

POLS 54

## IDENTITY POLITICS

Prof. Osman Balkan



The term “identity politics” has become a mainstay of contemporary political discourse. In both scholarly and public debates, it is used to describe and make sense of phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, civil rights, the women’s movement, white nationalism, LGBTQI activism, separatist groups, and violent ethnic conflicts. Identity is central to politics but are all identities political? Where do our identities come from and why do they matter for social and political life? Do we have the freedom to choose our own identities or are they ascribed to us by others? And to what extent do our identities dictate what we can do, think, know, say, or feel? This class offers an introduction to the politics of identity. Over the course of the semester, we will investigate how categories like class, race, gender, ethnicity, nation, religion, and sexuality impact politics and struggles for power across the world. The first part of the course introduces students to concepts like identity and identity politics, performance/performativity, authenticity, standpoint theory, intersectionality, power/knowledge, ideology, subject formation, and hegemony. Once we have developed a common vernacular and conceptual toolkit, we will delve into five books which speak to the politics of identity from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. During the course of the semester, students will conduct independent research on identity-related topics of their choice, culminating in a final research paper.