

Israel: Politics and Society

PIED 3405

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Objectives:

This module examines the political, religious, ideological, social, economic and strategic forces that inform the allocation of power and resources in Israeli society and its political decision making processes. While a historical perspective is frequently adopted, this is not a course on the history of the state; rather, an understanding of the processes of state formation and securitisation is used to inform discussion of aspects of Israel today and conceptions of 'Israeliness'. Further, this is not a course on the Israel/Palestine dispute, the justice of the Palestinian or Israeli cause or the various processes of resistance, occupation and peace initiatives. Instead, the Israel/Palestine dispute is recognised as an important aspect of the context in which Israeli society is examined and Israeli identity discussed.

Syllabus:

Where appropriate, we will be showing film presentations relating to a particular week's seminar.

Lecture and Seminar Plan

Week One beginning 24/01/11	Lecture 1: Interpretations of Zionism
	Joint Seminar Event: Course Introduction

Week Two
beginning
31/01/11

Lecture 2: Ethnicity

Seminar 1. Interpretations of Zionism

Seminar Question: *How can we best distinguish the various strands of Zionism and their contribution to state formation?*

The discussion: this discussion requires an understanding of the breadth of pre-state argument about the need for a Jewish state and the form that it was to take; this approach examines the Zionist enterprise as a process of construction of multiple Zionist political ideologies in the context of the creation of the state; this leads to an awareness, early in the course, of the ongoing debates about the organisation of Israeli society. Zionism is understood to provide a clear ideology designed to legitimise a sovereign Israeli state but lacking clarity about the essential features of the state, particularly the role of religion and the ultimate geographical borders.

Essential Reading

Colin Rubenstein, Colin. "Zionism: The National Liberation Movement of the Jewish People", in Jennette and Stewart (eds), *Politics of the Future*. Chap. 8.

Shafir & Peled. Introduction.

Colin Schindler, *A History of Modern Israel* pgs. 10-30.

Week
Three
beginning
07/02/11

Lecture 3: Religion

Seminar 2: Ethnicity

Seminar Question: *To what extent is ethnicity uniting or dividing Israeli society?*

Discussion: the discussion considers the ethnic divisions in Israeli society and Israel's management of immigration and social cohesion; the topic requires an understanding that Israeli ethnicity is about more than Israel/Arab and the topic links to a discussion of Zionism as a unifying ideology under pressure from waves of immigration of Jews of differing ethnicity and culture.

Essential Reading

Sammy Smooha, The Mass Immigration to Israel: A Comparison of the Failure of the Mizrahi immigrants of the 1950s with the Success of the Russian Immigrants of the 1990s, *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, March 2008, 1-27.

[Ephraim Ya'ar, "Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot", *Israel Studies*, Vol 10:2,\(2005\), pp. 91-128](#)

Week Four
beginning
14/02/11

Lecture 4: Israeli Arabs

Seminar 3: Religion

Seminar Question: *How important is religion to the organisation of Israeli society? To what extent is Israel's settlement policy a religious project?*

Discussion: the discussion of Zionism will have introduced the secular/religious tension underlying the relationship between Judaism and the State. This topic requires an understanding of the differing secular and religious lifestyles and the political compromise that gives the orthodox Rabbis control over some aspects of the Israeli personal space. The discussion will also examine the position of the orthodox religious groups on territorial compromise, settlement and their growing influence in the IDF.

Essential Reading

'Religious and Secular Jews in Israel: a Kulturkampf?' IDI paper at:

<http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/PublicationsCatalog/Pages/PolicyPapers.aspx>

'Israel's Religious Right and the Question of Settlements', *International Crisis Group* Report at

http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/arab_israeli_conflict/89_israels_religious_right_and_the_question_of_settlements.pdf

Isabel Kershner, Supreme Court's Ruling Leads to Ultra-Orthodox Jews Taking to the Streets, *New York Times*, 18 June 2010 available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/18/world/middleeast/18israel.html>.

