

SOS2700 – Religion in contemporary societies, fundamentalism, radicalization and religious violence

Course content

This course provides a theoretical and empirical introduction to religion as a sociological phenomenon, religion in contemporary society, fundamentalism, religious radicalization, and violence. We will discuss theoretical perspectives which will be combined with current debates and research on religion.

The course provides knowledge and insight into different concepts of religion and debates on religious change in contemporary society. Are Western societies post-secular? Or are they increasingly secular? We will discuss these topics by relating sociological theories to empirical studies of the role of religion in Norwegian and Nordic public spheres.

Another aspect of religious change in modern times is religious radicalization and religious violence. What is the difference between Muslim activism and radicalization? Which aspects of all world religions can be used to legitimize violence? In order to understand fundamentalism, religious radicalization and violence, we will discuss different perspectives that have been used in empirical studies: social psychology, cultural analysis, and social movements.

This course will provide useful knowledge and skills for people who work in education, research, the media, public administration, the health and social services, business, politics, and international affairs.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge

The course will provide:

- An overview of major trends in religious change in contemporary societies
- Key sociological concepts and theories used in the study of religion
- Analytical perspectives in explanations of Muslim activism, fundamentalism, religious radicalization and violence

Skills

You will develop the skills to:

- Use relevant concepts, theories and empirical knowledge in analyses of religion
- Provide a critical analysis of different theories in the sociology of religion
- Provide a critical analysis of the empirical studies included in the syllabus
- Discuss and write such analyses, following the basic rules of social scientific inquiry

Competences

- Think analytically about religious phenomena
- The ability to distinguish between academic knowledge based on empirical studies versus personal perceptions
- Respect for ethical considerations involved in scientific work in general and sociological studies of religion in particular