Religion and Party Politics in the West

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Winter semester 2016-17 (2 credits, 4 ECTS credits)

Class meetings: Wednesdays, 11-12:40, Faculty Tower 908
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 to 12:00, Monument Building, Room 210, by appointment
Course description

Religion has always been an important factor in shaping the attitudes and party preferences of citizens, in influencing the identities of parties and of social movements, and in structuring their alliances. This prominent political role was expected to diminish in the developed world as part of the process of modernization and secularization. The course investigates the historical background and the current validity of this expectation, focusing on party political aspects, but also considering the attitudinal and institutional environment of the religion-politics linkage. The politicization of religious differences, church-state relationships, and the interaction between religiosity and political values will receive special attention throughout the course. The geographical focus of the course will be on Europe and Northern America, but issues related to other regions will be also discussed.

After introducing the most relevant historical antecedents, the course will turn to the discussion of the cooperative relations of churches with the state and the competitive relations with each other. The first part of the course will conclude by the examination of the links between religious background, values and policy preferences in the public.

The second part will start with a discussion of specific party families. We will focus on Christian democratic and radical right wing parties and we will analyze the relationship between religion and populism. Then we move to the discussion of voting behavior and religion, to the changing role of religion in US politics, and to the influence of religion on European party systems. The course will end with reflections on the relationship between religion and democracy and with a discussion of the politics of atheism.

Course requirements

This is a two-credit course. Students are expected to be present at all meetings. If one is unable to attend the class, (s)he should signal this via an e-mail to the lecturer. Activity in the classroom can be complemented with questions, suggestions and comments (maximum 200 words) sent to the lecturer 24 hours prior to the meetings or uploaded to the e-learning site after the class discussion. The use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, e-readers, phones, etc.) is kindly discouraged.
Evaluation

Presentation: 15%
Two position papers: 40%
Class activity: 15%
Questions uploaded to the e-learning site: 10%
Final mini-essay: 20%

Presentation. You need to give a short (ten-minutes long) presentation that covers, with the help of one or more of the recommended readings, a sub-topic of the theme of the week. The presentations need to be based on a short handout, circulated to other seminar participants by Tuesday 4 pm.

Position papers. You need to submit two 800 words-long position papers, excluding bibliography. The position papers should summarize the content of the readings assigned for a particular week and comment on them relying on previous readings and lectures. In the position paper you must refer to at least two academic texts on the topic that are additional to the mandatory readings. The reproductive part (intelligent, selective summary that covers the major claims and techniques of the readings) is supposed to provide about 60 percent of the paper. The rest should consist of original ideas, commenting critically on the readings’ concepts, design, methods, or findings. The first position paper must be submitted by the sixth week, uploaded to the e-learning site not later than Tuesday 4 pm.

Class activity and submitted comments. Participation is measured not only by the quantity but also by the quality of contribution. In addition to the activity in the classroom, you need to upload to the e-learning site - by 4 pm, Tuesday, each week - one question suggested by that week’s readings, with a brief explanation. The question should address important substantive or methodological issues that emerge from that week’s readings.

Final mini-essay. The final 2000-words long paper should be focused on two recently published articles that present opposed, or at least different, views on a substantive, conceptual or methodological matter in the field of party politics. The essay should highlight and evaluate the
differences and aim at solving the controversy. The deadline for the submission of the essay is one week after the course ends.

**Learning outcomes and their assessment**

With the help of the course the student should acquire the ability to:

1. understand basic concepts used in the subfield pf politics of religion;

2. competently describe and discuss key phenomena such as secularization, populism, political parties, church and state relations, religious values, atheist politics, etc.;

3. understand major sociological and political science approaches to the study of religion, learn about institutionalist, psychological and functionalist explanations of the changes in the role of religion in politics;

The position papers are expected to improve the ability to identify the most relevant aspects of a scholarly argument, to establish links between different publications, to discriminate between scholarly and unscholarly arguments, and to channel the knowledge one obtained from sources inside and outside of class-work into the criticism of particular articles. The class activity will center on the readings, helping the students to synthesize information, determine focus points, and discern the main line of argumentation. The obligation to submit an essay will develop the skills to build up a coherent argument. All aspects of the class contribute to develop the skill of problem analysis in international context: the ability to understand problems in cross-national comparative perspective and to discuss them with students of different cultural background.
Course programme

Week 1. Antecedents to modern configurations of religion and politics

Required readings:

Week 2. Secularization

Required readings:

Week 3. Church and state relations in historical perspective

Required readings:

Week 4. Church and state relations in normative, political and legal debates

Required readings:
Week 5. Values, attitudes and policies

Required readings:


Week 6. Christian (democratic) parties

Required readings:


Week 7. Radical right

Required readings:


Week 8. Religion and voting behavior

Required readings:


Week 9. Religion in US politics
Required readings:


Week 10. European party systems and religion

Required readings:


Week 11. Religion and democracy

Required readings:


Week 12. The politics of atheism

Required readings:
