

# THE INTERSECTION OF POLITICS AND RELIGION IN MODERN SOCIETY

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## Abstract:

*The intersection of politics and religion in modern society is a complex and multifaceted issue that continues to shape the political, social, and cultural landscapes of nations worldwide. Throughout history, religion has played a crucial role in influencing political ideologies, policies, and governance structures. In modern times, the relationship between politics and religion remains contentious, with debates surrounding the appropriate role of religion in public life and government affairs. In secular democracies, such as the United States and India, there is an ongoing tension between maintaining religious freedom and upholding the principle of separation between religion and the state. In these societies, political leaders often navigate the delicate balance of addressing religious issues while ensuring that governance remains inclusive of diverse belief systems. The influence of religious groups on policy-making, especially on contentious issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious freedom, remains significant, highlighting the persistent intersection of religion and politics.*

*In contrast, in theocratic systems such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, religion and politics are deeply intertwined, with religious leaders holding significant political power. In such societies, the state's political decisions are often informed by religious doctrine, and the governance of the country is closely aligned with religious values and laws. This intersection has also given rise to religious nationalism, where political movements are driven by the desire to establish a state based on a particular religion, often at the expense of minority groups. The growing prominence of religious fundamentalism, both in Western and non-Western societies, has further complicated this relationship, raising questions about the compatibility of democracy, human rights, and religious beliefs in a pluralistic world. Ultimately, the intersection of politics and religion in modern society remains a dynamic and evolving issue, influencing public discourse, policy-making, and the lives of individuals across the globe.*

**Keywords:** Intersection, Politics, Religion, Modern Society.

## INTRODUCTION:

**Politics** and **religion** are two fundamental aspects of human society that significantly influence individual lives, social structures, and global affairs. Politics refers to the process by which decisions are made within a society, often involving the governance, laws, policies, and leadership of a state or nation. It determines how resources are distributed, how conflicts are resolved, and how power is exercised. Political ideologies can vary widely, from democracy to authoritarianism, and often involve debates over the roles of government, individual rights, and the common good. **Religion**, on the other hand, encompasses a system of beliefs, practices, and values often centered around the worship of a higher power or deity. It provides

individuals with spiritual guidance, ethical standards, and a sense of community. Religions also shape cultural identities, moral values, and rituals, and have historically played a crucial role in shaping societal norms and laws.

When these two domains intersect, **politics and religion** can become closely intertwined, influencing each other in various ways. Religious beliefs may inform political ideologies and policies, as seen in laws governing moral issues like abortion, marriage, and education. Conversely, political power can influence religious practices and institutions, with governments sometimes seeking to regulate or control religious activities. In some countries, the state may endorse a particular religion, while in others, the principle of **secularism** seeks to maintain a separation between politics and religion to ensure fairness and equality for all belief systems. The relationship between politics and religion remains complex, often generating both cooperation and conflict.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

This study explores the Intersection of Politics and Religion in Modern Society.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, journals, research papers, websites and other sources.

### **THE INTERSECTION OF POLITICS AND RELIGION IN MODERN SOCIETY**

The intersection of politics and religion in modern society has been a subject of significant debate and analysis throughout history. The relationship between the two is multifaceted and complex, influencing the policies, social norms, and cultural landscapes of societies across the globe. This intersection often sparks controversies, with various arguments surrounding the extent to which religion should play a role in public life and how political leaders navigate the delicate balance between religious beliefs and governance. To understand this intersection fully, it is essential to explore the historical foundations, contemporary manifestations, and the challenges and consequences that arise when politics and religion intertwine.

Historically, politics and religion were inseparable for much of human civilization. In ancient societies, rulers were often seen as divine figures or were closely linked to religious institutions. The divine right of kings, for example, posited that monarchs were appointed by God to rule over their people. In many instances, political legitimacy was derived from religious authority, and religious institutions had significant influence over political decisions. The Catholic Church, for example, was a powerful political entity in medieval Europe, with the Pope wielding considerable authority not only over the spiritual lives of people but also over political leaders. The intertwining of religion and politics also manifested in various empires and dynasties throughout history, where religious ideologies often played a central role in the governance of state affairs.

