Politics

Please note that intermediary and advanced courses require some previous experience. Please contact us if you would like to discuss your options: vsp@mansfield.ox.ac.uk

Introductory: The Theory and Practice of Democracy

Intermediate Level: Comparative Government
British Politics and Government since 1900
Theory of Politics
International Relations
Political Sociology

Advanced Level: Modern British Government and Politics
Government and Politics of the US
Politics in Europe
Politics in Russia and the Former Soviet Union
Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa
Politics in Latin America
Politics in South Asia
Politics in the Middle East
International Relations in the Era of the Two World Wards
International Relations in the Era of the Cold War
Political Thought: Plato to Rousseau
Political Thought: Bentham to Weber
Marx and Marxism
Government and Politics of Japan
Politics in China
Politics of the European Union

Introductory

The Theory and Practice of Democracy

This course introduces students to the empirical and theoretical study of Politics, to some of the key concepts of the discipline and to major methods of contemporary analysis. Section (a), entitled “Theorizing the Democratic State” introduces you to some of the main concepts which inform theoretical and empirical discussion of democracy, such as, liberty and power, and to the role of ideology in interpreting and linking them. It also identifies some of the core normative issues which arise in democratic politics, such as the desirability of democracy itself and the legitimate scope of state authority in a democracy.

It also introduces you to the major theoretical frameworks used to explore the distributions and exercise of power in a democratic state, including Marxist, pluralist and public choice approaches. It also provides an introduction to the work of some of the major political thinkers who have considered these questions, especially Rousseau, Tocqueville, Mill and Marx. Section (b), entitled “Analysis of Democratic Institutions”, focuses on the practice of democracy, and especially its institutions, processes and political outputs. It asks you to think about the nature and functioning of institutions and rules in a liberal democracy; to consider their aims and how well they realise them; and to identify the effects they have on the design and implementation of public policies. This part of the course also encourages you to consider the necessary and sufficient conditions of democratic government and political stability.
These questions may be approached both by the close study of four contemporary political systems (the United States of America; the United Kingdom; France; Germany) and also by the comparative study of a range of countries.

In addition to these two Sections, the Department provides lectures in research approaches methods in the study of politics in Hilary Term. These lectures introduce students to key approaches to work in all aspects of politics.

**Intermediate Level**

**Comparative Government**

This course is a comparative study of the main political institutions through which contemporary societies are governed. These include constitutional frameworks, executives, legislatures, bureaucracies, constitutional courts, systems of devolved power, electoral systems, political parties, and party systems. The course also considers some of the main political processes that affect governance and regime stability, such as styles of leadership, processes of regime transition and democratisation, and patterns of policy-making. Through reference to the distinct methodological approach used by different scholars in studying these phenomena - socio-cultural and behavioural approaches, the various 'institutional' schools, and rational-choice analysis - students acquire an understanding of the utility and limits of these individual schools of analysis. The course builds on the country-based institutional knowledge introduced in the first-year course (Introduction to Politics). In the first year, the focus is on single-country analysis of broad themes in the recent historical development of specific countries. In Comparative Government, the approach is explicitly comparative.

**British Government and Politics since 1900**

This course consists of the close study of political developments in Britain since 1900 and the major academic debates surrounding them. It allows students to study a single political system in depth, over a period long enough both to make visible long-run processes of social, economic and political change, and to permit comparisons and contrasts to be drawn between the situations of political actors at different times. It is also a period with an extraordinarily rich and rewarding academic literature, which encourages students to explore problems of evidence and interpretation, and to consider a range of explanations, based on different scholarly traditions, for the same events. These include techniques and methods as diverse as archivally-based historical analysis, political biography and political science modelling. Among the topics covered are the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of the Labour Party; the political effects of the two world wars and the widening franchise; the development of the institutions and procedures of modern government; the changing party system under mass democracy; the challenges and failures of political extremism; the domestic impact of foreign policies such as appeasement, decolonisation and European integration; the challenges posed to modern governments by relative economic decline, and efforts to transform the system such as tariff reform, social democracy and Thatcherism.