Israel's pro-settlement soldiers worry leaders, *BBC*, 25 November 2009, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8376631.stm>

Efrat Weiss, Israeli soldiers again protest settlement evacuation, *Ynet news.com*, 16 November 2009, available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3805871,00.html>

Yair Lapid, The glance they don't deserve, *Ynet news.com*, 10 March 2009, available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3798764,00.html>

Jonathan Lis, Barak: soldiers' political protest harms IDF, *Haaretz*, 28 October 2009, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/barak-soldiers-political-protest-harms-idf-israel-1.5225>

Week Five
beginning
21/02/11

Lecture 5: The Electoral System, Parties and Civil Society

Seminar 4: Israeli Arabs

Question: *What is the position of Israeli Arabs? Is membership of an Islamic party incompatible with Israeli citizenship?*

Discussion: this is intended to build on the understanding that Israeli Arab citizens have full citizenship rights and are not to be confused with Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories. The discussion considers the relative deprivation of the Arab community, the complexity of an Arab identity in Israel and the growing influence of Islam to ask whether Israeli Arabs can ever be considered 'equals'

in a Jewish State.

Essential reading

18th Caesarea Forum - The Employment of Arabs in Israel, 16 June 2010, available at:

<http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/events/TheAnnualEconomicForum/Pages/18thCaesareaForum-TheEmploymentofArabsinIsrael.aspx>

Identity Crisis: Israel and its Arab Citizens, *International Crisis Group*, 4 March 2004, available at: www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2528&l=1

The Islamic Movement in Israel, Strategic Assessment, *Institute for National Security Studies*, February 2000, Vol. 2, No. 4, available at: <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=631>.

Rabbi Naftali Rothenberg, Arab minister good for Israel, *y.net news.com*, 30 January 2007, available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3358870,00.html>

Amnon Meranda, Majadele refuses to sing national anthem, *y.net news.com*, 17 March 2007, available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3377681,00.html>

Week Six
beginning
28/02/11

Lecture 6: The Military and the State

Seminar 5: The Electoral System, Parties and Civil Society

Question: *With particular reference to the 2009 election, does proportional representation help or hinder the process of democratic government in Israel? Is ethnicity a reliable guide to political affiliation?*

Discussion: students will by now be aware of the religious and ethnic divides and will be

expected to discuss whether the Israeli electoral system correctly balances the need to

represent these various groups with the requirement for efficient government. Students

should demonstrate an understanding of the multi-party system, coalition government and the thriving civil society of NGOs and interest groups.

Essential Reading

Amotz Asa-El, Israel's Electoral Complex: Israeli politics needs a system overhaul, *Azureonline*, 2008, vol. 31,

Available at: <http://www.azure.org.il/article.php?id=419&page=all>

Clive Jones, What's Left of the Left in Israel? The Shadow of the February 2009 National Election. [A good discussion of the last election results].

Gloria Goldberg, Religious Zionism and the Framing of a Constitution for Israel, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 3 (1998), pp. 211-229.

The links to Israel's main political parties and institutions are on the Israeli government web site listed above.

Week
Seven

Lecture 7: The Political Economy of Israel

Seminar 6: The Military and the State

Question: *Do the people control the army or does the army control the people?*

Discussion: students will be aware of: the conscription system, the value placed on military service in all aspects of Israeli life, senior members of the military 'parachuting' into politics and the links between the military and the economy but will also be aware of the submission of the military to civilian government control. The discussion invites opinions on the institutional, cultural and sociological implications of a civilian army facing continuing threats to the security of the state.

Essential reading:

Barak and Sheffer, *The Study of Civil–Military Relations in Israel: A New Perspective*, *Israel Studies*, Volume 12, Number 1, Spring 2007, 1-27.

Neuman Kalman, *Rabbis vs. the Army: New Tensions between Religion and State*, 30 December 2009, *The Israel Democracy Institute*, available at:
http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/OpEds/Pages/Whoto%20Obey_Neuman.aspx.

Lecture 8: The Legacy of the Holocaust

Seminar Topic 7: The Political Economy of Israel

Question: *Why was state direction of the economy considered essential in the first two decades of the state? How can the Haredi community be integrated into a modern economy?*

Discussion: students will be aware of Israel's economic miracle and the experiences of the ethnic groups on arrival in Israel. This topic examines the role of government control of the economy in state formation and the liberalisation process of the last 30 years, exposing the tension between Zionist ideals of economic strength, social justice and provision for *olim*. This raises questions about the sustainability of the economy and the policy implications of the reduced participation of the Arab and Haredi communities in the modern economy.

