REL 3672

Religion and Society in Israel/Palestine

Section: U01

In Person

Spring Term 2027

Course Meeting Information

Classes are scheduled from 11-12.15 Tuesdays and Thursdays in PC 428,

REL 3672 U01 time of classes	Classroom
TuTh 11:00 - 12:15	Charles E. Perry (PC) 428

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

The Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023, the devastating war in Gaza that followed, and the subsequent political, military and humanitarian crises have brought renewed attention to the complex relationship between religion, nationalism and politics in Israel and the wider Middle East. The ceasefire of October 2025, continuing violence, and unresolved questions concerning Palestinian statehood, Israeli security and the future of Gaza have further demonstrated the difficulties of achieving a lasting settlement.

These developments invite us to reconsider the role of religion in the region's conflicts. How far are these conflicts driven by competing nationalisms, territorial claims and political interests, and how far by religious beliefs and identities? Scholars such as Edward Said have emphasized the importance of nationalism and colonial history, while others, notably Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, have given greater prominence to religious and cultural identities. This course will critically examine these competing interpretations.

Israel is also a highly diverse immigrant society, characterized by differences of religion, ethnicity, national origin, political

affiliation and cultural identity. The course will explore the relationships between secular and religious Jews, different Jewish religious movements, Muslim and Christian communities, and the Palestinian Arab population. Particular attention will be given to religious Zionism, the political influence of religious parties, the contested character of sacred places, and the relationship between religion and the state.

Beginning with the historical significance of the Holy Land to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the course will examine the emergence of Zionism, the development of Palestinian nationalism, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the religious and political transformations that have shaped the region. It will also consider contemporary debates surrounding citizenship, democracy, minority rights, religious identity and the prospects for coexistence.

The central aim is to equip students with the historical knowledge and analytical tools necessary to understand the complex interplay of religion, society and politics in Israel and the Middle East, and to assess critically the competing explanations of contemporary conflicts.

Textbook and Course Materials

No textbook required

Subtitle: N/A″

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: N/A

Publisher: N/A

Publication Date: N/A

Copyright Date: N/A

ISBN 10: N/A

ISBN 13: N/A

Notes: N/A

Description: N/A

Chapters/Pages: N/A

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for $22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop.

Readings, Materials, and Open Educational Resources (OER)

No textbook purchase is required. The course draws upon selected scholarly articles, book chapters and other academic materials, as indicated in the weekly reading schedule.

Required readings will be accessible through FIU Libraries or other authorised sources. Additional works will be recommended for further study.

Course Goals

The principal goal of this course is to provide students with a critical understanding of the role of religion in shaping the history, society and politics of Israel, Palestine and the wider Middle East.

The course aims to:

1. Examine the historical relationships between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land.
2. Explore the development of Zionism, Palestinian nationalism and competing religious and national identities.
3. Analyze the influence of religious beliefs, institutions and political movements on Israeli and Palestinian societies.
4. Investigate the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of Israeli society, including relations between Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities.
5. Evaluate competing scholarly interpretations of the relationship between religion, nationalism and political conflict in the region.
6. Develop students' ability to assess historical evidence, engage critically with scholarly arguments and formulate independent, well-supported conclusions.

Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to

approach controversial issues with intellectual independence, historical understanding and respect for differing perspectives.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to: Identify and explain the principal historical developments that have shaped relations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Israel, Palestine and the wider Middle East. Analyze the emergence of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism and evaluate the influence of religious and national identities on contemporary political developments. Examine the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of Israeli and Palestinian societies, including relations between secular and religious communities. Evaluate critically competing scholarly interpretations of the relationship between religion, nationalism and political conflict. Assess the influence of religious movements, institutions and ideologies on political decision-making, social divisions and prospects for coexistence. Interpret and compare primary and secondary sources, recognizing differences in historical perspective, methodology and ideological assumptions. Construct and present coherent, evidence-based arguments about the relationship between

religion and society in Israel and the Middle East, both orally and in writing.

Expectations of the Course

Students are expected to attend classes regularly, complete the assigned readings in advance, and participate actively and thoughtfully in discussions. The course addresses complex and sometimes controversial religious and political issues. Students are expected to engage respectfully with differing viewpoints, distinguish between evidence and opinion, and support their arguments with appropriate scholarly sources.

Attendance and Participation: Regular attendance is expected. Attendance and informed participation together account for 10% of the final grade. Students should arrive punctually, prepare for class discussions, and contribute constructively. Unavoidable absences should be communicated to the instructor as soon as reasonably possible.

