Religion and State in Israel and the Middle East

Theoretical, empirical and comparative aspects

Outline - The State of Israel represents a unique model of the state-religion relationship. On the one hand, since its independence Israel has challenged the dominant idea of separation between religion and state and instead granted the Jewish religion (alongside other minority religions) significant multidimensional recognition in the public and political spheres. On the other hand, the Israeli regime contains some crucial secular elements, including secular public education system, legal code and judiciary system. This course will explore different aspects of the Israeli model of religion and the state, its foundations, theoretical implications and applicability to other societies and religions. The first section will introduce basic theoretical concepts in the study of religion and the state. The second, most substantive section, will discuss the historical development and contemporary characteristics of the state-religion regime in Israel. The third section will be comparative in nature and examine recent political transitions in the Middle East, the role of religion in these transitions, and the ability of the Israeli case to serve as a role model for the state-religion relationships in emerging Arab regimes.

Course Assignments (elaborate details and Q&A about the assignments will be provided in class).

1. Attendance and active participation in class discussions – 20/100
   (Students are required to read all the reading materials, come prepared to class and take part in class discussions)

2. Two weekly reviews of reading assignments (up to 1000 words each) – 30/100 points (15 points each). Each review should contain the following three components:
   (1) Summary of the articles’ main argument and supporting evidence – 40%
   (2) Critique of the articles (what is missing in the main argument) – 40%
   (3) Issues for future inquiry – 20%

   At least one review shall be submitted and graded before November 1st.

3. One in-class presentation of reading assignments (15-20 minutes) – 25/100
   This is basically an introduction to the weekly theme, based on the review of the reading assignment. Depending on number of registered students, I may I assign two students to present their reviews in the same week.
4. **Take home final exam** – Exam form will be distributed at the last week of November and should be submitted before the last day of class – 25/100
   The final take home exam will contain two parts:
   (1) Two out of three short questions (25% each), about a key reading (or a comparison of up to three readings), or summary of a subject covered in one of the lectures such as key concepts, case study etc. (up to 500 words each).
   (2) One out of two essay questions (50%). The essay would require integration of knowledge from reading assignments and lectures and would normally cover a general trend, comparison among cases, etc. (up to 1200 words).

5. **Israel Knowledge Exam** – You will answer a brief multiple answer exam during the first and last sessions, to assess your knowledge of Israel before and after the course. This assignment is obligatory but is not weighted in the course grade.

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**Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments**

**Section 1: Religion and the state – theoretical concepts**

**Session 1 - Religion, modernization, secularization**


**Session 2 – Religion and nationalism in the Western world**

Session 3 - Religion and nationalism in non-western regimes


Session 4 – Religion and democracy


Section 5 – Religion, fundamentalism and violence


Section 2 – Religion in the State of Israel

Session 6 – The role of religion in the Zionist movement and in the pre-independence era


Session 7 – Institutionalization of religion in post-independence Israel


**Session 8 – Ultra-Orthodox-Haredim – isolation, integration and impact**


**Session 9 – Religious Zionism – from pragmatic partnership to Messianic militancy**


• Clip: Minister Naphtali Bennett on CNN 28 December 2016
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMpKdK6T5v8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMpKdK6T5v8)

**Session 10 – Religion in Israeli politics – contemporary trends**


**Section 3 – Religion in the Middle East – lessons from Israel**

**Session 11 – Religion and State in a changing Middle East**


**Session 12 – The role of religion in post Arab-Spring emergent regimes**

