



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
Politics of Global Challenges BA programme

RELIGION AND (GLOBAL) POLITICS
Course Syllabus

2025/2026 Autumn semester
Seminars: Mondays, 15:00, room 302
Elective course, 5 ECTS

Course instructor

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Course description

The aim of the course is to provide insight into interplay of religion and (global) politics by examining substantive topics, such as religion and democracy, religious freedom, religious fundamentalism, religion in party politics, religion in public space, church-state relations, religion and nationalism etc. Students will be equipped with conceptual and analytical tools for studying the role of religion in processes of political contestation, cooperation, and change. They will also train their collaborative, analytical and communication skills.

Teaching and learning methods

Seminars, lectures, a field trip, individual reading and written assignments, collaborative presentation of seminar materials, a final exam.

Course requirements and assessment

Seminars: 50% (participation in discussions 30% + presentation of materials 20%)

Written assignments: 30%

Final exam: 20%

Seminar attendance is compulsory. Students must read the required material and be prepared to participate in the discussion and other seminar activities.

Students are allowed to miss up to 3 seminars due to health or other personal reasons. Missing more than 3 seminars will lower the overall grade. Missing more than 7 seminars will result in failure of the course.

Seminar assessment criteria:

1. High-quality participation in the seminars involves students deeply and critically considering the assigned readings, illustrating their points with pertinent empirical examples, constructing sound arguments, and contributing meaningfully to discussions with their peers.
2. In-class presentation of seminar materials by small study groups (2-3 people) will be graded upon performance in three areas: the content of the contribution, oral communication skills, analytical capabilities.

Written assignments include 3 one-page reflection papers (450-600 words). They must be submitted on time in the virtual learning environment of the course. Late submissions will not be accepted. All written assignments must be prepared independently. Using Chat GPT or similar AI tools is not allowed.

A written in-class examination will take place in December (or January).

Course outline

Week 1

Sept 08. Lecture. Introduction to the course

Week 2

Sept 15. Seminar. Religion and democracy: the 'clash of civilizations'

Required readings:

1. Jeffrey Haynes, "From Huntington to Trump: Twenty-Five Years of the 'Clash of Civilizations,'" *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2019): 11–23.
2. Jonathan Fox, "Civilizational Clash or Balderdash? The Causes of Religious Discrimination in Western and European Christian-Majority Democracies," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 17, no. 1 (2019), 34-48.

Suggested material:

3. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

Week 3

Sept 22. Seminar. The myth of religious violence?

Required materials:

1. Interview with Mark Juergensmeyer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXUpAUCiQzg&t=1555s&ab_channel=StefaniRuper 25:55-35:00
2. William T. Cavanaugh, "Religious Violence as Modern Myth," *Political Theology* 15, no. 6(2014): 486–502.
3. Ulrich Schmiedel, "The Myth of Muslim Violence: Theorizing Religion in the War on Terror," *Journal for Religion, Society and Politics* 7 (2023): 729–750.

Week 4

Sept 29. Seminar. Transnational religious actors: faith based organizations and the Pope

Required readings:

1. Tanya Schwartz, "Challenging the Ontological Boundaries of Religious Practices in International Relations Scholarship," *International Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (2018): 30–54.
2. Petr Kratochvíl and Jana Hovorková, "Papal Geopolitics: The World According to Urbi et Orbi," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 4 (2017): 79–92.

Suggested material:

3. Amélie Barras, "Faith in Rights: Christian-Inspired NGOs at Work in the United Nations" On *New Books in Religion* [Podcast episode].

4. Edward Stourton, "Francis, the rebel Pope" On *BBC* [Documentary podcast].

Week 5

Oct 06. Seminar. Religious fundamentalism

Required readings:

1. Nora Kindermann et al., "Mapping the concept of fundamentalism: a scoping review," *Politics and Religion* 17, no. 4 (2024): 648-673.

→ **First reflection paper** ←

In virtual learning environment

Week 6

Oct 13. Lecture-seminar. Religion and the European Union

Preparation for the lecture-seminar:

1. Reflection on European identity and its connection to religion

Week 7

Oct 20. Lecture-seminar. Religion and the state: the many faces of political secularism

Preparation for the lecture-seminar:

1. Analysis of assigned empirical cases of church-state relations (in virtual learning environment)

Week 8

Oct 27. Seminar. Religious political parties

Required readings:

1. Luca Ozzano, "The Many Faces of a Political God: A Typology of Religiously Oriented Parties," *Democratization* 20, no. 5 (2013): 807-830.

2. Guy Ben-Porat et al., "Populism, Religion and Family Values Policies in Israel, Italy and Turkey," *Mediterranean Politics* 28, no. 2 (2021): 155-177.