Written Assignments and Presentations: Students are responsible for completing assignments by the announced deadlines. Written work should demonstrate independent thought, critical engagement with the readings, and appropriate academic referencing. Details of assignments, including length and submission requirements, will be provided during the semester.

Late Work and Make-Up Assignments: Assignments

submitted after the deadline may incur a grade penalty. Extensions or alternative arrangements may be granted in cases of documented illness, emergencies, religious observances, or other circumstances warranting reasonable accommodation. Students should contact the instructor promptly. Make-up arrangements are at the instructor's discretion, subject to university policy.

Academic Integrity: Students must submit their own work and acknowledge all sources appropriately. Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, fabrication of evidence, and other forms of academic misconduct are prohibited and will be addressed in accordance with FIU policies.

Use of Artificial Intelligence: AI tools may be used for preliminary research assistance or improving the clarity of written expression, but students remain responsible for the accuracy, originality, arguments, and sources of all submitted work. AI-generated material must not be presented as independent scholarship without appropriate disclosure. Specific requirements for individual assignments will be communicated by the instructor.

Communication: Students should consult their FIU email and Canvas regularly for course announcements, reading assignments, and updates. Questions about assignments or academic difficulties should be communicated to the instructor in a timely manner.

Course Adjustments: The instructor may make reasonable adjustments to readings or the schedule in response to

academic developments or the progress of the class. Any changes affecting student responsibilities or assessment will be communicated in advance and in writing, in accordance with university policy.

Assignments & Assessments

Student performance will be assessed through the following components:

1. Final Research Paper – 60%

Students will complete a substantial research paper examining a topic relevant to religion and society in Israel, Palestine or the wider Middle East. Topics should be discussed with and approved by the instructor.

Papers will be assessed on the quality of research, clarity of argument, critical engagement with relevant scholarship, effective use of evidence, organization and appropriate academic referencing.

1. Short Papers and Presentations – 30%

Students will complete shorter written assignments and/or oral presentations addressing themes and readings covered during the semester.

These assignments are intended to develop students' capacity to interpret scholarly literature, evaluate competing arguments and communicate their conclusions clearly.

Assessment will consider analytical depth, accuracy, originality, organization and engagement with course materials.

1. Attendance and Participation – 10%

Students are expected to attend regularly, complete the assigned readings and participate constructively in class discussions.

Participation will be evaluated on the basis of preparation, informed contributions, engagement with the readings and respectful consideration of differing perspectives.

Assessment Summary

Final Research Paper: 60%

Short Papers and Presentations: 30%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Total: 100%

Detailed instructions and submission deadlines for individual assignments will be provided during the semester. All written assignments must comply with FIU's academic integrity policies.

Grading

Grading and Assessment

The final course grade will be calculated according to the following components:

- **Final Research Paper:** 60%
- **Short Papers and Presentations:** 30%
- **Attendance and Participation:** 10%

Total: 100%

Grading Scale

Percentage	Letter Grade
93–100%	A
90–92%	A−
87–89%	B+
83–86%	B
80–82%	B−
77–79%	C+
73–76%	C
70–72%	C−
67–69%	D+
63–66%	D
60–62%	D−
Below 60%	F

Grades will reflect the quality of students' research, analytical

reasoning, engagement with course materials, clarity of written and oral presentation, and participation in class discussions.

The final research paper will constitute the principal assessment of students' ability to develop an independent, evidence-based argument concerning religion and society in Israel and the Middle East.

Schedule of Topics

Schedule of Topics and Readings

REL 3672 – Religion and Society in Israel and Palestine
Spring 2027

Course Schedule and Readings

The following schedule outlines the principal themes to be explored during the semester. The accompanying reading lists identify relevant scholarly works and are intended primarily as guides to further study rather than as an exhaustive or inflexible programme of required reading.

Specific required readings, where applicable, will be identified in advance of the relevant classes. The selection of readings

will reflect the academic preparation, interests and progress of the students, as well as significant contemporary developments in Israel, Palestine and the wider Middle East.

Not all works listed below will necessarily be assigned. The instructor may adjust the selection and sequence of readings and topics in accordance with the educational needs of the class. Changes affecting course requirements or assessment will be communicated in advance and in writing, in accordance with university policy.

Weekly Programme

Week 1: January 11–17
Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land

The religious and historical significance of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Sacred geography, religious traditions and competing interpretations of history.

Suggested reading:

- Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*.

Week 2: January 18–24
Palestine before Zionism: Arabs, Jews and the Ottoman Empire

Ottoman Palestine, religious communities, European influence and the emergence of modern identities.

Suggested readings:

- Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine*.
- Tudor Parfitt, *The Jews in Palestine 1800–1882*.

