Politics and Religion covers a broad range of issues and concerns of interest to the student of Comparative Politics and International Relations: political theology, institutional formation and change, state power and authority, legitimacy and resistance, nationalism, as well as the shifting and productive boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular. The course will introduce students to a variety of different analytic approaches to religion, exploring the tensions between them. These include, but are not limited to, positivist approaches that posit religion as a causal factor, public policy-orientated approaches that view religion as a challenge to and an instrument for governance, and interpretivist and poststructuralist approaches that seek to question religion as a social scientific concept. The second half of the course will address these issues through a comparative exploration of religion and politics in a variety of contexts.

Teaching & Examination
The course will be taught by a combination of lectures and supervisions, running through Michaelmas and Lent terms, with a revision session in Easter term. In Michaelmas, lectures cover a range of debates and analytic questions in the study of religion and politics. In Lent, students choose 2 modules that explore these debates further, through readings and discussions on a thematic case study. During the course students will have 4 supervisions, two each in Michaelmas and Lent. The examination will consist of 16 questions divided into two sections: Section A, which covers themes introduced in Michaelmas term, and Section B, which contains at least two questions per module. Students will choose at least one question each from Section A and B, and answer a third from either section.
Readings
Readings are divided into two groups: essential readings will form the main basis for essays and discussion. Recommended readings are provided as a guide for students who wish to explore topics in further depth.
The majority of articles and book chapters can be accessed electronically through the University Library’s electronic resources, including through the LEAN Library (https://www.libraries.cam.ac.uk/eresources/access-full-text-anywhere).
The SPS/Seeley library and the UL will assist students with access to readings.
Lecture list
Lectures, readings and supervisions will be finalised shortly before the beginning of each term, and announced on the course Moodle.

Michaelmas term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Seminar leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 October</td>
<td>Questioning Religion and Politics: The Context</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 October</td>
<td>Debating secularism and politics</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 October</td>
<td>Religion and the State</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<td>2 November</td>
<td>Religion and Empire</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 November</td>
<td>Analytic approaches: Religion and Law</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 November</td>
<td>Analytic approaches: Religion and capitalism</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 November</td>
<td>Analytic approaches: Religion and violence</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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<td>30 November</td>
<td>Discussion: What is Religion? What is Politics?</td>
<td>Dr Hussin</td>
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Lent term

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Seminar leader</th>
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<tr>
<td>25 January</td>
<td>Module 1: Religion and Politics in Europe</td>
<td>Dr Silvestri</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 February</td>
<td>Module 1: Religion and Politics in Europe</td>
<td>Dr Silvestri</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 February</td>
<td>Module 2: Religion and the Indian Political</td>
<td>Dr Sohal</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 February</td>
<td>Module 2: Religion and the Indian Political</td>
<td>Dr Sohal</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 February</td>
<td>Module 3: Islam and political discourse in Africa</td>
<td>Dr Shivji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 March</td>
<td>Module 3: Islam and political discourse in Africa</td>
<td>Dr Shivji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>Module 4: Buddhism and Politics in Southeast Asia</td>
<td>Dr Larsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 March</td>
<td>Module 4: Buddhism and Politics in Southeast Asia</td>
<td>Dr Larsson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questioning Religion and Politics: The Context

Essential


The Immanent Frame, 'A Universe of Terms,'
https://tif.ssrc.org/category/a-universe-of-terms/
'Enchantment, Disenchantment'; 'Belief'; 'Race'

Recommended


https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/islam-and-western-secular-modernity

Debating secularism and politics

Essential


Shakman-Hurd, E. 2004. ‘The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol 10, no. 2

Recommended


Religion and the state

Essential

Recommended
John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," (various editions):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xILFxFkF3E
Loos, Tamara. 2008.“A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia: Class, Intimacy and Invisibility.” *Citizenship Studies* 12, 1.

Religion and empire

Essential

Recommended
Supervision I Essay topics:
Select from the readings and lectures above to prepare an essay, which will be emailed 24h in advance of every supervision.

1. Comparing two definitions of 'secular,' explain: their major differences, the assumptions that underlie these differences, and the kinds of analytic questions raised. What is at stake in these definitions of secular?

2. What is the relationship between secularism (and/or 'the secular') and the power of the state? How does this relationship vary across time and space?

3. In what ways has the category of 'religion' been shaped by empire?

Analytic approaches: Religion and law
Essential

Recommended
Analytic approaches: Religion and capitalism

**Essential**


**Recommended**


Analytic approaches: Religion and violence

**Essential**


  https://canopyforum.org/2020/07/16/from-breath-to-voices/

**Recommended**

- Cavanaugh, W. 2014. ‘Religious Violence as Modern Myth’, *Political theology*, 15: 6,
Discussion Seminar: What is Religion? What is Politics?

Selected Readings


Supervision 2 Essay topics:

Select from the readings and lectures above, drawing from MT readings if you wish, to prepare an essay, which will be emailed 24h in advance of every supervision.

