

POLS 4690: Religion and American Politics
University of Georgia
Fall 2025

Instructor:

Dr. Brittany Bramlett¹
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Office meeting times:

Before/after class
Or by appointment

Class meets:

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8am to 9:15am, Baldwin Hall, 0101D

Course description

The religious landscape has changed over the nation's history and so has religion's role in American politics. We'll explore the nation's religious diversity and how it relates to politics, uniting and dividing us. Ultimately, we will work towards an understanding of how America can be extremely devout, religiously diverse, and for the most part, tolerant of religious differences.

Course objectives

Students will:

- Study the diversity of religious life in American politics
- Understand the participatory and electoral consequences of religious activity in American politics
- Understand the historical role of religion in American politics
- Learn the course material by working independently and with a group
- Improve critical thinking and communication skills by considering various political perspectives and communicating those views effectively

Course texts

You are required to gain access to the books listed below. They are available at the campus bookstore.

- *American Grace* (2010), Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell.
- *From Pews to Polling Places* (2007), Edited by J. Matthew Wilson.
- Other assigned readings will be made available to you via E-Learning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>)

Course structure

¹ Instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus as needed.

I'm assuming some level of interest in the subject matter because you signed up for this course. Readings will be provocative, and I look forward to your participation in class discussions. To do this, you should be engaging with the readings. If you don't read, discussion will be tiresome, and we all know what that means for a morning class. In sum, read!

Assignments and grading

Attendance & participation (20%)

Attend class & participate in discussions and activities.

Exams (20%each, 40% total)

There will be two exams. Anything from the assigned readings and discussed during class is considered fair game to show up on the exam.

Class discussion kickoff (20%)

You will sign up with your discussion group (established during the second week of classes) for a slot to kick off class discussion for the day. This involves leading class discussion for the first 20 minutes of class. Your tasks include 1) Find a recent news article highlighting the role of religion in American politics, 2) Inform the class about the particular news item, why you think it's important and explain consequences for American politics, 3) Establish a connection between the article's content and the material to be discussed in class that day, and 4) Finally, generate 2 to 3 discussion questions based on the news item for the class.

Final written reflection (20%)

Students will complete a final writing assignment where they will reflect on the relationship between American politics and religion. Students will cite sources from inside and outside of the class. Additional details will be provided via eLC.

Administrative Items

ELearning

You will submit writing assignments and locate additional reading assignments for our class via the ELearning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>). You should sign into the ELearning Commons using your UGA MyId and password. If you are registered for the class, the course link should show up on your ELearning Commons homepage. I may post additional documents useful for your class, so you will want to check in throughout the semester.

Missed deadlines

If you have a conflict with a due date or will miss class repeatedly, please come talk to me about it as soon as you know about it. This way we can work something out and your grade may not suffer. If you have an emergency conflict (i.e. personal, family or medical emergencies), you should e-mail me within the week of the missed due date to discuss the timely completion of

the assignment. Documentation is required for make-up exams. If you miss a deadline for a non-emergency, most assignments can still be completed and will be accepted for up to a week—but they will be penalized a letter grade for every additional day late.

Classroom safety

If the fire alarm sounds, we will exit the building and reassemble across the street (Jackson) to make sure everyone exited the building. If there is a tornado warning, we will move downstairs to shelter and account for everyone. If you have concerns about other emergencies or if you have special circumstances that I need to know about in case of an emergency, please speak to me after class. If you have questions about evacuation locations or shelter locations, contact OEP (Office of Emergency Preparedness).

Disability resource center

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional information can be found here: <http://drc.uga.edu/>

UGA Culture of Honesty policy

The policy is in place to encourage academic honesty among students, faculty and other members of the university community. You and I are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating and much more. It's in your best interest to understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University.

Please carefully review the policy in its entirety here: <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy>

Tentative Course Outline

Week 1.

Thursday, August 14

- Review course syllabus

Week 2.

