

Foundation Scholarship Examinations 2026-27

**Examination Papers set by Trinity College Dublin's Political
Science Department**

Guidance for Students

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Introduction

The Foundation Scholarship examinations provided by the Political Science department changed in 2020-21 due to the curriculum changes resulting from the Trinity Education Project (TEP). These changes resulted in political science offering five examinations, in place of the two examinations that were offered in 2016-17 through 2019-20. These differences have been retained this year, with the addition of one further paper, Introduction to Political Science Research, which is a new SF module offered by the department for the first time in 2024-25, meaning there are now a total of six examinations offered by the department.

The number and combination of papers that you should take depends on your programme plus the pathway that you are taking. There are mandatory papers for different programmes and pathways plus optional choices. The details can be found in the following table.

Paper description									
Paper 1: Political Science General Paper 1									
Paper 2: Political Science General Paper 2									
Paper 3: Political Science History of Political Thought Paper									
Paper 4: Political Science Comparative Politics Paper									
Paper 5: Political Science International Relations Paper									
Paper 6: Political Science Introduction to Political Science Research Paper									
Credit Profile in Political Science in Senior Fresh	No. of SF credits taken in Political Science by end of Semester 1	Number of papers taken in Political Science	Papers to be taken (M = mandatory, O = optional)						
			Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	Paper 5	Paper 6	
40 SF credits (20 by end Sem 1)	20	3	M		O	O	O	O	
JF credits only	n/a	1		M					
40 SF credits (20 by end Sem 1)	20	2	M		O	O	O	O	
20 SF credits (10 by end Sem 1)	10	2	M		O	O	O	O	
20 SF credits (10 by end Sem 1)	10	1	M						

Please note that the Political Science Department **cannot** provide you with any guidance on what examinations you should take beyond the information provided in this table.

Each examination is timed at two hours fifteen minutes. Please note that no special tutorials will be provided by academic staff relating to any of these examinations. Sample questions for each examination can be found below.

Some “Frequently Asked Questions” are also answered on the Academic Registry’s website here: <https://www.tcd.ie/academicregistry/exams/scholarship/>.

We wish all students good luck with the Foundation Scholarship examinations.

POLITICAL SCIENCE 1

The examination “**Political Science 1**” requires students to write an essay on a topic related to one of the broad areas of political science covered in Senior Fresh (SF) modules—international relations, comparative politics, history of political thought or introduction to political science research—but addressing materials that are outside the Michaelmas Term SF module syllabi. The topics can be found below, along with an additional reading list covering each topic. Students will therefore focus on one of these topics in advance and write one essay on that topic in a two-and-a-quarter-hour examination. The exam will contain only one essay question for each of the four topics for which reading lists have been provided. Students may, at their discretion, prepare more than one topic in advance, but they will answer only one essay question in the examination. To repeat: students must answer one question for this examination—the international relations question, the comparative politics question, the history of political thought question, or the introduction to political science research question— and not more than one.

When writing essays for “Political Science 1”, students are expected to know relevant materials and concepts from the related SF modules, but they must demonstrate engagement with, and mastery of, the materials contained on these additional reading lists. Similarly, students may choose to do additional reading, beyond the materials contained in the provided reading lists, on these political science topics, but, again, students are expected primarily and above all to demonstrate engagement with and mastery of the materials contained on these reading lists. There is no requirement to do any additional outside readings and indeed these reading lists are already extensive and demanding. Indeed, given that these reading lists are extensive, students may wish to select and prioritize their readings from among the readings set out. If a student wishes to refer to additional readings outside these reading lists (or materials contained on module syllabuses), the student is recommended to provide a reference, indicating author, title, and year of publication if possible.

Reading lists for these topics this year are contained in this document, as well as sample questions. Students, however, are advised to prepare broadly for a variety of possible questions addressing this material.

Readings for these topics will be made available online—through the library, through the Blackboard pages of the relevant modules, or through other means.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

William Phelan

Topic: The Politics of International Human Rights

The question will deal with various contributions to political science explanations of the development, negotiation, and effectiveness of international human rights agreements and institutions, with a particular focus on the readings below. It will not deal with strictly legal-doctrinal analysis of international human rights law of the sort sometimes produced by professional lawyers.