1. Is the law of the state primarily an expression of majority interests, or an instrument for minority protection?

2. To what extent can newer religious movements be understood as a response to global capitalism?

3. How have scholars of religion defined violence in their work, and what is the role of religion in these definitions?
**Lent Term**
Students will choose **2 out of 4 modules**. Each module consists of 2 lectures and one supervision.

**Lent Lecture List**

*Lecture timings, readings and supervision essays will be confirmed shortly before the beginning of Lent term. Please contact each module leader if you have questions about readings, lectures, or supervisions.*

**Module 1: Religion and Politics in Europe**

Taking stock of the concepts and dynamics analysed earlier in the paper, this module focuses on the region of Europe and specifically onto European Union (EU) member states and EU institutions in order to examine how religion as a concept as well as faith communities are addressed through laws and policies by European governments and institutions. Such exercise will also require identifying key political, social and religious actors, and unpacking ideas at the heart of the European integration project. Awareness of the past and recent history of Europe will be necessary in order to understand the present. A case study about Muslim communities in Europe will examine the dilemmas that European democracies, religious minorities, and individual people of faith are facing while seeking to simultaneously maintain peace, security, and protect individual freedoms in societies that are increasingly multicultural and diverse.

**Lecture 1: How the relationships between EU member states and EU institutions determines which laws and policies exist and which actors have competence over religious matters**

**Essential**

**And one of these:**


**Recommended**


Silvestri, Sara (2009), “Islam and Religion in the EU Political System”, West European Politics, vol.32, no.6

Thomas, Scott (2005), The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Lecture 2: The position of Religious Minorities in Europe: a case study of Muslim communities

Essential


Recommended


Patterns of Prejudice (2014), special issue on Islamophobia, 48: 5.


Supervision Essays:
1. Should the governments of European democracies step up their involvement in the management of religion?
2. The EU has been a vocal actor in condemning religious discrimination and in promoting intercultural relations. How useful and effective do you think this effort has been?
3. To what extent can the public display of religious symbols threaten democratic freedoms in Europe?
4. What could be considered the key factors affecting the emancipation of Muslim communities in Europe?
Module 2: Religion and the Indian Political

This module will focus on the role of religion in the making of multiple nationalisms during the formative phase of modern South Asian political thought either side of Indian decolonisation and partition in 1947. Elevated to the foremost unit of social organisation by the British colonial state, religion took on a peculiar political meaning as representative government was steadily devolved to Indians over the course of the twentieth century. In short, religion served to name an almost static structural problem between majorities and minorities—both nationally, and in the various regions of this linguistically diverse country. Students will explore how a set of thinker-politicians, associated with a variety of political ideologies, confronted this problem in different, creative ways at this momentous juncture in South Asian history; the implications of which are more than evident in the present-day politics of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. While a range of communitarians sought to constitutionalise the division between Hindus and Muslims (and Sikhs and Dalits) for a peaceful independent future, others associated with secular Indian nationalism tried to offset or even destroy the political importance of religion. By covering these different ways of imagining the nation in late colonial India, students will also be introduced to a range of connected questions or themes: historical inheritance; territoriality; socialism; and active nonviolence.

Lecture 1: Religious Nationalism and its Problem of Structure

Essential Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Lecture 2: Secular Solutions and the Congress Movement**

**Essential Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Supervision Essay Questions**

1. To what extent were nationalist ideas of nonviolence drawn from religious sources?
2. ‘Socialism had the power to subvert the politics of religion in India.’ Respond with reference to THREE thinkers.
3. Why did some Muslim thinkers refuse Jinnah’s politics?
Module 3: Islam and political discourse in Africa

Lecture 1: Framing Islam in Africa
This introductory lecture will situate the movement and thinking through Islamic practice in the context of Africa in relation to wider exchanges and networks across the Red sea, Indian Ocean and the Sahara to argue that migration and exchange is central to the development of Islamic discourse in Africa.

Required readings


Recommended readings


Lecture 2: The politics of space in the movement of Islamic discourse

This lecture will attempt to pose the problematic of focusing on Islamic networks of exchange and discourse production on the coast and moving across the Ocean. In so doing we will take examples from the hinterland and how this politicized the space of discourse production in ways different and simultaneously contingent to the coast.

Required readings


Recommended readings


Umar, Muhammad Sani. 1993. “Changing Islamic Identity in Nigeria from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Sufism to anti-Sufism.” In *Muslim Identity and Social Change in sub-Saharan Africa*

Supervision essay questions:
- To what extent does movement and migration shape the discourse of Islam in Africa?
- In thinking of Islam as a discursive practice, provide a critique of “African Islam”.
- Historicize Islamic discourse in Africa by thinking through urbanization and discourses of secularization.
In the classical states of Buddhist Southern Asia, political authority was heavily Buddhised. Rulers and the ruled shared a political culture in which Buddhist idioms, symbols, and rituals played a central, legitimating role. Before the advent of European colonialism, rulers in the territories that we today refer to as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Sri Lanka typically styled themselves as *dhammaraja* (righteous Buddhist ruler). The relationship between political authority and religious authority, the latter resting with the *sangha* (Buddhist monkhood), has been characterized as one of antagonistic symbiosis.