The Enlightenment era marked a significant shift in the relationship between politics and religion. Philosophers such as John Locke, Voltaire, and Montesquieu argued for the separation of church and state, emphasizing the importance of individual freedoms and the need to protect citizens from the coercive power of religious institutions. The ideas of secularism and religious tolerance emerged during this period, and many Western democracies adopted the principle of separating religious influence from government. The American Revolution and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, for example, established a framework that sought to limit the power of religion in political affairs. The First Amendment to the Constitution explicitly prohibits the establishment of a national religion and guarantees the free exercise of religion, marking an important milestone in the separation of politics and religion.

However, despite the efforts to create a secular political framework, the relationship between politics and religion has remained a contentious issue in modern society. In many countries, religious beliefs continue to shape political ideologies, influence policy decisions, and guide the actions of political leaders. In the United States, for instance, the Christian faith has long been intertwined with political rhetoric, with politicians often invoking religious language and symbols to appeal to voters. The Religious Right, a political movement in the U.S. that emerged in the 1970s, sought to align conservative Christian values with conservative political policies, advocating for issues such as opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, and the promotion of traditional family values. This movement has had a profound impact on American politics, influencing the policies of both major political parties.

Similarly, in many parts of the world, religion plays a central role in shaping political ideologies and public policies. In countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, political systems are deeply rooted in religious principles, and religious leaders hold significant political power. In these nations, the state and religion are not separate entities but rather work in tandem to govern society. Theocratic systems, where religious leaders have both spiritual and political authority, have proven to be a contentious issue in modern times, particularly in the context of human rights and freedoms. The role of religious law in these societies often raises concerns about the rights of women, minority religious groups, and non-believers, as these systems tend to enforce strict interpretations of religious doctrine.

In contrast to the theocratic systems, in many liberal democracies, religion remains an influential but separate force in politics. In these societies, religious groups may not hold formal political power, but their influence on public opinion, moral values, and social norms is significant. The debate over issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia often pits religious groups against secular or progressive movements, with religious leaders and organizations advocating for policies based on their faith-based beliefs. These debates illustrate the continuing relevance of religion in shaping public policy, even in societies that pride themselves on secular governance.

One of the key challenges in modern society is the increasing diversity of religious beliefs and practices. As globalization and migration have brought people from different religious traditions into closer contact, political leaders must navigate the complexities of representing diverse religious communities while maintaining a secular and inclusive political framework. In countries with significant immigrant populations,

such as the United States and much of Western Europe, the question of how to accommodate religious practices and beliefs within the public sphere has become a significant political issue. Issues such as the wearing of religious symbols in schools, the construction of religious buildings, and the recognition of religious holidays have sparked debates about the place of religion in public life.

In addition to the challenges posed by religious diversity, the rise of secularism and the decline of religious affiliation in many parts of the world have further complicated the relationship between politics and religion. As more people identify as secular or non-religious, political leaders must contend with the tension between accommodating religious beliefs and ensuring that their policies reflect the values and needs of a broader, more diverse electorate. In many cases, secularism has become a rallying cry for those who seek to keep religion out of the public sphere, arguing that political decisions should be based on reason and evidence rather than religious doctrine.

At the same time, the resurgence of religious fundamentalism in various parts of the world has also had a profound impact on the intersection of politics and religion. Religious fundamentalist movements, whether they are Islamic, Christian, or Hindu, often advocate for a return to traditional religious values and the implementation of religious law in political systems. These movements have gained significant political traction in some countries, leading to the rise of political parties and leaders who openly endorse religious ideologies and policies. The influence of religious fundamentalism on politics has sparked debates about the compatibility of democracy with religious conservatism, particularly in countries where religious minorities may face discrimination or persecution.

One of the most prominent examples of religious fundamentalism influencing politics in recent years has been the rise of Islamist political movements in the Middle East and North Africa. In countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey, Islamist parties have gained political power by appealing to voters with religiously based platforms. The success of these parties has sparked debates about the role of religion in government and the challenges of reconciling democracy with religious values. In some cases, the ascension of religiously motivated political movements has led to political instability, as secular and religious factions clash over issues such as the role of women in society, freedom of expression, and the separation of religion and politics.

In the West, the intersection of politics and religion has been shaped by the increasing influence of evangelical Christianity and other conservative religious movements. In the United States, for example, the rise of the Religious Right in the late 20th century has had a profound impact on the political landscape. Evangelical Christians, who make up a significant portion of the American electorate, have become a powerful political force, advocating for policies that reflect their religious beliefs. These include opposition to abortion, the promotion of traditional family values, and the rejection of same-sex marriage. The influence of religious conservatives in the U.S. has led to a heightened polarization in American politics, as the divide between religious and secular voters has grown more pronounced.