**Theory of Politics**

The course is designed to acquaint students with the political concepts central to the theoretical, normative and interpretative analysis of politics. The study of concepts such as liberty, justice, authority or power provides the foundation for understanding the nature of political thought. These concepts underpin the study of politics in general and are therefore crucial to enhancing the awareness of the relation between political thought and action. Students are also directed towards discursive ideologies displaying complex conceptual arrangements such as liberalism or socialism. The course is devised so as to develop a manifold range of skills necessary for constructing critical arguments in political theory, for working with problems of consistency and justification, for
analysing the complexities of the usage of political language, for understanding the principal forms through which political thought presents itself, both as theory and as ideology, and for appreciating the main current and recent debates that command attention in the field. To those ends philosophical, ideological and historical analyses are all appropriate, and the merits of each type may be assessed and contrasted. Students are therefore encouraged to explore different ways of approaching these issues, though they are also enabled, if they so wish, to choose a specific strategy from among these approaches. Students are also invited, in consultation with their tutors, to balance a broad appreciation of the field with a development of their own interests within the wide choice of available concepts and ideologies. The literature to which they are directed is therefore diverse, encompassing classical texts, seminal philosophers and theorists, significant journal articles, and typical examples of ideological debate. Both substantive arguments and methodological issues are consequently aired. By extending the initial understanding of political thought gained by students in the first year introduction to politics, or by building on other related introductory lectures and subjects, the course provides the basis for specialization in political theory, as well as tools that other specializations may draw upon. It will enable students to reflect on the principles underlying politics, to make reasoned assessments of political discourse, and to develop their own arguments at a requisite degree of sophistication.

International Relations
This course helps develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the major issues in international relations, concentrating on the period since 1990. The subject seeks to strike a balance between empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding. Those taking the subject will have the opportunity to study some of the major questions in contemporary international relations (e.g. the role of the United Nations and of alliances such as NATO; the impact on international relations of globalization and of democratization; the development of European integration; the international impact of civil wars and humanitarian disasters; and problems that arise from national self-determination and attempts to promote human rights). They will also develop a broad knowledge of the most important analytical and theoretical tools that are needed to make sense of these questions.

Political Sociology
The course builds on some of the concepts, theories and knowledge introduced in introductory Politics courses - notably the study of electorates, parties and interest groups, and the study of the interaction of political ideas such as democracy with political processes. In this subject students will study in more detail the major theoretical approaches to social class, race and ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, states, interest groups including unions, parties, movements and single issue campaigns, and the interrelationships between culture, economy, social structure, and political processes and institutions. The theoretical approaches will be critically assessed in the light of empirical evidence from a range of countries, and also put in the context of the philosophically rigorous analysis of power and change. To aid students in attaining a comprehensive grasp of the field of study, they will have the opportunity to look at 'approaches' such as structuralism, rational choice theory, political culture theory, and the historical and comparative perspective as such, as well as studying the application of these to the specific topics mentioned. Thus by the end of the course students should have an understanding of recent sociological explanations of political processes and events, a grasp of the competing approaches in the field, an understanding of the main methods of data collection and analysis, and an appreciation of the role of models and theories in sociological knowledge.
Advanced Level

Modern British Government and Politics
The course aims to provide a specialist knowledge of contemporary British government and politics. It provides candidates with both an awareness of the most significant debates in the academic literature and of different methodological approaches to the subject and a thorough understanding of the issues and controversies surrounding the operation of British government. This involves the study of the UK electoral system, political parties and voting behaviour; of the organisation and political activities of the executive, legislature, judiciary and civil service; of the powers of Parliament and local government; of the devolution of power to regions of the UK; and of the political influence of the media and pressure groups. The interaction of these political institutions with the European Union is also studied. Current and recent proposals for reforming the constitution are a particular focus of attention. The course includes the examination of a wide range of primary documents, including parliamentary papers and government reports. It aims to provide candidates with the ability to retrieve and analyse official information and other primary documents and to place them in historical and political context. On completion of the course candidates will be familiar with the detailed workings of British governmental institutions, with decision-making processes in government and the evolution of strategies for managing the public sector, and with the political dynamics of the system.