Essential reading:

Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation*, 2009, Chaps 1.

Taub Centre State of the Nation Report <http://taubcenter.org.il/index.php/featured-publication/state-of-the-nation-report-society-economy-and-policy-2009/lang/en/>

Ben-Zion, Zilberfarb, 'From socialism to the free market', *IA*, Vol.11, No.1 (January 2005).

Tobias Buck, *Israel Becomes OECD Member*, *Financial Times*, 10 May 2010, available at:

www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f1a60a22-5c58-11df-93f6-00144feab49a.html

Recent economic statistics:

Adva Center, International Comparisons, 2009 available at:
<http://www.adva.org/default.asp?pageid=33>.

UN Human Development Reports at:
http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ISR.html

18th Caesarea Economic Policy Planning Forum (June 2010) at:
<http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/events/TheAnnualEconomicForum/Pages/EconomicConference2010.aspx>

Momi Dahan, 'Why is Poverty Widespread in Israel?' in The International Advisory Council of The Israel Democracy Institute, 'Democratic State Building in Israel: Principal Challenges and Possible Solutions' 31 May 2010, pages 80-82. Available at:
http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/events/Other_Events/Documents/AdvisoryCouncilBackgroundMaterials2010.pdf

'Israel's Economy', in The International Advisory Council of The Israel Democracy Institute, 'Democratic State Building in Israel: Principal Challenges and Possible Solutions' 31 May 2010, pages 52-64. Available at:
http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/events/Other_Events/Documents/AdvisoryCouncilBackgroundMaterials2010.pdf

Week Nine
beginning
21/03/11

Lecture 9: Israel's Foreign Relations

Seminar Topic 8: The Legacy of the Holocaust

Question: To what extent does the experience of the Holocaust influence current Israeli behaviour in the public space? How has the relationship between the state and the survivors and their families changed over time?

Discussion: The discussion builds on an understanding of the effect of the Holocaust on the processes of immigration in the immediate aftermath of WWII, to explore the treatment of survivors and their families and consider the extent to which Israeli society has internalised an extreme form of self-reliance, distrust of alliances and a tendency to view all threats as existential.

Essential reading:

[Tuvia Friling, "Introduction to Israel Studies Special Volume: Israel and the Holocaust: Scars Cry Out for Healing", *Israel Studies*, 14:1, \(Spring 2009\).](#)

Shlomo Aronson, The Holocaust and Israel's Domestic, Foreign and Security Policy, available at:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/aronson.html>

Week Ten
beginning

Lecture 10: Conclusion: The Post-Zionist Debates

Seminar Topic 9: Israel's Foreign Relations

Question: *'America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied.'* (Barak Obama). *Is this a persuasive description of the relationship?*

Discussion: this topic demands a considered appraisal of the relations between Israel and the US that critiques the Mearsheimer/Walt position to make an informed assessment of the strength of the alliance and the factors that account for its endurance. While students will demonstrate an awareness of the strength of the American Jewish lobby, the counter-arguments require careful assessment. Seminar discussion can usefully be organised around pro and anti Mearsheimer/Walt positions.

Essential Reading:

Obama Cairo speech, 'New Beginning', available at:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/04/obama-egypt-speech-video_n_211216.html

[David Rodman, "Israel's National Security Doctrine", *Meria Journal*, Vol. 5:3, \(Sept 2001\)](#)

John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, 'Is it love or lobby? Explaining America's Special Relationship with Israel,

Jerome Slater, Two Books by Mearsheimer and Walt, *Security Studies*, 18/1 (2009), pp.4-57

Benny Morris, And Now for Some Facts, *New Republic*, 8 May 2006, available at:

<http://spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=434>

Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Usual Suspect," *The New Republic*, 10/1/07, available at:

http://www.standwithus.com/pdfs/flyers/WM_Goldberg_NewRepublic.pdf

Push the button available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJsntAx7TE&feature=related>

