Israeli Politics and Society Seminar

Spring 2024
Class meets Mondays 12-2:15 Naftali 004

Instructor: Prof. Udi Sommer   **Email:** udi.sommer@gmail.com
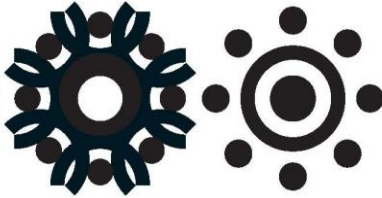**Office**: Naftali 529 (03-6409231)   **Office Hours**: By appointment (Naftali 522) or Zoom

The more than six decades of Israel's democratic system of government, under intense external and internal pressures, have been facilitated by four major characteristics of its society and politics. First, a cultural aspect: a commitment to a national coalescent orientation on the part of the majority of Israeli population, stemming from sentiments of Jewish solidarity and from the tradition of multi-party democratic politics inherited from the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine prior to 1948. Second, a structural aspect: multiplicity of crosscutting social cleavages that provide for the diffusion of tensions stemming from internal social conflict. Third, an economic aspect: availability of external resources such as US foreign aid programs, German reparations and Jewish donations. Those made it possible to allocate resources beyond what was extracted from society. And, forth, a political aspect: oligarchic inclinations of political elites composed of professional politicians, whose common interests have been to avoid ideological controversies and political confrontations among themselves.

In the early days of the state a serious concern was raised: can Israel survive as a democracy facing the difficulties resulting from mass immigration, meager resources, internal divisions and external threats to its very existence? By the early 1970s, such concerns largely dissipated. The Israeli body-politic has proven cohesive enough to overcome tensions stemming from fragmented party politics, deep social and cultural cleavages, fundamental ideological schisms and an involvement in protracted conflicts with neighboring states and the Palestinians. Those have become particularly urgent in the aftermath of the October 7th attacks and the Israel-Hamas war of 2023-24.

These achievements were facilitated by the emergence of a pattern of politics, indeed, a political culture, that puts a strong emphasis on the pursuit of political accommodation among social groupings, political parties and ideological strands even at the expense of compromising their respective manifest interests, aspirations and programs. Such accommodation, however, has been put to the test with the proposed judicial reform of 2023 and the ensuing mass social protests against it. Moreover, the mobilization capabilities of Israel's governments have been remarkable by any standard. They were capable of inducing the citizens to accept willingly such burdens as high taxation, harsh economic measures and long conscript and reserve military service. Israel has done all these without loss of public support for its central political and social institutions, but in early 2024, with the war and expanding social cleavages and political schisms, such accomplishments are at risk.

Seminar objectives
The seminar has three major objectives. First, we will analyze the major features of Israel's political system and compare it to other democratic countries. Second, we will examine the question of democracy under stress - the politics of a state striving to be Jewish and Democratic. Third, we will relate the theories studied in class to day-to-day contemporary Israeli politics (students will be expected to be up-to-date concerning the current events in Israeli politics). All this will be done within the analytic framework of the analysis of conflicts and their resolution, with some application in practice.

Seminar assignments
- A midterm exam.
- A seminar paper – by the end of the semester, each student will submit a paper (20 pages, double spaced, 12 font) which will include her/his analysis of a research question concerning Israeli politics. The individual meetings along the semester will help students crystalize a research question and develop their research design.
- Presentation of seminar papers during the last 2 sessions of the class.

Breakdown of final grade
Class Participation	35%
Midterm Exam	18%
Midterm + Final Presentations	18%
Seminar paper	29%

Seminar Outline and Readings

March 4 - **Introduction**, Syllabus, Seminar Overview, Sign up for Discussion Leadership

March 11 –
Toward Statehood: The Zionist Movement and the Jewish Community in Palestine Prior to 1948
D. Horowitz & M. Lissak, "Authority without Sovereignty: The Case of the National Center of the Jewish Community in Palestine", **Government and Opposition**, 8, 1 (Winter 1973): 48-71.
E. Ya'ar "Change and Continuity in Israeli Society The Test of the Melting Pot", Israel Studies, 10(2), Summer 2005: 91-128
A. Arian, **Politics in Israel: The Second Generation,** Chaham House, N.J., 1989: 1-29.