Government and Politics in the US
This subject seeks to provide students with a basic understanding of American exceptionalism, of the United States' political institutions, and of selected areas of public policy, and a good knowledge and understanding of the scholarly literature in the field. It covers the constitution; federalism and separation of powers; the presidency; congress; the federal courts; the federal bureaucracy; parties and the party system; electoral politics; political culture; mass media; interest groups; state and local politics; processes of policy formation and implementation, especially as related to urban policy, economic policy, race, and civil rights. It enables students to use data drawn from the large resources available (inter alia) in the Harmsworth Library (in the Rothermere American Institute) and the Law Library to form their own interpretations of governmental processes, to refine the skill of thinking rigorously and critically for themselves, and thus to contribute more fully to tutorials.

Politics in Europe
This paper is a comparative study of the national party and institutional systems of Europe, and of comparative issues in European politics, including democratisation, institutional relations, political economy and party politics. Candidates are expected to show a broad knowledge of European politics, and may where appropriate include reference to the UK in answers, but should not answer any questions mainly or exclusively with reference to the UK.

Politics in Russia and the Former Soviet Union
Candidates will be required to show knowledge of the transformation of the Soviet system from 1985, and an understanding of the politics of countries of the former Soviet Union with respect to their formation, post-Soviet transitions, regime types, institutional arrangements, party systems, electoral processes, ethnic and clan composition, political economy, corruption, and the influence of external factors.

Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa
This course will enable students to acquire a knowledge and understanding of the recent history and contemporary politics of particular African countries; to analyse their political processes and institutions, to situate them in their social and economic context; and to examine the political conditions and consequences of economic policies. Students will be expected to study the politics of
at least three African countries in some detail. These should include one or both of South Africa and Nigeria. They will also be expected to read material on other countries relevant to the study of specific themes and topics dealt with in tutorials and in a weekly class. These include the politics of democratization, structural adjustment, labour and unions, agricultural policy, gender, class and ethnicity. The course will allow students to extend their understanding of comparative politics, and particularly of issues common to Africa and other regions they may be studying, of political theory, of political sociology and of international relations by raising relevant questions in African circumstances. Students will acquire a more informed and critical understanding of African countries, which often appear to be far-away places of which we know little. Students may use this course as a foundation for further work in and about Africa in journalism, business, government, NGOs and academic research. It will contribute to their wider education as informed citizens.

**Politics in Latin America**

The aim of this subject is to study the major issues in the politics of Latin America. The subject will focus on the politics of a number of major countries, but in a way that leads to comparisons between them. The countries will include Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Chile and Venezuela - chosen because they all represent interesting problems to the student, and because they have accessible literature in English. The broad theme that links these countries together is the study of the conditions that facilitate or hinder the consolidation of political stability. This subject will examine institutional approaches to the study of Latin American politics, and will draw upon the political sociology and the political economy of the countries concerned, as well as upon the international context. Attention will be paid to the politics of the military; to the politics of economic stabilisation; to the nature of the governing elites; and to questions of political participation of the major social groups.

**Politics in South Asia**

This course introduces students to the nature of political change in the major South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) in the period after independence from colonial rule. The subject is intended to educate students in the most significant themes and issues in contemporary South Asian politics, through the study of illustrative cases taken from the various countries of the region. The subject also seeks to enable students to develop a critical engagement with the analytical literature on South Asia, in particular, and on the 'Third World' or 'developing countries', more generally. While each of the major South Asian countries is studied separately, students are, at the same time, encouraged to analyse political developments comparatively. The course examines the nature of the post-colonial state and the evolution of political institutions and party politics, with a focus on the functioning of democracy and the tendencies towards authoritarianism or martial rule. The interface of democratic politics with the political economy of the 'developmental' state is also addressed. The course also explores the development of 'movement' politics or social movements as an important element of the democratic process. The course gives attention to social organisation, culture and identities as they bear on politics. In particular, the politics of gender, class, caste, religion and ethnicity are emphasised. The course engages with the evolution of political ideologies, especially those of nationalism and 'development', which have played significant roles in the political history of post-colonial states. The course is expected to enable students to develop the ability to construct rigorous arguments on South Asian politics, based on empirical knowledge and informed by a critical awareness of the scholarly literature on the subject. This course will prepare students to undertake post graduate studies on South Asia and the 'Third World', and for careers in journalism, diplomacy, national and international 'development' organisations, NGOs and 'Think Tank' or consultancy organisations, which specialise on the 'Third World' and the field of 'development'. 
Politics of the Middle East
The course aims to give the student a wide-ranging and sophisticated introduction to the domestic political dynamics of the contemporary Middle East and its wider social relations. The course is organised thematically, with weekly topics including the nature of the state, political economy, the military, democratisation, succession and gender. The thematic emphasis gives the student maximum flexibility to concentrate on whichever countries most interest him/her. The geographical scope of the course is inclusive, covering North Africa, Turkey and Iran, as well as the core countries of region. It is expected that the student will complete the course knowing six or seven countries in some depth. The course is designed to relate to the discipline of politics in general, eschewing the notion that the Middle East is somehow unique and mysterious; students are encouraged to bring their knowledge of political concepts to bear in the course. Inter-regional comparisons are also encouraged, with students who have studied other parts of the developing world especially welcome. The course has been designed both for the generalist, who may go on to work in business, government, journalism or the professions, and for the budding specialist who may then proceed to a Masters in Middle Eastern studies. Please note that demand sometimes outstrips teaching supply on this paper.

