm, Stein 316