PS 138-08

The Israeli Political System:
A Guide to the Perplexed

Course Description:

Although Israel is a prominent actor on the international stage, its political system is a labyrinth in which not many can find their way. This course will introduce the students to Israel’s political system: its institutional and constitutional framework, the electoral system and various patterns of political participation. During the course we will also examine the way the Israeli political system reflects the structure and dynamic of the Israeli society. By becoming familiar with the inner forces of domestic politics in Israel, we will be able to analyze the challenges which the Israeli political system faces and its unresolved major dilemmas: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the relations between the "Jewishness" of the state and its democratic aspects.

Grades

Grades will be determined as follows:

- 20% Midterm exam (in class)
- 40% Final exam (in class)
- 30% Two presentations in class (hand in an outline).
- 10% Attendance and participation in class
a) The midterm exam will be held in class on March 17. It will have two parts: multiple choice questions and definition of concepts. (grades scale 1-20)

b) The final exam will be held on the last class April 28 in class. The exam will have two parts. The first part: open questions (choose 2 of three). Part 2: six concepts to define.

c) During the term you will need to present two papers in class (about 25 min., you can do that in pairs). The subjects for the presentations appear in the appendix. The dates for the presentations are: first presentation: February 17, 22. Second presentation: April 12, 14. You need to hand in outline of your presentations.

d) See Attendance and Participation below.

**Final Grades Scale**
All assignments (written, oral, exams) will be given a numerical grade on the following scale:

- A+: 96-100
- A: 93-95
- A-: 90-92
- B+: 87-89
- B: 83-86
- B-: 80-82
- C+: 77-79
- C: 73-76
- C-: 70-72
- D+: 67-69
- D: 63-66
- D-: 60-62
- F: 59 and below

**Attendance and Participation in Class**

**Attendance:** Regular attendance and timeliness are important. More than two absences (without proper excuse) will affect your participation grade, and absence from more than a third of the classes will automatically result in a failing grade. Students arriving late will generally be counted as absent.

**Participation:** Participation in class discussions is welcomed and expected. Reading assignments for each class is obligatory and it will also enhance and improve the quality of your participation. *Participating in class can only improve your grade and it will not harm it in anyway.*

Students are encouraged to keep up on current events relating to Israel. If you wish you can present in class a current event that is connected to the class subjects. I recommend reading an Israeli newspaper for ideas ([www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com) or [www.jpost.com](http://www.jpost.com) or [www.ynetnews.com](http://www.ynetnews.com)) as well as an American one such as the NY Times or the Washington Post.
Honesty

The university's policy on academic honesty will be strictly adhered to. *For more information on plagiarism and the proper citing of sources, see:*

http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/writingresources/plagiarism.asp

Useful links:

*The Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) website: [www.knesset.gov.il](http://www.knesset.gov.il)
Where you can find, for example, a lexicon of terms:
http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/cindex_eng.htm

*The Israeli Democracy Institute:
http://www idi.org.il/SITES/ENGLISH/Pages/homepage.aspx
Where you can find: The Israeli Democracy Index (2003-2009)
http://www idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/The%20Israel
eli%20Democracy%20Index/Pages/TheIsraelDemocracyIndex.aspx

*Jewish Virtual Library: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/index.html

“Israel Studies: An Anthology”
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/jsdf/text/anthologycvr.html
You can also find in the site a glossary:
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/gloss.html

- Course Text Book (Available in the bookstore):

PART I: Foundations: The Pre-state period

(Jan 20/25/27)

General historical background
Zionism
The legacy of the "Yishuv"

- Theodor, Herzl, The Jewish State (1896), ch. 1, ch. 2
  http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/herzl2.htm
- Israel's Declaration of independence:
  http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm

PART II: Institutions Matter

(Feb, 1)

Parliamentary systems and consensus Democracy: an Introduction


The Israeli Parliament and Coalition Government

(Feb, 1/3/8)


### The Electoral System

(Feb, 10)


### The Political Parties

(Feb, 15)

The Current "political landscape"
(Feb, 17)


(Presentations: Parties – Feb 17, Feb 22)

*Note: Feb, 24 – No class

The Judicial and the constitutional framework
(March, 1)


Political participation
(March, 3)

PART III: Society
The cleavages in the Israeli society:
(March, 8, March, 10; March, 15)


The politics of the cleavages:

Mid-Term Exam (in Class) - March, 17

*The Arab Minority in Israel:*
PART IV: Unsolved policy issues

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict from Israel’s domestic politics point of view (March, 31, April, 5)

  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v013/13.2.waxman.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v013/13.2.waxman.pdf)
Note: April, 7 – No Class

(Presentations: April, 12, April, 14)

A Jewish and/or Democratic state

(April 19, April, 21)


  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v002/2.2smooha.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v002/2.2smooha.pdf)

  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v004/4.2dowty.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v004/4.2dowty.pdf)

  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v004/4.1gavison.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/israel_studies/v004/4.1gavison.html)

Summary

(April 26)

Final Exam

(April, 28)

Appendix: Subjects for presentations

First Presentation (Feb, 17,22): You need to choose one current party in the Knesset. Describe its historical background and its stand on the Israeli political parties map. You need to describe the party platform and its role in the current political landscape.
Second presentation (April 12, 14): You need to choose an event related to the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict and analyze it from Israel's domestic political point of view (who were the leaders, who were the parties in the coalition, opposition, the parties stand, public opinion, results and effects on Israel's political system and society, etc.)