Syllabus:

RELIGION AND POLITICS ACROSS CULTURES

A SECULAR AGE? RELIGION, POLITICS, AND MODERNITY. In the aftermath of the Second World War, policy analysts and social scientists alike subscribed to the notion that the more a society becomes “modern” the less religion figures in public life. Where it did not disappear entirely, modern religion was assumed to become a matter of private personal belief – not something that can or should be drawn into politics or the public square. This was the core premise of the “secularization theory” that dominated Western policy and social science from the 1950s to the 1990s. The assumption was in turn linked to another widespread still today in policy circles and some academic disciplines, including International Relations: Where a society does not secularize in this manner, the influence of religion in public life is a serious obstacle to the achievement of democracy, gender equality, and tolerance, and may even become a catalyst for a “clash of civilizations.”

PUBLIC RELIGION RESURGENT. Since the 1970s, however, developments in many societies have shown that, rather than declining, religion has remained strong or become even more societally influential. The world-wide Islamic resurgence, the growth of Hindu nationalism in India, the revival of Confucianism and Buddhism in China, the Christian right and civil-rights progressivism in the United States, Buddhist nationalism in Southeast Asia, and the wildfire spread of Pentecostal Protestantism in Latin America, Africa, the Pacific region, and, now, China – these and other developments indicate that “religion” in many national settings is not a declining influence, but a growing one. The global resurgence of religion raises questions as to how we are to understand religion, politics, and public life today. Is the resurgence a peculiar and broadly “democratizing” cultural effect of modernity? Or does public religion lead to intolerance and contradict the secularism required for democracy, gender equality, and freedom? Can we live together peaceably in a world where religion has gone public?

OUR GOALS. The first goal of this course is to understand and critically evaluate the changing role of religion in modern politics and public life. Few issues are more fiercely debated today than this one, and few are more important for students aspiring to a career in government, international NGOs, or academic fields dealing with issues of religion and public policy.

The second goal of this course is to understand these issues, not just in the modern West, but in countries and civilizational traditions around the world. A generation ago, Western countries were assumed to be the model of political and cultural development for all societies undergoing “modernization.” We now realize that there are multiple modernities, not one, and this plurality is especially striking on matters of politics, secularism, and religion. Even in the “West,” there is and never was just one but always several models of state-society-religion relations. This plurality becomes all the more striking as we compare Western countries with those in other parts of the world.

Our case-studies and civilizational comparisons this semester include the politics of secularism, gender, and citizenship in the U.S., France, and Turkey; Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity and democracy and gender politics in the global South; Muslim politics and the challenge of modernity in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, with special attention to Muslim democracy, radicalism, and Islamic populism; the politics and culture of the religious resurgence in China and East Asia; new Buddhist movements in Thailand and Southeast Asia; Hindu nationalism and the “dark side” of democratization and citizenship in India. Along the way, we will make many side comparisons, including to Israel and Judaism, Orthodox Christianity and Eastern Europe, modern “non-religious” spiritualism, feminist religious ethics, and the new atheism. In the course of examining these and other cases and issue, we
come back again and again to ask, Why are some societies and some polities deeply religious, and others not? And what does this variation imply for the future of citizenship and modern politics?

**Our third and final goal** in this course is to understand the implications of modern religions and politics for a variety of political and ethical issues: citizenship and how to live together in multicultural/multi-religious societies; the prospects for gender and sexual equality in different political and religious traditions; the different varieties of democracy, and their implications for tolerance, coexistence, and human flourishing. Over the entire length of our course we return again and again to the question, What are the implications of religion “gone public” for modern pluralism, tolerance, citizenship, and gender equality?

**Requirements and Grading.** In light of the breadth of our readings and discussions, the first requirement of this course is to attend all classes and participate actively in discussion.

1) **Attendance and Participation:** Classroom attendance and participation will comprise 25% of your grade. Each class member will be asked to present one or two five-minute critical summaries of our weekly readings, roughly equivalent to a one page outline of key points. These presentations will account for about half of your participation grade (or about 12% of your full grade).