Week 3: January 25–31
Zionism and the Emergence of Jewish Israeli Identity

The origins of Zionism, Jewish nationalism, religious Zionism, immigration and the construction of national identity.

Suggested readings:

- Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*.
- Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*.
- Moshe Maor, "The History of Zionism."

Week 4: February 1–7
Religion and Nationalism under the British Mandate

British rule, competing Jewish and Arab national movements, religious institutions and political conflict.

Suggested readings:

- Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*.
- Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*.
- Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*.

Week 5: February 8–14
The Law of Return and the Question of Jewish Identity

Who is a Jew? Religious identity, conversion, citizenship,

immigration and the politics of recognition.

Suggested readings:

- Rebeca Weiner, "Who Is a Jew?"
- Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova, *Genetics, Mass Media and Identity*.

Week 6: February 15–21
Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State

The relationship between Judaism, democracy, citizenship and minority rights. The place of religion in Israeli political institutions.

Suggested readings:

- Sammy Smooha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy."
- As'ad Ghanem and colleagues, "Questioning Ethnic Democracy."
- Charles S. Liebman, *Civil Religion in Israel*.

First short written assignment: provisionally due February 19.

Week 7: February 22–28
Israel as a Multicultural Society

Religious and secular divisions, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi identities, Arab citizens of Israel, immigration and contemporary social tensions.

Suggested readings:

- Relevant publications from the Pew Research Center.
- Selected articles from *Israel Studies* and other scholarly journals.

March 1–7: Spring Break

No scheduled classes.

Week 8: March 8–14
Islam and the Jews: Historical Relationships

Jewish communities under Muslim rule, coexistence, conflict, religious difference and historical memory.

Suggested readings:

- Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*.
- Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*.

Week 9: March 15–21
Islam and the Palestinian National Movement

The development of Palestinian nationalism, the emergence of political Islam, and the relationships between Hamas, Fatah and wider Palestinian society.

Suggested readings:

- Nathan Brown, "Religion and Politics in Palestine: Debates about Islam and the Hamas–Fatah Schism."
- Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*.

Week 10: March 22–28
Islamism, Religious Zionism and Competing Nationalisms

Religion and political ideology, the role of religious parties and movements, and competing claims to territory and sovereignty.

Suggested readings:

- Yitzhak Reiter, "Religion as a Barrier to Compromise in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict."
- Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession*.
- Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*.

Second short written assignment: provisionally due March 26.

Week 11: March 29–April 4
The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: Religion or Nationalism?

Competing scholarly interpretations of the conflict. National identity, territorial claims, religion and the politics of historical memory.

Suggested readings:

- Khaled Diab, "The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict Is Not About Religion."
- Anshel Pfeffer, "The Israel–Palestine Conflict Is Not Just About Land. It's a Bitter Religious War."
- Ian Black, *Enemies and Neighbours*.

Week 12: April 5–11
Religion, Extremism and Political Violence

Religious radicalism, messianic politics, political violence and the role of sacred places in contemporary conflicts.

Suggested readings:

- Ehud Sprinzak, "Extremism and Violence in Israel."
- Yitzhak Reiter, *Contested Holy Places in Israel and Palestine*.

Week 13: April 12–18
Religion, War and Society since October 2023

The Hamas attacks of October 2023, the subsequent war in Gaza, regional military and political developments, humanitarian consequences, and the changing role of religion in public discourse.

Discussion of contemporary developments and their implications for Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Suggested readings:

- Selected contemporary scholarly articles, reports and primary sources, to be identified during the semester.

Student presentations may begin.

Week 14: April 19–25
Religion and the Prospects for Peace and Coexistence

Religious approaches to reconciliation, questions of citizenship and minority rights, the future of Israeli and Palestinian societies, and concluding reflections on religion

and nationalism in the Middle East.

Suggested readings:

- Selected scholarly articles and review of relevant course materials.

Student presentations and concluding discussions.

April 26–May 1: Final Assessment Period

Final research paper: provisionally due April 29, 2027.

No proctored examination is required.

General Notes on Readings and Assignments

The works listed above constitute a scholarly reading guide for the course. They are recommended resources and should not be understood as a requirement to purchase or read every listed volume.

The instructor will identify any specific required readings with appropriate advance notice. Additional materials may be introduced where they illuminate contemporary developments or particular questions arising during class discussions.

The timing and format of shorter assignments and presentations may be adjusted to reflect the progress of the course. Any changes affecting assessment requirements or

deadlines will be communicated to students in writing.

The course will emphasize informed discussion, critical interpretation of historical and contemporary evidence, and the development of independent arguments concerning the relationships between religion, society and politics.