

Race, Religion & Ethnicity

International Studies Department
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and by appointment

Course Description:

In the last two decades or so ethnicity has become a political flashpoint in ever more regions of the world. The developmental paths of many societies are being affected domestically as well as globally: the redefinition of national, ethnic, and religious identities on both sides of the Iron Curtain after the collapse of communism, ethnic nationalism in Eastern Europe, the reaffirmation of indigenous identities in Latin America and the rise of religious and ethnic mass politics in South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

What are the causes of such consciousness of group membership? Are these causes ancient, or is the present manipulating the past?

The first part of the course begins by defining ethnicity as broadly incorporating race, religion and examines the origins and development of ethnic categories through primordial, constructivist and instrumentalist explanations. The second segment of the course explores the conditions under which ethnicity and religious nationalism become politically salient, leading to violent conflicts. Reference will be made to case studies (the rise of violent ethnic and religious conflicts in Kashmir, Ireland, Bosnia, Israel-Palestine and Rwanda) to illustrate a global pattern. The third section explores solutions ranging from protection of minority rights to power sharing and self-determination.

Students will be exposed to practical experiments that are being implemented to mitigate ethnic and religious conflicts and at the same time recognizing the limits and strengths of each.