Week
Eleven
beginning
02/05/11

Lecture Topic: Discussion of the Exam

Seminar Topic 10: The Post-Zionist Debates

Question: *To what extent can Israel be described as 'Jewish and Democratic'?*

Discussion: The topic explores the themes of the course to comment on Israel's view of itself as revealed by the small group of thinkers who challenge Zionist orthodox conceptions of a 'Jewish and democratic state' in favour of an Israeli 'Hebrew' identity. The discussion raises questions about the character of Israeli democracy and whether Zionism is capable of producing an Israeli consensus that can locate the final borders of the state.

Essential Reading:

Sammy Smootha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State", *Nations & Nationalism*, Supplement, Vol. 8:4, (October, 2002), pp. 475-503.

As'ad Ghanem, Nadim Rouhana and Oren Yiftachel, "Questioning Ethnic Democracy: A Response to Sammy Smootha", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 3:2, (Fall, 1998), pp. 253-267.
Adam Danel, A methodological critique of the concept of ethnic democracy, *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 28, No. 1, March 2009, 37–54.

Sammy Smootha, The model of ethnic democracy: Response to Danel, *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 28, No. 1, March 2009, 55-62.

Asa Kasher, 'A Jewish and Democratic State' Present Navigation in the Map of Interpretations., *IA*, 11/1 (January 2005).

Recommended Course Texts

Ben Porat, Guy, Yagil Levy, Shlomo Mizrahi, Aye Naor, Erez Tzfadia et al, *Israel since 1980* (Hereafter Ben Porat et al)

Jones, and Murphy *Israel: Challenges to Identity, Democracy and the State* (Hereafter Jones and Murphy)

Peretz and Doron, *The Government and Politics of Israel*. (Hereafter referred to as Peretz & Doron).

Shafir and Peled. *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Hereafter Shafir & Peled).

Bernard Avishai, *The Hebrew Republic*, 2008.

Online Resources

Israeli politics is subject to frequent crises and change, such that students cannot rely on text books alone and must be familiar with specialist journals and internet resources. Students are required to read online translations of the Israeli press and to demonstrate in seminar discussion an ability to relate their studies to contemporary events.

<http://meria.idc.ac.il> This is the website for the online journal Middle Review of International Affairs (MERIA) and articles from this journal are denoted with the sign ~. Students can access and download articles free of charge. Once you have accessed the web site, click on index and then Israel. Many of the articles here are referenced in the appropriate seminar reading lists. All articles with the acronym MERIA are available online.

<http://www.haaretz.com> Website of the *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper known for its independent political views. It is worth looking at the editorials in particular on a weekly basis but particularly on Fridays.

<http://www.ynetnews.com> Website of Israel's most popular daily paper, *Yediot Aharanot* holds centre right views though editorials are known for their independence. This site is worth consulting on a weekly regular basis.

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/> Israeli government information service - has a daily summary of the Hebrew press, as well as links to Israel's main political parties, personalities and actors.

<http://www.jpost.com> Website of the English daily newspaper The Jerusalem Post. Politically, it tends to be more to the right of *Ha'aretz*, and should be consulted to maintain a balanced viewpoint.

<http://www.ict.org.il> International Centre for the study of terrorism. Contains information on Jewish extremists groups in Israel as well as in the wider Middle East

<http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/Pages/homepage.aspx>: Israel Democracy Institute (hereafter IDI). Useful articles and opinion polls on issue ranging from religion and state to national security and democracy.

<http://www.inss.org.il/> Web site of the Institute of National Security Studies. Students should click on the icon for 'Strategic Assessment'. Here you will find up to date information relating to party political positions in Israel, polling data, as well as articles relating to Israel's foreign and defence policy. It is a very good resource

<http://www.knesset.gov.il/index.html> Gives a basic introduction to the composition and workings of the Knesset as well as the parties represented in Israel's parliament.

<http://www.bicom.org.uk/> Britain Israel Research and Communications Centre. Has useful links to Israel's political parties and provides pen portraits of leading Israeli political figures