The major goal of this course is to enable students to look “inside” Israeli politics, making it understandable through the use of comparative tools.

Among the questions that will be addressed are: how does a state come into being? How did the Zionist movement succeed in establishing a strong state? How and why are religious, ethnic and other social cleavages pronounced in Israeli politics? What are the major characteristics of Israeli political institutions? How can we understand the way that decisions are made in the context of an institutional setting that is (or at least was) so different from the US setting (parliamentary vs. presidential regime, proportional representation vs. majoritarian electoral system, unitary vs. federal state)? What happens to a regime that was designed according to the European “Continental” structure when it tries to “Americanize” some of its parts?

These topics and other selected issues in Israeli politics will be analyzed using the comparative approach (historical, one-case and cross-national perspectives). The course will be “comparative” in two senses. First, it will present an analysis of aspects of Israeli politics and government using comparative tools: concepts, theories, models, units of analysis (the single case study approach). It will also analyze the development of these aspects from a historical comparative perspective. Second, the Israeli cases will be compared to other cases.

Lectures proceed from the assumption that all students have read the assigned material.
Grades: There will be a mid-term (25% of the grade) and a take-home exam (75% of the grade) or an optional essay.

Course Textbooks


1. Introduction: The Israeli Political System

Ch. 1: Introduction, pp. 1-18.
Ch. 2: People of Israel, pp. 19-47.


2. Historical Origins of the State of Israel

(2a) “Proclamation of Independence”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm


3. Democracy in Israel


(3d) www.freedomhouse.org.
4. A Basic Classification of the Israeli Regime


5. Israeli Society: Social Cleavages in Israel


6. The Executive Branch


(6a) “Basic Law: The President of the State”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic12_eng.htm
(6b) “Basic Law: The Government”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic14_eng.htm


7. The Legislative Branch


(7a) “Basic Law: The Knesset”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic2_eng.htm


8. The Judicial Branch and the Constitutional Setting


(8a) “Basic Law: The Judiciary”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic8_eng.htm

(8b) “Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic3_eng.htm

(8c) “Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation”
http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic4_eng.htm

(8d) “The Existing Basic Laws: Summary”


9. The Electoral System and Electoral/Government System Reform


10. Political Parties and Party System

Ch. 5: Political Parties, pp. 117-165.
Ch. 6: Party Organization, pp. 166-201.


11. Civil Society and Interest Groups


12. Political Culture and Electoral Behavior


13. Religion and Politics


14. Gender Politics


15. Are Israeli Politics and Society Comparable or Unique?

