

**SYLLABUS FOR GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF ISRAEL**

3 credits/no prerequisite/can be counted towards Judaic Studies major with permission of that Department chair

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**Course Description**

An advanced Political Science course that examines the political culture and governmental institutions of Israel. Particular emphasis is given both to the role of “political socialization” in a nation of immigrants and the origins and contrasts of the competing political “foundation myths” of Israeli society.

**Course/Departmental Objectives**

Most students taking this course have some parochial knowledge of Israeli politics. The course seeks to provide them with an analytical conceptual framework to better understand contemporary Israeli politics.

**Course/Institutional Objectives**

The creation and continued survival of the State of Israel plans a significant role in contemporary Jewish life. Enabling our students to better understand and appreciate the complexity of Israeli political life complements Touro’s mission. While many of the students taking this course have previously studied about Israel, it was almost always from a demi-theological perspective. The course seeks to provide them with the background information and analytical tools to understand Israeli politics from a more universalistic, secular perspective.

**Course Content**

**I. The Political Culture of Israel**

**A. An Introduction to Political Culture** An overview of the various way to approach the highly emotional topic of Israel ranging from “secular Zionist” to “third world”. An explanation of “political culture” and “political socialization” is followed by a discussion of the particular challenge of the latter in a nation of immigrants. This is followed by an examination of Max Weber’s theory of modernization and the difficulties of placing Israeli political culture in this classic framework.

**B. The Origins of Modern Israel: The Conflicting Foundation Myths** The student is introduced to the conflicting “foundation myths” of

Israel. Did Zionism rise from the Jewish tradition of longing for a return to Zion or despite this tradition of an otherworldly salvation? The roots of both “myths” are explored, as is the irony that the more rigorously Orthodox segments of Israeli society accept the myth of the secular left, while the more moderate religious elements embrace that of the secular right.

The role of messianism in Jewish history is explored, culminating in the Shabbtai Tzvi episode which some historians consider the seminal event in shaping contemporary Jewish history (the case against this position is also presented). The impact of the Enlightenment and the growth of Pön Slavism, nationalism and of political anti-Semitism are discussed as are the differences between the Jew’s place in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. This section concludes with a discussion of the Russian pogroms of 1881, Pinker’s Autoemancipation and the competing emergence of political and cultural Zionism.

**C. The Politics of Zionism 1897-1948** The section opens with a review of Jewish settlement in Palestine prior to the birth of Zionism. The millet system and Chaluka are discussed as are other aspects of the “Old Yishuv” that impact on contemporary Israeli political culture. The “first aliya” is then examined as is the role of the Dreyfus Affair and Theodore Herzl in the creation of the Zionist movement. The politics of the early movement is discussed including the emergence of Labor Zionism and the British offer of Uganda after the Kishinev massacre.

The “second aliya” is examined and contrasted with the first aliyah. This is followed by a discussion of the reasons given for the Balfour Declaration and a discussion of the post-Declaration “third aliyah.” The growing tensions between the Zionist and both the “Old Yishuv” and Arab residents of Palestine are examined as is the question as to how Zionism eventually succeeded in the face of the opposition of much of organized world Jewry.

A discussion of the three phases of the Mandate experience follows, including the “fourth” and “fifth aliyah” and the growing impact of Arab violence of British unhappiness with the chaotic situation. The Peel Commission of 1936 and White Paper of 1939 are discussed as is the Second World War. This section continues with the events leading up to the creation of the State (with particular attention to those that impact more directly on contemporary Israeli political culture) and concludes with a brief summary of the Arab-Israeli struggle since 1948 and its effects on Israeli politics.

**D. Israeli’s Middle East Geography** An introduction to the origins and possible meanings of the term “Middle East” is followed by a brief

introduction to the Muslim and Arab worlds. The changing role of minorities in Arab nations is examined as is the impact of shifting twentieth century great power rivalries on Arab society and politics.

**E. Class and Ethnicity in Israeli Politics** Both the question of “who is an Israeli” and “who is a Jew” are discussed. The former issue focuses on the question of “protected minorities” and the role of Israeli Arabs contrasting the different groups of Israeli Arabs as well as Palestinians living in areas occupied by Israel since 1967. The latter group’s current legal status is discussed. The examination of “who is a Jew” traces the question from its earlier almost hypothetical status to an examination of the ethnic, demographic and political changes flowing from the recent large non-Jewish and “Jewishly challenged” immigration from the former Soviet Union. The section concludes with an examination of the religious issues that create socio-political tensions in contemporary Israeli society.

**F. Political Socialization** The challenge of “political socialization” in a nation of immigrants is discussed with particular attention to the process envisioned by the early Zionist ideologies and the compromises that had to be made to maximize effective socialization. The primary tools of political socialization are then examined, including the components of shared religious heritage, the Bible, holidays, Jewish history, the revived Hebrew language and the sense of a shared regional threat. The section concludes with a review of the locations at which political socialization takes place, including *inter-alia*: family, youth groups, schools, army, absorption center, the kibbutz, the family and the media.

**Midterm Examination is given at this point**

## **II. The Governmental Structure**

**A. The Constitutional Structure** The concept of a “constitution” is examined as is the question of the role of a constitution in determining a nation’s laws. The Turkish, British and classic Jewish roots of Israeli law are traced and the draft constitution of 1948 is distributed in class and discussed. The reasons for the failure to accept that document leads into a discussion of the “Basic Law” compromise of 1949 and the alleged advantages and disadvantages of a modern nation-state not having a written constitution. The section concludes with a discussion of the Israeli Supreme Court’s recent efforts to define an “unwritten constitution”.

**B. Political Institutions** The role of the Second Aliyah generation is reviewed as are the various “shadow governmental” agencies that