POLT 596 — SELECTED TOPICS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective

Dr. Paul Christopher Manuel — Sample Syllabus
T, Thurs, 10:30–11:50 a.m.
Office Hours: T 12:00–2:00 p.m. or by appointment

Course Description

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, comparative political scientists treated religion as a residual category. The dominant theories of political development assumed that modernization would produce secularization and that secularization would, in turn, drain religion of its political significance. The empirical record has not been kind to those assumptions. The Iranian Revolution, the role of the Catholic Church in the democratic transitions of Iberia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, the rise of the Christian Right in the United States, the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India, the recent prominence of the Polish Catholic hierarchy in the country's constitutional crisis, and the political role of evangelical Christianity across Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa have all forced the field to take religion seriously as a political variable.

This seminar examines religion as a force in comparative politics. We begin with the theoretical literature on secularization and its critics, move through the major models of church-state relations, and then take up religion's role across a sequence of empirical domains: democratic transitions, authoritarian regimes, civil society, right-wing populism, and faith-based provision of social welfare. The seminar draws on Catholic Christianity, Protestant Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and the secular republican tradition. The Catholic cases — Iberia, Latin America, Poland, and the Vatican itself under Pope Francis — receive particular attention, both because of their importance to the comparative politics of religion and because they have been the focus of much of my own research.

Course Requirements

Weekly response memos (one page, due before Tuesday class)	20%
Class participation	20%
In-class research presentation	20%
Final research paper (15–18 pages)	40%
Total	100%

Research Paper

The final paper (15–18 pages) asks each student to take a single case — a country, a religious tradition, a transnational movement, or a particular episode of religion-and-politics interaction — and analyze it using the theoretical apparatus developed in the course. The paper proceeds in four sections: a historical and contextual introduction; a theoretical framing; an empirical analysis; and a conclusion that addresses the implications of the case for the broader comparative literature. Detailed paper guidelines will be distributed in Week 4. Students will present preliminary findings in class in Weeks 12–14.

Required Texts

The following books are required and available at the bookstore. All other readings will be made available on Canvas.

José Casanova, *Public* Religions *in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Alynna J. Lyon, Paul Christopher Manuel, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Paul Christopher Manuel and Miguel Glatzer, eds., *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare*, Volumes 1–4. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019–2023.

Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

A Note on the Reading Load

Each week lists three required readings and two suggested readings. Required readings should be completed before the Tuesday meeting. The suggested readings provide additional depth and will often be useful for the research paper. Response memos engage with the required readings.

Course Policies

Attendance and active participation in seminar discussion are mandatory. All written work is submitted via Canvas. The University of New Hampshire's Academic Honor Code governs all work in this course. The use of generative AI to produce written work is not permitted; AI may be used as a research aid (comparable to a search engine) and must be cited where used. Students with documented disabilities should contact Student Accessibility Services and notify the instructor early in the term.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1. Introduction: Why Religion Matters in *Comparative Politics*

The puzzle of the secularization thesis: a powerful theoretical prediction that the world has refused to validate. Why political scientists, having ignored religion for decades, now have to take it seriously again.

Required:

- José Casanova, *Public* Religions *in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Peter L. Berger, "*The Desecularization of the World*: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World*, ed. Peter L. Berger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Chapter 1.

Suggested:

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. Introduction.
- Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Chapters 1–2.

Week 2. Theoretical Foundations: Secularization and Its Critics

The classical secularization thesis from Weber to Berger. Why the prediction proved partial at best. The contributions of Casanova, Asad, and others to a more nuanced theory of religion in modernity.

Required:

- Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World *Religions*" (excerpt) and "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (selected passages), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- José Casanova, *Public* Religions *in the Modern World*, Chapters 2 and 8.
- Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Introduction and Chapter 1.

Suggested:

- Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–273.
- David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*. Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993. Selected chapters.

Week 3. Models of Church-State Relations

The major institutional patterns: separation, establishment, concordat, laïcité, state-church identity. Why each developed where it did, and what each does to political life.

Required:

- Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State*, Introduction and Chapters 1–2.
- Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Chapters 1–2.
- Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (2000): 37–57.

Suggested:

- Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Paul Christopher Manuel, "Religious Regulation in France," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Week 4. The Catholic Church as a Political Actor

A church that operates as a transnational political actor with its own diplomatic corps, doctrinal apparatus, and global reach. Vatican II and the political turn that followed it.

Required:

- Paul Christopher Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. Introduction and Chapters 1–2.
- Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa*. London: Routledge, 2010. Chapter 3.
- José Casanova, "Catholicism and the Public Sphere: A Sociological Perspective," in *Catholicism and Religious Freedom*, ed. Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Suggested:

- Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*. New York: Modern Library, 2003.
- Paul Christopher Manuel, Alynna J. Lyon, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Religion and Politics in a Global Society: Comparative Perspectives from the Portuguese-Speaking World*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. Introduction.

Week 5. Pope Francis and the Politics of the Vatican

The first Latin American pope and his political significance. Climate, migration, inequality, and the limits of papal influence in a divided global Church.

Required:

- Alynna J. Lyon, Paul Christopher Manuel, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Introduction and Chapter 1.

- Paul Christopher Manuel, "How the Theological Priorities of Pope Francis Inform His Policy Goals," in *Pope Francis as a Global Actor*.
- Pope Francis, Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home (encyclical). Vatican: 2015. Selected paragraphs.

Suggested:

- Massimo Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020.
- Alynna J. Lyon, Paul Christopher Manuel, and Christine Gustafson, eds., *Pope Francis Reconsidered: The Politics and Theology of a 21st Century Global Leader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026.