Immigration, Political Culture and Israel's Society
K. Goldstein & Z. Gitelman, "From "Russians" to Israelis?" in A. Arian & M. Shamir (eds), **The Elections in Israel – 2003**, Transaction, New Brunswick (US) & London (UK): 245-60.
D. Hacohen, **Immigrants in Turmoil**, Syracuse University Press, 2003, Chapter 8: Immigration During 1948-1998 and its Ramifications on Israeli Society: 251-63.
T. Horowitz, "The Integration of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union", **Israel Affairs**, Taylor & Francis Group 11(1), January 2005: 117-36.
Y. Yonah, "Israel As a Multicultural Democracy: Challenges and Obstacles", **Israel Affairs**, Taylor & Francis Group, 11(1), January 2005: 95-116.
M. Lissak, "The Unique Approach to Military-Societal Relations in Israel and its Impact on Foreign and Security Policy", in S.Sofer (ed), **Peacemaking in a Divided Society: Israel After Rabin**, Frank Cass, London 2001: 235-55.
Y. Peri, **Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel**, Stanford University Press, California, 2004, Introduction; 1-10.
J. T. Shuval, "The Structure and Dilemmas of Israeli Pluralism" in B.Kimmerling, **The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries & Frontiers**, State University of New York, 1989: 216-36.
Zvi Zameret, **The Melting Pot in Israel**, State University of New York, 2002, Chapter 14: Summing Up: Israel – From a "Melting Pot" to a Pluralistic State: 155-160.

March 18 – **Analyzing the Political Upheaval around the 2023 Proposed Judicial Reform**

Gregory S. Mahler, **Politics and Government in Israel: The Maturation of a Modern State**, Rowmen & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Oxford 2004, Chapter 4: The Constitutional System and Parliamentary Government: 117-39, and Chapter 8: The Machinery of Government: 221-47.

M. Edelman, "The Judicialization of Politics in Israel", **International Political Science Review**, 1994, 15: 177-86.

Y. Yishi, "Legislators and Interest Groups: Some Observation on the Israeli Scene", **The Journal of Legislative Studies** 1997 3(2): 89-111.

D. Korn, "The Presidentialization of Politics: The Power and Constraints of the Israeli Prime Minister", 2010
www.israelistudies.umd.edu-articles-research-paper-2.pdf

N. Chazan, "The Knesset", **Israel Affairs**, 11(2), April 2005: 392-416

March 25 – **Israel's System of Government: Parliament, Executive and the Judiciary**
Parties and Interest Groups

A. Arian & M. Shamir, "On Mistaking a Dominant Party in a Dealingnment System" in A. Arian & M. Shamie (eds), **The Election in Israel – 2003,** Transaction New Brunswick (USA) & London (UK) 2005: 13-31.

G.Goldberg (1998), "Trade Unions and Party Politics in Israel: The Decline of Party Identification", **The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies**, 23(1): 51-70.

G. S. Mahler**, Politics and Government in Israel: The Maturation of a Modern State,** Rowmen & Littlefield Publishers Inc. Oxford 2004, Chapter 6: Political Parties and Interest Groups: 171-91.

J. Mendilow, **Ideology, Party Change and Electoral Campaigns in Israel**, State University of New York, 2003, Introduction: 1-25.

Y. Yishi, "Bringing Society Back In: Post-Cartel Parties in Israel", **Party Politics**, 2001, 7(6): 667-687

G. Rahat, "Intra-Party Politics"
www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/Intra-PartyPolitics.aspx

The State/Religion Issue: Judaism in the Jewish State

A. Cohen & B. Susser, 'From Accommodation to Decision: Transformation in Israel's Religio-Political Life', **Journal of Church and State**, 1996, 38: 817-39.