In this module, we will explore the continuing significance of this historical legacy, as a frame for political interpretation and imagination, and repertoire of statecraft. We will do so with a focus on two of the challenges inherent in Weber’s conception of the state as a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” In light of the common, and also Weberian, understanding of Buddhism as a uniquely non-political and tolerant religion, the teachings of the Buddha would seem to be particularly ill suited for sanctioning (a) political order and (b) political violence. Rulers (and rebels) in modern South and Southeast Asia have nevertheless often sought to legitimize the centralization of power and exercise of violent coercion by appealing to the Buddhist tradition.

**Contextual Materials**

- *In Our Time*, “Ashoka the Great”: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0511tm1](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0511tm1).
- *Burma’s lost royals*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWFOr47_dao](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWFOr47_dao).
- *An unholy alliance: Monks and the military in Myanmar* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF1GZ0O94qk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF1GZ0O94qk).
- *Thailand’s tainted robes* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=382VkJLGpDAl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=382VkJLGpDAl).
- *Thailand: In the footsteps of the king* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdvgpoCPkc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdvgpoCPkc).

**Lecture 1: Righteous Rule? Buddhist Kingship in Theory and Practice**

A spectre is haunting Theravada Asia—the spectre of Buddhist kingship. Nineteenth and twentieth century efforts by imperialists, radicals, and republicans to exorcise this spectre have, arguably, failed. While imperial intervention and domestic revolutions have relegated the absolute monarchies of the *dhammarajas* to history, collective memories of them have continued to exercise a profound influence on modern politics. Indeed, following the perceived failures of military, democratic and communist regimes, elites and publics across South and Southeast Asia have sought to revive the ideals and symbols of righteous Buddhist rule.
The readings this week introduce the pre-modern religious and textual sources of political culture centered around utopian Buddhist visions of political authority (Collins, Goh), and explore their modern transformations and contemporary manifestations.

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


Lecture 2: Just Violence? Buddhism and Bloodshed

In the comparative study of religion and politics, Buddhism is often rather good to think with. It provides a productive contrast with the monotheistic Abrahamic religions. Buddhist teachings do not deny the existence of gods. On the contrary: in Buddhist cosmology we find...
a panoply of deities (alongside a tapestry of demi-gods, fairies, nagas, hungry ghosts, and hell beings). But Buddha’s teachings are thought to apply to gods and humans alike. Buddhism therefore lacks much of the powerful drive, inherent in monotheistic traditions, to destroy rival gods and convert their followers. The willingness to accept, at a certain level, religious pluralism is one reason Buddhism often has been portrayed as a “peaceful” religion. However, the differences should not be exaggerated. In the pre-colonial era, the cakkavatti ideal of universal Buddhist kingship served as an ideological spur to self-aggrandizing and if need be violent expansion of the polity. Furthermore, it is incumbent on the righteous ruler to preserve and defend the satsana (teachings). Claiming that Buddhism is “under threat” has therefore often served as a justification for violence against the perceived enemies of the “triple gem” (Buddha, dhamma, sangha) — including but not limited to European colonial powers. This discourse was mobilized during the Cold War and, in more recent years, it has reappeared in Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, especially, in relation to Muslim and other minorities who are perceived as threats to the “Buddhist” identity of state and society.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**Supervision Questions**

1. How have ideas regarding Buddhist kingship informed strategies of political legitimation in Southern Asia?

2. Should we pay attention to Buddhism when trying to understand violent conflict in Southern Asia?
Mock exam questions

16 questions: Answer three questions: a question from each of Section A and Section B, and a third question from either section.

Section A: Answer at least one question from this section

To what extent is the state's definition of 'religion' the only definition that matters?

How, and to what extent, is global capitalism a threat to religious institutions?

To what extent, and under what circumstances, does the law serve the interests of the minority?

How does the concept of religious freedom function in the international arena, and to whose benefit?

What is the role of violence in the relationship between religion and the state?

Why, and to what extent, does secularism vary between states?

To what extent have imperial definitions of religion persisted into the modern nation state?

Is religion a threat to democracy, or essential to its practice?

Section B: Answer at least one question from this section

To what extent can religion facilitate or hinder the project of European integration?

What factors determine the ways in which European countries and institutions engage with religious issues and faith communities?

To what extent was the religious question a structural problem in colonial India? Answer with reference to THREE thinkers.

Is the title ‘philosopher of Pakistan’ more suitable for Ambedkar, Iqbal, or Jinnah?

’Sovereignty was more important than secularism to Congress.’ Discuss.

How has Islam been shaped by the separation of the political sphere from figures of “authority” in Africa?

Discuss and critique the centrality of the coast in evaluating the presence and influence of Islam in Africa.
To what extent has the public sphere in post colonial Africa shaped the practice of Islam in relation to the state? How has the collective memory of dhammarajas been cultivated in contemporary politics in Southern Asia?

What does it mean to say that some warfare is "Buddhist"?