International Relations in the Era of the Two World Wars
This course is the study of central issues in the international history of a period which had a profound influence on the subject of international relations. Students are introduced through the study of historical topics to the major debates and different theoretical approaches. These include Realist, Liberal, and Marxist views of the international system, levels of analysis, decision making processes and the role of individual leaders, the concepts of the balance of power, collective security, and détente and the concert of powers, isolationism and appeasement. The course also considers the impact of total war on the international system, causes of regional instability (nationalism, imperialism), the inter-action of different regional theatres in an evolving global international system, the role of financial and economic factors, revolutionary ideologies (Communism and Fascism), and the 'learning process' as it affected policy-making in and immediately after the Second World War. The course enables students to consider the major theories and concepts of international relations critically in relation to the historical evidence, on which several of the theories were based, and to draw on a rich academic literature. It develops the skill of analysing empirical material in a way which is both informed by theory and sensitive to the complexity of the evidence. The course is closely related to the core subject International Relations and to the option International Relations in the Era of the Cold War.

International Relations in the Era of the Cold War
The course covers the international relations of a period (1945-91) crucial for the evolution of today's world. These have always generated much writing of high quality, which is now further enlivened by the progressive release and assimilation of archive material; and the period now appears sufficiently self-contained for scholars to be able to step back and gain perspective by viewing it as a whole. The course links strongly with the Politics 'core' 'International Relations' course, providing factual context and tests for many of that subject's theoretical approaches to international relations, and also valuable background for its treatment of the post-1990 'contemporary' scene.

Political Thought: Plato to Rousseau
The objective of this subject is to introduce students to some of the canonical texts in political thought and to help them to develop an appreciation of their significance for their own time and for contemporary political theory. The subject is designed to enhance students' skills in reading and
interpreting texts and to develop their appreciation of the richness of the traditions of political thought in the West which will contribute to their broader understanding of the discipline. The subject allows students to choose from a range of classical texts in the history of political thought and also offers a number of supplementary topics which encourage students to examine issues raised by these texts in the context of related discussions in the wider cannon of political thought. In both cases, the subject encourages students to develop skills in reading and critically reflecting on the arguments of complex works of political philosophy. It offers students the opportunity to develop an appreciation of the intellectual context in which the texts were written and/or to discuss the arguments of the texts in relation to issues in contemporary political theory. Students, in consultation with their tutors, may follow one or other of these options exclusively so long as they are able to demonstrate a sound grasp of the arguments of the texts on which they answer questions. The subject permits students to take either a narrow focus, concentrating on a few thinkers in depth, or aiming for a wide coverage of many. Either approach, however, relies on developing the capacity to grasp both the way particular texts work as arguments, and to gain some independent critical purchase on the arguments themselves. Students are also encouraged to examine different methods of interpretation in the History of Political Thought.