I. Englard, 'Law and Religion in Israel', **The American Journal of Comparative Law,** 1987, 35: 185-208.

G. S. Mahler**, Politics and Government in Israel: The Maturation of a Modern State**, Rowmen & Littlefield Publishers Inc. Oxford 2004, Chapter 2: Zionism, Religion and the Domestic Political Environment: 53-88.

Chaim I. Waxman, "Religio-Poilitics and Social Unity in Israel: Israel's Religious Parties" in Robert O. Freedman (Ed), **Israel's First Fifty Years**, Florida University Press Gaineville 2000: 162-79.

April 1 (Double Class 9:30-14:15) – **Midterm Presentations + Recap for Midterm + Individual Meetings**
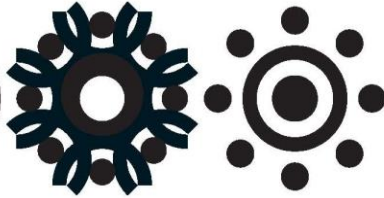**The October 7th Attacks, the Israel-Hamas War, and US-Israel Relations (if time allows)**

April 15 – **Midterm Exam**

May 6 – **The October 7th Attacks, the Israel-Hamas War, and US-Israel Relations**

May 20 - **Coalition Politics in Israel: Is the Netanyahu Coalition Really that Fragile?**
Dan Horowitz, 'More than a Change in Government', **The Jerusalem Quarterly**, 5, 1977: 3-20.

G. S. Mahler, **Politics and Government in Israel: The Maturation of a Modern State**, Rowmen & Littlefield Publishers Inc. Oxford 2004, Chapter 5: The Prime Minister and the Knesset: 141-69.
G. S. Mahler & R. Trilling, "Coalition Behaviour and Cabinet Formation: The Case of Israel", **Comparative Political Studies**, 1975, 8: 200-233.
N. Yanai (1986), "Critical Aspects of the 1984 Elections in Israel: The Crisis of Coalition Forming Politics and the Government of   National Unity", **Journal of International and Area Studies**, 1: 151-174.

May 27 - **Public Policy in Israel – The Case of the COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign**
D.Korn**, Public Policy in Israel: Perspectives and Practices**, Lexington Books ,2002, Introduction: 1-6.
E. Don-Yehiya, 'Public Policy and Management of Major Political Cleavages' in D.Korn (ed**) Public Policy in Israel: Perspectives and Practices**, Lexington Books, 2002: 9-30
D. Nachmias & O. Arbel-Ganz, 'The Crisis of Governance: Government Instability and the Civil Servics', *Israel Affairs*, 11(2), April 2005: 281-302.
D. Peretz & G. Doron, **Government and Politics of Israel**, Harper Collins Publishers Inc. 1997, Chapter 7: Government Administration and Public Policy: 208-43.
I. Sharkansky, "Israel's Political Economy" in E.Sprinzak & L. Diamond (eds), **Israel Democracy Under Stress**, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London, 1993: 153-70.

The Socio-Economic Cleavage in Israel and the Protest Movement of the Summer of 2011
Oz Almog, "Shifting the Centre from Nation to Individual and Universe: The New "Democratic Faith" of Israel", in E. Karsh (Ed) **Israel: The First Hundred Years**, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2002: 31-42.
D. Bernstein & S. Swirski, "The Rapid Economic Development of Israel and the Emergence of the Ethnic Division of Labour", **British Journal of Sociology**, XXII (March 1982), No. 1
Ofira Seliktar, "The Changing Political Economy of Israel: From Agricultural Pioneers to the "Silicon Valley" of the Middle East", in Robert O.Freedman (ed), **Israel First Fifty Years**, Florida University Press, Gaineville, 2000: 197-218.
B.Zilberfarb, "From Socialism to Free Market – The Israeli Economy 1948-2003", **Israel Affairs**, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 11(1), January 2005: 12-22

June XXXX – class trip to the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) and the Israeli Supreme Court (Tentative)

June 3 – Conclusions + possible class simulation – Elections, Judicial Politics, Robustness of Democratic Institutions, National Security and Future Trends

June 10 – Presentations – 1st Batch

June 17 – Presentations – 2nd Batch; **Final papers are due**