The intersection of politics and religion is not confined to the actions of political leaders or religious groups. It also manifests in the everyday lives of citizens, particularly in the way that religious beliefs shape political attitudes and behavior. For many individuals, religion provides a moral framework that influences their views on a range of political issues. Religious teachings on poverty, social justice, and the environment, for example, have shaped the political platforms of various parties and movements around the world. Religious institutions also play an important role in fostering civic engagement and political activism, with churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples often serving as sites of political organizing and community outreach.

### **Case Study 1: The Rise of Hindu Nationalism (Hindutva) and Its Political Implications**

Hindu nationalism, commonly referred to as Hindutva, has become a defining force in Indian politics, particularly under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Hindutva is a political ideology that seeks to define India as a Hindu nation and emphasizes the promotion of Hindu culture, values, and practices within the public sphere. This ideology has often been in tension with India's secular constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion and aims to treat all religions equally.

The roots of Hindutva can be traced back to the early 20th century, with the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist organization founded by K.B. Hedgewar in 1925. The RSS and its affiliates, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar, have been central in promoting Hindu nationalism, and they advocate for the idea that India should be a state where Hinduism is the dominant cultural force. Over time, the RSS's influence extended to the BJP, which emerged as the political arm of the Sangh Parivar.

The 1992 Babri Masjid demolition and the subsequent communal riots were pivotal events that brought Hindutva politics to the forefront. The demolition of the mosque, carried out by Hindu extremists claiming it stood at the birthplace of the Hindu deity Lord Ram, intensified religious polarization between Hindus and Muslims in India. This event galvanized Hindu nationalist movements and laid the foundation for the BJP's rise as a political party. In the 1990s, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, the BJP successfully capitalized on the demand for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, appealing to Hindu sentiments and framing the issue as a matter of restoring the Hindu pride and identity. This issue, along with other communal concerns, led to the BJP's electoral success in the 1990s, culminating in its historic win in 2014, when Narendra Modi became Prime Minister.

Modi, backed by the RSS, represents the fusion of political power with the rhetoric of Hindutva. His government has faced accusations of promoting religious intolerance, particularly towards India's Muslim minority. The controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2017, which provides a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from neighboring countries, was seen as discriminatory by many critics, as it explicitly excluded Muslims from the provisions of the act. This sparked widespread protests, with critics arguing that it violated the secular principles of India's constitution.

Hindu nationalism has also found expression in social policies and cultural interventions. Under Modi's government, there has been a visible push to integrate Hindu symbols, festivals, and practices into the state's official activities. The state's endorsement of Hindu religious symbols in public life, such as the installation of statues of Hindu deities, the promotion of yoga, and the increasing use of Sanskrit and Hindu religious chants in public spaces, has reinforced the idea of India as a Hindu nation. Critics argue that this undermines India's pluralistic identity and marginalizes religious minorities.

The political and social consequences of Hindutva have been profound. On one hand, it has energized a large segment of the Hindu population that feels politically marginalized. On the other hand, it has created significant social division and tension, especially between Hindus and Muslims. This polarization is visible in rising instances of religious violence and the increasing communal rhetoric in political discourse. The shift from secular politics to a politics of religious identity has led to concerns about the future of India's secular democracy, especially regarding the treatment of religious minorities like Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs.

## CONCLUSION:

The intersection of politics and religion in modern society is an enduring and complex issue that shapes both the governance of nations and the lives of individuals. While secularism in democratic nations aims to separate religion from state affairs, the influence of religious beliefs on political ideologies and policies remains profound. In countries like the United States and India, political leaders must navigate the delicate balance between religious freedom and ensuring that governance is inclusive of diverse belief systems. Conversely, in theocratic systems, religion and politics are inseparable, with religious institutions directly influencing state governance. This often leads to tensions over issues such as human rights, gender equality, and the treatment of minority groups, as political decisions are based on religious doctrines. Furthermore, the rise of religious nationalism and fundamentalism across the globe adds complexity to the relationship between religion and politics, creating challenges for maintaining pluralism, democracy, and individual freedoms. As societies continue to evolve and become more interconnected, political leaders must confront the challenge of respecting religious beliefs while promoting inclusive and secular governance.

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