Political Thought: Bentham to Weber

This subject is designed to acquaint students with the transition from classical political philosophy to modern social theory --- that is, to introduce them to major theories developed from the late eighteenth century to the early twenty century, theories which (a) explored the nature and direction of social and economic change in Europe and (b) grappled with the moral and political issues raised by social and economic change. The subject enables students to study in depth a range of important texts, helping them to develop the skills required to identify and comment critically on the principal arguments contained in those texts. Students are also encouraged to appreciate the intellectual and historical context in which the texts were written. Students may, in consultation with their tutors, choose between a number of approaches to this subject. They may concentrate on a smaller number of named theorists in greater depth or aim for a broader coverage of many theorists by way of topics. Thus, they may approach the subject by choosing a number of clusters of thinkers (e.g. Bentham and Mill, Hegel and Marx, Weber and Durkheim, Saint-Simon and Tocqueville). Or they may focus on topics such as individualism and community, centralisation, the idea of progress, science and religion, by reading further primary texts in addition to those specified in the reading list. These further texts can include both additional works by the named thinkers and works by other relevant writers, for instance those who pre-date the named thinker and who were particularly influential for him, contemporary writers whose work was pertinent and, in some cases, later writers. In any event, students will be expected to demonstrate detailed and critical acquaintance with the major texts, and to analyse some of the main issues of contention, or agreement, in the period covered by the subject. This subject will enable students to read complex texts with discrimination and attune themselves to the variety and depth of modern social and political debates in an historical perspective.

Marx and Marxism

The course, unusual in being devoted to a single intellectual and political tradition, gives students the opportunity to develop a deep and systematic understanding of Marxist theory and practice. Depending on their interests, and reflecting the interdisciplinary breadth of the Marxist tradition, students are able (in consultation with their tutors) to concentrate on one or more of Marxist philosophy, politics, sociology and economics. Similarly, although all students are required to cover the essentials of Marxist theory with reference to the key writings of Marx and Engels, the course permits students to strike their own balance between concentrating on these texts - and their interpretation and evaluation - and considering the theoretical contributions of later Marxists. While most attention is devoted to issues in Marxist theory, students are also expected to approach
Marxism as a practical, political ideology, with concrete political consequences. In all cases, the course teaches students to be able critically to evaluate, not just to show knowledge of, the Marxist tradition.

The Government and Politics of Japan course provides a study of one of the very few nations outside the Western world whose politics appears to be stably based on democratic principles and a democratic constitution. It introduces students to Japanese political history since 1945 and the social context of Japanese institutions and policy-making, enabling them to understand the vicissitudes of Japanese experience in the last twenty years: from the 1980s, when Japanese exports were seen as threateningly ultra-competitive in Europe, North America and elsewhere, through the more difficult 1990s and 2000s which have precipitated a concentrated debate on "restructuring" both of the economy and of the political system. The course covers the constitutional framework and structure of government; parliamentary and local politics; the electoral and party systems; the role of corporate interests and pressure groups; the bureaucracy; foreign policy. It aims to provide an understanding of the major debates on the nature of Japanese liberal democracy, and to some of the main interpretive models: "bureaucratic polity", "developmental state", "iron-triangle dominance by bureaucrats, business leaders and politicians", "patterned pluralism" etc. The underlying principle of the course is that Japanese politics is just as capable of being understood empirically as is any other political system, so long as preconceptions are not allowed to get in the way of understanding. No previous knowledge of Japan is required.

Politics in China This course will enable students to acquire a knowledge and understanding of the recent history and contemporary politics of China. China has been in transition from the long rule of Mao Zedong since 1978, and its politics and society have transformed radically during that period. Students will gain an understanding of the Chinese Communist party (the most powerful Communist party left in the world), looking at its historical background before analysing its current strategy to remain in control of China in the post-Cold War era. The reform era under Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin will be analysed through a variety of themes, including elite politics and the Tian'anmen crisis of 1989, rural reforms, urban culture, and gender. China's new status as a regional power in international relations will also be examined, as well as its relations with Taiwan and Hong Kong, two very different Chinese societies. This course will allow students to develop a strong knowledge of one of the world's most important countries, and could serve as stimulation for further work in and about China in journalism, business, government, NGOs and academic research. Please note that demand sometimes outstrips teaching supply on this paper.

The Politics of the European Union This paper focuses on the study of the history, institutions, and policy processes of the European Union. It includes analysis of the history and theories of the European integration process. Candidates are expected to show knowledge of politics of the European Union, including the main institutions of the EU, decision making procedures and specific policies, as well as relations between the EU and the rest of the world. The paper also focuses on democracy in the European Union and the impact of European integration on the domestic politics and policies of the member states.