2) **Readings:** The other half of your participation will be based on class attendance and class discussion, including discussion of readings; so keeping up with the reading and “being there” for the class and your classmates are very important.

3) **Take-Home Essays & Final Paper:** There are no in-class examinations for this course. The written portion of your grade will be based on a take-home midterm essay (25% of your grade), a final take-home exam reflection (25%), and one outside reading report or research paper of approximately 2500 words (roughly ten double spaced pages) in length (25% of grade). The paper topic should reflect your own interests – something you are excited to pursue more deeply – in relation to some theoretical issue from the course, and be worked out in consultation with me, sometime prior to mid-semester. The paper will be due on April 23.

**Consultation.** This course welcomes people from all disciplinary backgrounds – you don’t have to be an IR specialist, anthropologist, or political sociologist. I also welcome and encourage discussion outside of class. My office hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 1:00-2:20. My office is located at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, 10 Lenox Street, second floor (tel: 3-9050; email: rhefner@bu.edu). Come on by!

**A Note On Academic Conduct.** The University has also asked all professors to remind students of the Boston University Academic Conduct Code. If you are not familiar with the code, please read it. Copies are available on-line at

http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

More generally, remember that handing in someone else’s work or ideas as your own – even if at some point you worked as a group – constitutes plagiarism. Using someone else’s ideas or paraphrasing passages from an on-line source without proper attribution also constitutes plagiarism. The University takes plagiarism very seriously, and requires faculty to report any and all infractions of the Academic Conduct Code to the Dean for resolution by the Academic Conduct Committee.

**Texts.** You will read parts of the following books in this course, as well as several articles. All of the book are available at the BU Bookstore; I will provide PDF copies of the articles.


Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India.*

Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East.*
Schedule of Topics and Readings
The reading for each week is listed in the first line of each week’s “Reading” below. The “Outside Referenced Reading” are not at all required – and not expected to be read this semester as such. However, I refer to these readings in our seminar discussion, and I list them here so that students interested in pursuing a particular issue further may look into them whether this semester or sometime later.

Week 1: Secularism & Secularization in Western Societies: The West as Model or Exception?


Week 2: Varieties of Secularity, Religious Governance, & Citizen Ethics
Outside Referenced Reading: Michael Warner, Jonathan van Antwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age, especially Introduction, Chs. 8-12.

Reading: Kuru, Secularism and State Policies, pp. 103-246.


Week 5: Pentecostalism, Gender, & Politics

Week 6: Muslim Traditions of Religion and State: From Caliphate Rule to Democratic Populism
Reading: Hadiz, Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East, pp. 1-115.

**Week 7: The Islamic Resurgence and Modernity: The Great Exception or the Fourth Wave of Democratization? Wherein Too the Place of Muslim Women?**

**Reading:** Hadiz, *Islamic Populism*, pp. 116-189.


**Week 8: Is East Asia Different? Religious Resurgence and Democratization in China and Taiwan.**


**Week 9: Buddhism, the State, and Religious Resurgence: A Different Modernity?**

**Reading:** Rachelle M. Scott, *Nirvana for Sale?* pp. 1-87.

**Week 10: Women’s Religiosity and the New Middle Class**

**Reading:** *Nirvana for Sale*, pp. 89-187.


**Week 11: Hinduism and Religious Nationalism: Illiberal Democratization in the World’s Largest Democracy?**

**Reading:** Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, pp. 3-89.


**Week 12: India Compared: Democratization, Religious Resurgence, and “Uncivil Society”**

**Reading:** Hansen, *Saffron Wave*, pp. 134-238.


**Week 13: Religion and Citizenship in the Late-Modern West: Liberalism, Minorities, and the Struggle for a New Civic Pluralism**


**Week 14: Religion & Western Modernity Revisited: Is Multiculturalism Possible? Is the Liberal Secular Model of Citizenship Exhausted?**

**Reading:** Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe’s Muslims*, Chs. 5-8.