Suggested material:

3. Kristin Kobez Du Mez, "Jesus and John Wayne. How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation" On *New Books in Religion* [Podcast episode].

Week 9

Nov 3. Seminar. Religion and right-wing populism in the East and the West

Required readings:

1. Tobias Cremer, "Defenders of the Faith? The Alternative für Deutschland's Christian Credentials Under Scrutiny, *The Godless Crusade: Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*. (2023). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2. E. Leidig and C. Mudde, "Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) The Overlooked Populist Radical Right Party," *Journal of Language and Politics* 22, no. 3 (2023): 360–377.

Suggested material:

3. "The Godless Crusade: Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West with dr. Tobias Cremer" on *Religion in Praxis Conversation Series* [Podcast episode].

Week 10

Nov 10. Seminar. Religion and nationalism: Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar

Required readings:

1. Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012): 2–20.
2. Niklas Foxeus, "The Buddha Was a Devoted Nationalist: Buddhist Nationalism, Ressentiment, and Defending Buddhism in Myanmar," *Religion* 49, no. 4 (2019): 661–690.

Suggested reading:

3. Brenna Artinger "Buddhist Nationalism and Extremism in Myanmar and North America," *e-IR*, (August 31, 2023).

Week 11

Nov 17. Seminar. Religious actors and progressive political change

Required readings:

1. Rachel Rinaldo, "Pious and critical: Muslim Women Activists and the Question of Agency," *Gender and Society* 28, no. 6 (2014): 824–46.
2. Laura M. Krull, "Liberal Churches and Social Justice Movements: Analyzing the Limits of Inclusivity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59 (2020): 84–100.

Suggested material:

3. Ava DuVernay, *Selma* (2014) [Movie]

Week 12

Nov 28 (Friday!). Field trip: meeting with a priest of Orthodox Church in Lithuania (Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Required reading:

1. Petr Kratochvíl, Tomáš Doležal, "Orthodox Christianity and Multiple Modernities: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War," *Czech Journal of International Relations* 60, no. 2 (2025), 69–100.

[→ Second reflection paper ←](#)

In virtual learning environment

Week 13

Dec 01. Seminar. Religion and political behaviour

Required reading:

1. Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom and Gizem Arikan, "A Two edged Sword: The Differential Effect of Religious Belief and Religious Social Context on Attitudes towards Democracy," *Political Behavior* 34 (2012): 249–276.
2. Michele F. Margolis, "Reversing the Causal Arrow: Politics' Influence on Religious Choices," *Advances in Political Psychology* 43, no. 1 (2022): 261–290.

Week 14

Dec 08. Seminar. Religion in public space

Required reading:

1. Frédéric Strack, "Laïcité, Public Governance of Religion, and the Orthodox Jews in France," in *When Politics Meets Religion*, eds. Marko Veković and Mirosljub Jevtić (London: Routledge, 2024).
2. David Miller, "Majorities and Minarets: Religious Freedom and Public Space," *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2016): 437–456.

Week 15

Dec 15. Lecture-seminar. Religious v. secular values: limits to free speech

Preparation for the lecture-seminar:

1. Analysis of assigned essays from a book *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* for participation in a debate (in virtual learning environment)

→ Third reflection paper ←

In virtual learning environment

Week 16

Dec 22. Final exam?

Further materials

Books

1. Veković, Marko, Miroljub Jevtić (eds.). 2024. *When Politics Meets Religion: Navigating Old Challenges and New Perspectives*. Routledge.
2. Jeffrey, Haynes (ed.). 2023. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*. Routledge.
3. Jeffrey, Haynes (ed.). 2022. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Politics and Ideology*. Routledge.
4. Ferrari, Silvio (ed.). 2015. *Routledge Handbook of Law and Religion*. Routledge.
5. Herrington, Luke M., Alasdair McKay, and Jeffrey Haynes (eds.). 2015. *Nations under God: The Geopolitics of Faith in the Twenty First Century*. E-International Relations Publishing.

Journals

1. The Review of Faith & International Affairs
2. Journal of Contemporary Religion
3. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
4. Politics and Religion
5. Critical Research on Religion

Podcasts

1. New Books in Religion: <https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/religion-faith/religion>
2. Religion in Praxis: <https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/religion-in-praxis/>

Class Conduct

Religion can be a personal topic. Some of the issues that we will cover in this course are controversial. Since students come from diverse religious traditions or secular backgrounds, it is important that a classroom remain a space for open and respectful discussion. Students are encouraged to share their opinions, knowledge and experience freely, but also to be aware of the feelings of their colleagues.