Tuesday, August 19

- "How Americans Feel about Religious Groups"

[\(http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/\)](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/)

- "If the U.S. had 100 people: Charting Americans' religious affiliations"
http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/14/if-the-u-s-had-100-people-charting-americans-religious-affiliations/?utm_content=buffer0209a&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Thursday, August 21

- *American Grace* 1
- Discussion group intro

Week 3.

Tuesday, August 26

- *American Grace* 2

Thursday, August 28

- "Measurement error is sin"
[\(https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/03/22/measurement-error-is-sin/\)](https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/03/22/measurement-error-is-sin/)
- "When You Ask People to Describe their Religion, Bad Things Happen"
https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/10/11/when-you-ask-people-to-describe-their-religion-bad-things-happen/amp/?_twitter_impression=true
- "Do we have any idea who evangelicals are?"
[\(https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/12/14/do-we-have-any-idea-who-evangelicals-are/\)](https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/12/14/do-we-have-any-idea-who-evangelicals-are/)
- Class discussion kick-off 1

Week 4.

Tuesday, September 2

- Selections from *The Oxford handbook of church and state in the United States* edited by Derek Davis
- *American Grace* 5

Thursday, September 4

- *American Grace* 6
- Class discussion kick-off 2

Week 5.

Tuesday, September 9

- *American Grace* 3
- *American Grace* 4

Thursday, September 11

- Selections from *Onward Christian Soldiers*
- Class discussion kick-off 3

Week 6.

Tuesday, September 16

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 3
- *With God on Our Side* film

Thursday, September 18

- *With God on Our Side* film
- Class discussion kick-off 4

Week 7.

Tuesday, September 23

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 10
- "'Nones' on the Rise"
(<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>)

Thursday, September 25

- Take exam 1 via eLC

Week 8.

Tuesday, September 30 – digital assignment

Thursday, October 2

- *American Grace* 10 & 11

Week 9.

Tuesday, October 7

- "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs"
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html>)
- *American Grace* 12
- Class discussion kick-off 5

Thursday, October 9

- *American Grace* 7
- *American Grace* 8

Week 10.

Tuesday, October 14

- *American Grace* 9
- *From Pews to Polling Places* 6
- Class discussion kick-off 6

Thursday, October 16

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 4
- Why are Catholics overrepresented in Congress?
(<https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/03/21/why-are-catholics-overrepresented-in-congress/>)

Week 11.

Tuesday, October 21

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 9
- "Muslims are the least popular religious group in the U.S. They're disliked even more than atheists" (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/muslims-are-the-least-popular-religious-group-in-the-u-s-theyre-disliked-even-more-than-atheists/?utm_term=.8a50150c59e8)
- "100 years ago, American talked about Catholics the way they talk about Muslims today" (<https://www.vox.com/2017/1/18/14312104/islamophobia-catholics>)

- Class discussion kick-off 7

Thursday, October 23

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 8

Week 12.

Tuesday, October 28

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 5

Thursday, October 30

- *From Pews to Polling Places* 7

Week 13.

Tuesday, November 4

- "How religious groups voted in the midterm elections" (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/07/how-religious-groups-voted-in-the-midterm-elections/>)
- "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis" (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>)
- "How the Faithful Voted: 2014 Preliminary Analysis" (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/05/how-the-faithful-voted-2014-preliminary-analysis/#>)
- Class discussion kick-off 8

Thursday, November 6

- "Civil Religion in America" by Robert N. Bellah (<https://www.jstor-org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/stable/pdf/20028013.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A21c90a9b5464ed8f036e5c36615c9207>)
- Class discussion kick-off 9

Week 14.

Tuesday, November 11

- Speeches by John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Mitt Romney

Thursday, November 13

- *American Grace* 13
- Class discussion kick-off 10

Week 15.

Tuesday, November 18

- *American Grace* 14 & 15

Thursday, November 20

- Take exam 2 via eLC

Week 16.

Tuesday, November 25

- Writing workshop
- Final writing assignment due

Thursday, November 27 – THANKSGIVING – no class

List of Due Dates

Exam 1 – Thursday, September 25

Exam 2 – Thursday, November 20

Final writing assignment – Tuesday, November 25