

**TOPICS IN COMPARATIVE
POLITICS I**

Israeli Politics and Society

Faculty of Arts and Science, Department of Political Science,
Winter 2026 POL 377 H1 S, LEC0101

Lecturer: Olga Talal, PhD

Lectures: Tuesday, 3-5pm
Office hours: Tuesday, 1-3pm
Contact information: olga.talal@utoronto.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will focus on Israel's balancing act between two competing objectives, one seeking to fulfill the Zionist vision and entrench "Jewishness" within the state and the other seeking to establish democratic institutions and procedures. Since independence, Israel's official ideology, Zionism, has been shaping the state's economic, political, demographic, and security policies, designed to advance the interests of the Jewish population in Israel. The Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel fall outside the sociological boundaries of the Jewish nation and present a challenge to nation-building. At the same time, Israel's commitment to democratic principles and procedures entails guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of Palestinian Arab citizens. In this course, students will explore the most salient manifestations of the tensions between Israel's commitment to democracy and Zionism, familiarize themselves with the debates about Israel's political regime, institutions, and society, and develop their positions on these divisive debates.

TEXTS:

Online course readings are accessible through Quercus or UofT library.

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:

One two-hour lecture per week. Course requirements include quizzes, an essay proposal, a final essay, and a final test.

Quizzes	15% (Best 3 of 4 quizzes, 5% each)
Essay proposal	20%
Essay	40%
Final test	25%

Quizzes (15%) – Students will take four (4) quizzes on course readings and lecture materials. The best three (3) will be calculated toward the final grade. Quiz materials are not cumulative.

These are short (5-10 min) quizzes administered **in class via Quercus** at the beginning of lectures. The quizzes will include multiple-choice and true/false questions.

Essay proposal (20%) – The proposal provides an opportunity to receive feedback and prepare students for writing the final essay. It is the roadmap for developing your final paper, and it includes several key components: A title, a research question, a topic description (one paragraph), a main argument (one paragraph), a brief literature review (two paragraphs) and a list of academic references (at least seven). The essay proposal should be no longer than 2 pages, not including references, double-spaced, in 12-point font, and with standard margins (1 inch). **Essay proposals are due via Quercus by 11:59 pm February 9th.**

Research essay (40%) - The research paper should be no longer than 10 pages, double-spaced, with font size 12, and standard margins (1 inch). Please sign and date your proposal prior to submission. **The papers are due via Quercus by 11:59 pm on March 16th.** The penalty for late submission is 5% per day for up to 7 days after the due date. After that, late submissions will no longer be accepted, except for medical or personal emergencies and only with proper documentation.

I encourage you to research topics that truly interest you. You may develop one of the topics surveyed in the course, a relevant topic to the course materials not covered in the syllabus, or a case study that explores a topic relevant to the course content. Given your discretion in choosing the topic of the final essay, I strongly recommend you seek my advice on your research focus and additional research materials.

Students are advised to follow best practices for saving their essay drafts (on personal computers, in the cloud, on external hard drives, etc.) before submitting the essay in class on the due date. The student should keep a copy of the essay until the marked essay is returned and the grade posted. Please sign and date your essay prior to submission.

Final test (25%) – The final test will take place during the last lecture of the term (**March 31st**). It will include essay questions and draw on materials from course readings and lectures. Late tests will not be administered except for medical or personal emergencies and only with proper documentation.

PREREQUISITES: 1.0 credit in POL/ JPA/ JPF/ JPI/ JPR/ JPS/JRA courses

LEARNING GOALS, COMPETENCIES, AND OUTCOMES:

1. Learn about the most influential scholarship and debates on Israel's politics.
2. Apply these theories to the current events and issues in Israel's politics and news.
3. Critically assess the main challenges to the current regime.
4. Learn to identify arguments and assumptions in academic research.
5. Evaluate the inner logic of arguments, the validity of empirical claims, and generalizability of theories.
6. Improve academic writing skills.

PLAGIARISM and Turnitin Plagiarism Framework

According to U of T's Code of Behavior on Academic Matters: "It shall be an offence for a student knowingly: (d) to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e. to commit plagiarism...(e) to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere."

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and all cases of plagiarism will be sent to the Dean's Office for appropriate action. For further information on the University of Toronto's policy regarding plagiarism, you may look at <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation website (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Students are strongly advised to keep rough and draft work and hard copies of their essays and assignments before handing in to Turnitin Plagiarism Framework. These should be kept until the marked assignments have been returned.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes. The use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, a term test, essay, essay proposal, and quizzes may be considered an academic offence in this course. Students may not copy or paraphrase from generative artificial intelligence applications, or represent as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated.

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Students are encouraged to visit and ask questions during office hours: Tuesdays 1-3pm. You are also welcome to email your TA, TBA or the course instructor, Olga Talal, at olga.talal@utoronto.ca. Please email **short** questions and requests and allow up to 2 business days for a response. *Note, we will not be checking Quercus messages regularly, so please contact me by email.*

Course announcements, readings, and all other information will be posted on Quercus at:

<https://idpz.utorauth.utoronto.ca/idp/profile/SAML2/Redirect/SSO?execution=e2s1>

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>.

ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES:

It is the policy of the University of Toronto to arrange reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays. Students have a responsibility to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences.

Instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations or other compulsory activities at these times. If compulsory activities are unavoidable, every reasonable opportunity should be given to the students to make up work that they miss, particularly in courses involving laboratory work. When the scheduling of tests or examinations cannot be avoided, students should be informed of the procedure to be followed to arrange to write at an alternate time.

The ACORN Absence Declaration Tool

Starting in the 2023-2024 school year, students in participating divisions may use the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool to declare an absence **once per academic term** (e.g., the fall term) for **a maximum period of seven (7) consecutive calendar days**. The seven-day declaration period can be retroactive for up to six (6) days in the past, or proactive, up to six (6) days in the future.

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

COURSE READINGS

Introduction (January 6th)

Zionism (January 13th)

- Avineri, Shlomo. *The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*, Basic Books, 2017. Introduction (pp.12-23), Herzl (101-114), Jabotinski (172-199), Kook (200-210), and Ben Gurion (211-228). The book is available online through the UofT library.

Part I: The State of Israel

Constitutional debates (January 20th)

- Israel's Declaration of independence:
<https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx>
- Rubinstein, Amnon. "Israel's Partial Constitution: The Basic Laws." *Israel Studies: An Anthology* (Mitchell G. Bard and David Nachmias (Eds). Jewish Virtual Library Publications. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/Rubinstein.html>
- Gavison, Ruth (2003). "Constitutions and Political Reconstructions: Israel's Quest for a Constitution." *International Sociology*, 18 (1), pp. 53-70.

Israel's regime (January 27th)

- Smooha, Sammy, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State." *Nations and Nationalism* vol. 8, no. 4 (2002): pp. 475-503.
- Gavison, Ruth, "Jewish and Democratic? A Rejoinder to the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate." *Israel Studies* vol. 4, no. 1 (1999): pp. 44-58.
- Waxman, Dov, and Ilan Peleg. "The nation-state law and the weakening of Israeli democracy." *Israel Studies* 25, no. 3 (2020): 185-200. [Waxman, Peleg - 2020 - The nation-state law and the weakening of Israeli democracy\(2\).pdf](#)

Israel's society (February 3rd)

- Kook, Rebecca B. "Multiculturalism and identity politics." In *Understanding Israel*, pp. 119-133. Routledge, 2018.
- Guy Ben Porat [Multicultural Realities](#)
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-studies-an-anthology-table-of-contents>
- Calvin Goldscheider, *Israeli Society in the Twenty-First Century: Immigration, Inequality, and Religious Conflict*, (Chapter 3 Immigration, Nation-building, and Ethnic Group Formation) Brandies University Press 2015. Pp.38-61.

Palestinian Arabs in Israel (PAI) - rights and status (February 10th)

ESSAY PROPOSALS ARE DUE THE DAY BEFORE CLASS, FEBRUARY 9TH BY 11:59PM.

- Peleg, Ilan, and Dov Waxman. *Israel's Palestinians: the conflict within*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. Chapter 1 "Palestinians in Israel: Separate and Unequal" pp.19- 46.
- Ghanem, Asad (2001). *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*. Albany, State University of New York Press, pp. 1-30.

Reading Week – No Class (February 17th)

PAI Politics (February 24th)

- Rekhess, Elie (2007). "The Evolvement of an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 12 (3), pp. 1-28.
- Haklai, Oded, and Rida Abu Rass. "The fourth phase of Palestinian Arab politics in Israel: The centripetal turn." *Israel Studies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 35-60.

Part II – Challenges to Israel's Regime

Alternative Regime Visions (March 3rd)

- Mada al-Carmel Center for Applied Social Research, *The Haifa Declaration* (2007), <http://www.mada-research.org/archive/haifaenglish.pdf>.
- National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel* (2006), <http://www.arab-lac.org/tasawor-mostaqbali-eng.pdf>.
- Adalah—The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, *The Democratic Constitution*, (2007), http://www.adalah.org/eng/democratic_constitution-e.pdf.
- Rekhess, Elie. "The Arab Minority in Israel: An Analysis of the "Future Vision" Documents." *Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations*, The American Jewish Committee, April 2008, pp. 1-39.

Lack of state-religion separation (March 10th)

- Natan Sachs and Brian Reeves, "Tribes, identity, and individual freedom in Israel", Center for Middle East Policy, the Brookings Institute, March 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/cmep_20170331_tribes-of-israel.pdf
- Haklai, Oded. "Religious—Nationalist Mobilization and State Penetration: Lessons from Jewish Settlers' Activism in Israel and the West Bank." *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 6 (2007): 713-73.

Occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (March 17th) FINAL ESSAYS ARE DUE THE DAY BEFORE CLASS, MARCH 16th BY 11:59PM

- Lustick, Ian S. *Paradigm lost: From two-state solution to one-state reality*. University

of Pennsylvania Press, 2019, Chapter 5, pp.121-149.

- Haklai, Oded, Ronnie Olesker, Mira Sucharov, Ehud Eiran, and Ian S. Lustick. "Book Forum". *Israel Studies Review* 36.1 (2021): 144-164. <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.3167/isr.2021.360110>

Judicial Reform (March 24th) –

- Roznai, Y., Dixon, R., & Landau, D. E. (2023). *Judicial Reform or Abusive Constitutionalism in Israel*. *Israel Law Review*, 1-13.
- Navot, Suzie, and Guy Lurie. "An Attack on the Rule of Law in Israel." *Israel Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (2024): 20-37.

Final test (March 31st)