Economics 1450r
Religion and Political Economy
Syllabus

Fall 2019
Littauer M-15
Wednesdays 3-5:45 p.m.

Dr. Rachel M. McCleary
Prof. Robert J. Barro
Teaching Assistant: Mr. Brian Wheaton

Sept 5: Overview and methodological approaches to the study of religion & social science; Cross-country survey data on religiosity.

Readings:


Data Sources:

Todd M. Johnson and Brian Grim, eds. World Religion Data Base available through Harvard.


September 12: What Determines Religiosity?
The two-way causation: “Why insist that causation can work in only one direction? Is it not a little artificial to suggest that capitalist enterprise had to wait, as Weber appears to imply, till religious changes had produced a capitalist spirit? Would it not be equally plausible, and equally one-sided, to argue that the religious changes were themselves merely the result of economic movements?” R. H. Tawney, Foreword to the 1930 edition of Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.)

Religiosity has a two-way interaction with political economy. With religion viewed as the dependent variable, a central question is how economic development and political institutions affect religious participation and beliefs. As countries become more urban, educational levels increase, life expectancy is extended, and income levels rise, all these factors influence religiosity. In this class session, we examine the first direction of causation—the effects of economic growth on religiosity.

Readings:

Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations (handout on line).


Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York: Appleton and Company, 1912), 432, 488; Chapter 23 on religion.


September 19, 26: Secularization Theories, Effects of Shocks on Religiosity

Many secularization theorists argue that the demand for religion is decreasing. Other analysts disagree. The term “secularization” has different meanings and the process of secularization occurs in different ways.

Readings:

September 19:


Bruce, Steve, “Christianity in Britain, R.I.P.” *Sociology of Religion* 62, 2 (Summer 2001), 191-203.


September 26:

Shocks, such as natural disasters and financial crises, influence religiosity.


First paper due September 26th.
October 3: Religion and Economic Growth
In this class, we examine the other direction of causation: The effects of religion on economic, social, and political behavior. With religion as the independent variable, a key issue is how religiousness affects individual traits such as diligence, honesty, thrift, integrity, thereby influencing productivity and economic performance. Another channel involves religion’s effects on literacy and education more broadly.

Readings:


October 10: Islam and Economic Growth
The comparatively high levels of religious beliefs in Muslim countries should have generated high economic growth. In this class, we discuss the adverse effects on economic growth in Muslim countries from government regulation of religion and religious practices.

Readings:


**October 17, 24: Religion and Human Capital Accumulation**

Religions, through beliefs and belonging, influence the accumulation of human capital and the economic development of societies. In what ways do religions foster or detract from the accumulation of human capital?

**Readings:**


Boppart, Timo, Josef Falkinger, and Volker Grossmann. “Protestantism and Education: Reading (the Bible) and Other Skills.” *Economic Inquiry* 52, 2 (April 2014), 874-895.


October 24: Church and State, State Religion, Protestant Reformation

Readings:

Smith, Adam. The Wealth of Nations. (Online handout).


October 31: State Regulation of Religion and Its Consequences
According to Adam Smith, a state religion amounts to a government-sponsored monopoly of the religion market. A government does this through regulations and subsidies.

Readings:


Second paper due October 31st.
**November 7: The Club Model**

Mutual aid organizations face the intrinsic problem of all collectives: How to ensure that members will give according to their ability and take according to need, rather than the reverse. Successful radical religious groups have found a solution: they select members according to their willingness to make an up-front sacrifice to signal commitment, and then use a set of prohibitions and social norms to enforce compliance. Iannaccone (1992) pointed out that this functional view of sacrifices, stigmas, and prohibitions allowed an explanation of much of what was puzzling in the economic and social behavior of Christian sects. The club model has been extended to radical Jewish sects and radical Islamists, developing a general theoretical and empirical understanding of the internal economies of radical religious organizations.

**Readings:**


**November 14: Tolerance, Religious Competition, and Religious Diffusion**

Religions compete with each other for adherents as well as geographic dominance. Newer entries into a religion market have the effect of forcing existing religions to become more effective in providing their religious goods. Religious competition creates unlikely alliances as well as prejudices and harmful practices.

**Readings:**

Pfaff, Steven. “The True Citizens of God: The Cult of Saints, the Catholic Social Order,
and the Urban Reformation in Germany.” *Theory and Society* 42, 2 (March 2013), 189-218.


**November 21: Religion and Social Participation**

**Readings:**


**November 28, December 5: Presentations of final papers.**

Final papers due at the end of reading period.

**Requirements**
Class participation: 20%
First two papers: 40% (8 to 10 pages each)
Final paper and presentations: 40% (around 15 pages).

The papers will be written on topics to be discussed in class. The papers are to be analytical in nature, rather than descriptive or historical. The purpose of the papers is to think through your ideas on the readings and class discussions and to present reasoned arguments in favor, against, or undecided. The format of the papers is standard social science style and citation method (*University of Chicago Manual of Style*).

**Contact Information and Office Hours**

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