

COURSE SYLLABUS

**Challenge to the Secular State:  
Religion and Politics in Europe and America**

**Instructor:** Christian Joppke  
Department: Nationalism Studies  
Central European University  
Semester/term, year  
Course level (MA, PhD)  
# Credits (# ECTS Credits)  
Pre-requisites (if applicable)  
Course e-learning site:  
Office hours: days, location

**Course Description:**

Long deemed to be “privatized” or marginalized in a context of “secularization”, religion has returned to the center of politics and societal macro-conflict, if it ever was out. With a comparative focus on Christianity and Islam in Western Europe and North America, this course looks at religion as foundational, society- and civilization-making force *and* as contemporary political actor seeking to influence law and public policy. Among the issues to be discussed in this course is the classic comparative-historical sociology of religion by Max Weber; the linkage between “religion” and “politics” as concepts and realities; the meanings and empirical varieties of “secularism” and “secularization”; the relationship between religion, democracy, nationalism; and a comparison of the Christian Right in the United States and of Islam in Europe as contemporary challenges to the secular state.

This course follows closely the instructor’s recent book, *The Secular State Under Siege: Religion and Politics in Europe and America* (Cambridge: Polity 2015). Apart from this book, students will read some of the best recent (and some classic) writings in the sociology and politics of religion, which helped the instructor to navigate the field.

**Note:** The focus of this class is mostly on developments in Western Europe (historically: Latin Christianity) and the United States. This simply reflects the instructor’s competence (or lesser knowledge about other regions of the world). However, students are actively encouraged to draw comparisons with and inputs from their own regions of interest and competence, even in class! The insight (hopefully) gained about “Western” developments may thus help to sharpen the sense for variations and similarities with “Eastern” (or “Southern” etc.) developments.

**Learning Outcomes**

## Syllabus Template

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the different religion and politics constellations in Europe and America
- ✓ Critically discuss competing theories in the sociology and comparative politics of religion
- ✓ Understand the historical origins yet universal significance of secularism as prerequisite of liberal democracy
- ✓ Compare the different impacts of Islam and Christianity on conflict and political structure in Western societies
- ✓ The course uses materials and approaches to the topic from several disciplines, including law, history, political science, sociology, and political theory, which should strengthen students` sense and capacities for arguing across disciplines in a focused and meaningful way.
- ✓ The research paper due at the end of the course will enhance students` ability to conduct and implement independent research.

## Course Requirements

**Seminar style:** The course centers on in-depth reading and discussion of each session`s assigned literature. Ideally, each session should start with one or two students presenting in about 15-20 minutes the assigned reading(s) of the day, plus preparing ca. 5 questions that will allow to start and structure the discussion. Power-point presentations or handouts are encouraged. Regular attendance and active student participation is expected, which requires that all readings should be done beforehand.

**Research paper:** a paper is expected at the end of the semester (ca.12 pages, double-spaced, bibliography included). You have three options. The first is to further explore one of the topics of this class--such paper should at least include two further substantive sources in a non-tokenist way. A second option is to chose a topic that is not addressed in this class yet that is pertinent to the field of religion and politics (broadly understood). Thirdly, you may apply a topic covered in this class (like secularization or religion and democracy/nationalism to a country or region not explicitly covered in this class (of which there are plenty, including eastern and central Europe).

**Grading:** 40 percent class participation; 60 percent research paper.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Session 1: Introduction. Religion in Social and Political Theory

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, ch.1

### Session 2: Classical Sociology of Religion: Max Weber

Readings: Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions", in: *From Max Weber*, ed. H.Gerth and C.W.Mills, Oxford University Press 1956.

## Syllabus Template

Recommended: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 22-31.

### **Session 3: Religion and Politics: Historical and Phenomenological**

Readings: Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. New York: Norton 2011, chapter 3; R.Brubaker, "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference", *Nations and Nationalism* 19(1), 1-20.

Recommended: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 36-41.

### **Session 4: Secularization (I): The Concept.**

Readings: José Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994, ch.1.

Recommended: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 42-46.

### **Session 5: Secularization (II): The (Latin) Christian Origins of Secularization.**

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, ch.2 (47-70); Silvio Ferrari, "The Christian Roots of the Secular State" (2012, typescript).

### **Session 6: Secularization (III): Varieties of Secularization: America, Europe, India**

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 72-85; James Q. Whitman, "Separating Church and State: The Atlantic Divide", *Historical Reflections* 34(3), 86-104; Rajeev Bhargava, "States, Religious Diversity, and the Crisis of Secularism", *Hedgehow Review*, fall 2010, 8-22.

### **Session 7: Religion and Nationalism**

Readings: R.Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches", *Nations and Nationalism* 18(1), 2-20; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, ch.8; C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, 70-72.

### **Session 8: Challenge to the Secular State (1): The Christian Right in the United States.**

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, ch.3.

### **Session 9: Challenge to the Secular State (2): Islam in Europe**

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, ch.4.

### **Session 10: Islam and Christianity in the Secular State: Struggles over Veils and Crucifixes**

Readings: C.Joppke, *The Secular State Under Siege*, conclusion.