Week 6. Religion and Democratic Transitions: The Iberian Cases

How the Catholic Church changed sides. The Portuguese Church's role in the Carnation Revolution and the Spanish Church's role in the post-Franco transition.

Required:

- Paul Christopher Manuel, "*Religion and Politics in Iberia*," in *The One, the Few, and the Many*, ed. Ted G. Jelen and Clyde Wilcox. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- José Casanova, *Public* Religions *in the Modern World*, Chapter 4 (Spain).
- Manuel Braga da Cruz, "The Church and Politics in Contemporary Portugal," in *The Politics of Iberian Catholicism* (Canvas).

Suggested:

- Audrey Brassloff, *Religion and Politics in Spain: The Spanish Church in Transition, 1962–96*. London: Macmillan, 1998.
- Paul Christopher Manuel, *Uncertain Outcome: The Politics of the Portuguese Transition to Democracy*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995. Chapter 3.

Week 7. Religion and the Authoritarian Regime

The Polish Church under communism. Liberation theology in Latin America. The political roles religious institutions play when secular politics is closed off.

Required:

- Daniel H. Levine, *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. Selected chapters.
- Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Chapters 6–7.
- José Casanova, *Public* Religions *in the Modern World*, Chapter 6 (Poland).

Suggested:

- Paul Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Week 8. Religion, Civil Society, and Democratic Resilience

Religious institutions as forms of civil society. What they contribute to democratic life — and what they sometimes take away from it.

Required:

- Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Chapters 1 and 13.

- Paul Christopher Manuel, "How Can a Church Influence Civic Dialogue in a Liberal Democracy?" *The Forum*: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics *11, no. 4 (2013).*
- Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–429.

Suggested:

- Paul Christopher Manuel and Anne Marie Cammisa, "Religious Groups as Interest Groups," *Religions* 7, no. 2 (2016).
- Stephen V. Monsma, *When Sacred and Secular Mix: Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996.

Week 9. Christian Democracy and the Politics of European Centrism

The political tradition that organized post-war Catholic Europe — and what its decline says about the recent rightward turn in European politics.

Required:

- Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. Introduction and Chapters 1–2.
- Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, Chapter 8 ("The Decline of Christian Democracy?").
- Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, *What Is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion, and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Introduction and Chapter 4.

Suggested:

- Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Thomas Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

Week 10. Religion and Right-Wing Populism

The contemporary entanglement of religious symbols, identity, and right-wing populist politics. Why the alliance is sometimes deeply theological and sometimes purely strategic.

Required:

- Anna Triandafyllidou, "Religion and Nationalism Revisited: Insights from Southeastern and Central Eastern Europe," *Ethnicities* 23, no. 6 (2023).
- Olivier Roy, *Is Europe Christian?* London: Hurst, 2019. Chapters 1 and 4.
- Anna Grzymala-Busse, "How Populists Rule: The Consequences for Democratic Governance," *Polity* 51, no. 4 (2019): 707–717.

Suggested:

- Rogers Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226.
- Paul Christopher Manuel, "Of Cultural Backlash and Economic Insecurity in the 2016 American Presidential Election," *Política & Sociedade* 36 (2017): 212–227.

Week 11. Religion and Politics in the Americas

Two contrasting trajectories. The decline of Catholic political dominance in Latin America and the rise of evangelical political movements; the role of religion in U.S. partisan politics from the Christian Right to the present.

Required:

- Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997. Selected chapters.
- David E. Campbell, John C. Green, and Geoffrey C. Layman, *Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Chapters 1 and 5.
- Paul Christopher Manuel, "The Catholic Church and American Politics: How Can a Church Contribute to a Liberal Democracy?" *The Forum* 11, no. 4 (2013).

Suggested:

- Amy Erica Smith, *Religion and Brazilian Democracy: Mobilizing the People of God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Paul A. Djupe and Ryan L. Claassen, eds., *The Evangelical Crackup? The Future of the Evangelical-Republican Coalition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018.

Week 12. Religion and Politics in the Muslim World

Models of Islam in politics — Turkish, Iranian, Saudi, Indonesian. The Arab Spring and what it told us about religion and democratic possibility in the region.

Required:

- Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Chapters 1 and 5.
- Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Muslim Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 13–27.
- Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Introduction and Chapter 6.

Suggested:

- Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Jocelyne Cesari, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Week 13. *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare*

How religious organizations operate as providers of welfare, education, and humanitarian service — sometimes in partnership with the state, sometimes filling gaps the state has left, sometimes substituting for it altogether.

Required:

- Paul Christopher Manuel and Miguel Glatzer, "Use Words Only If Necessary: The Strategic Silence of Organized Religion in Contemporary Europe," in *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare*, vol. 1, ed. Manuel and Glatzer. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Paul Christopher Manuel and Miguel Glatzer, eds., *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare*, vol. 2 (selected case-study chapter, Canvas).
- Stephen V. Monsma, *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012. Chapters 1 and 5.

Suggested:

- Paul Christopher Manuel and Miguel Glatzer, eds., *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare*, vol. 3.
- Robert Wuthnow, *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Week 14. Course Wrap-Up: The Future of Religion in *Comparative Politics*

Where the field is going. The unresolved theoretical questions, the empirical puzzles that remain, and the policy and political stakes of getting the analysis right. Final research presentations.

Required:

- José Casanova, "Rethinking Public *Religions*," in *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs*, ed. Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Sacred Foundations*, Conclusion.
- Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, *Conclusion.*

Suggested:

- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, concluding chapters.
- Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz, and Yogendra Yadav, *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. Selected chapters.

Sample syllabus prepared for the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, University of New Hampshire.