Readings:

Duranti, M. (2017). *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hafner-Burton, E. and Tsutsui, K. (2007). "Justice Lost! The Failure of International Human Rights Law to Matter Where Needed Most." *Journal of Peace Research* 44 (4): 407-425.

Hafner-Burton, E. (2012). "International Regimes for Human Rights." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15: 265-286.

Hafner-Burton, E. (2005). "Trading Human Rights: How Preferential Trade Agreements Influence Government Repression." *International Organization* 59 (3): 593-629.

Inboden, R. S., *China and the international human rights regime, 1982-2017* (Cambridge, 2021)

Kinzelbach, K. (2014). *The EU's Human Rights Dialogue with China: Quiet Diplomacy and Its Limits*. London: Routledge.

Kinzelbach, K. (2012). "Will China's Rise Lead to a New Normative Order? An Analysis of China's Statements on Human Rights at the United Nations 2000-2010" *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 30 (3): 299-232.

Moravcsik, A. (2001). "Why Is U.S. Human Rights Policy So Unilateralist?" In Shepard Forman and Patrick Stewart, eds., *The Cost of Acting Alone: Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Moravcsik, A. (2000). "The Origins of Human Rights Regimes: Democratic Delegation in Postwar Europe." *International Organization* 54 (2): 217-252.

Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Genocide", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 2001
URL theatlantic.com/issues/2001/09/power.htm or via TCD electronic resources.

Simmons, B. (2009). *Mobilizing for Human Rights*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP.

Spilker, G. and Böhmelt, T. (2013). "The Impact of Preferential Trade Agreements on Governmental Repression Revisited." *Review of International Organizations* 8 (3): 343-361.

Rochelle Terman and Jennifer Byun. "Punishment and Politicization in the International Human Rights Regime." *American Political Science Review* 116:2 (2022), 385–402.

Terman, Rochelle. 2023. *The Geopolitics of Shaming: When Human Rights Pressure Works – and when it Backfires*. Princeton University Press.

Von Stein, J. (2015). "Making Promises, Keeping Promises: Democracy, Ratification and Compliance in International Human Rights Law." *British Journal of Political Science* 46 (3): 655-679.

Vreeland, J. R. (2008). "Political Institutions and Human Rights: Why Dictatorships Enter into the United Nations Convention Against Torture." *International Organization* 62 (1): 65-101.

Sample question:

Why do states comply with international human rights agreements?

HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Peter Stone

Topic: Deliberative Mini-Publics

The Athenian democracy relied extensively on *sortition*—the random selection of political officials—for the performance of many vital public functions, including the administrative council, most of the magistracies, and the courts. While the practice of sortition largely went into eclipse for over two millennia, it has generated renewed interest in recent years. This interest has been directed to the creation of *deliberative mini-publics*. While these bodies are randomly selected, they differ in two important ways from the randomly-selected bodies employed by the Athenian democracy. First, deliberative mini-publics are almost always stratified, to guarantee proportionate participation by different segments of society based upon gender, occupation, residence, and/or political opinions. Second, deliberative mini-publics are of course deliberative—they provide randomly-selected citizens the chance to engage in reasoned and informed discussion of public issues assigned to them. The randomly-selected bodies constituted by Athens were rarely asked to engage in such deliberation. Nevertheless, the Athenian example has spurred increasing experimentation with deliberative mini-publics around the world, with some of them making important public contribution in recent years (notably in Ireland).

The History of Political Thought question for the Political Science 1 paper this year will deal with the theory and practice of deliberative mini-publics. Just what can mini-publics contribute to democracy? Do they make political systems more democratic, or less so? Can deliberative mini-publics work alongside elected legislatures? Or should they replace them? The question this year for this paper could address any aspect of the growing modern engagement with this important democratic innovation.

Readings:

Note: All books will be on reserve in the library.

Curato, Nicole; Farrell, David M.; Geissell, Brigitte; Grönlund, Kimmo; Mockler, Patricia; Pilet, Jean-Benoit; Renwick, Alan; Rose, Jonathan; Setälä, Maija; and Suiter, Jane. 2021 *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Core Design Features*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Farrell, David M. and Suiter, Jane. 2019. *Reimagining Democracy: Lessons in Deliberative Democracy from the Irish Front Line*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gastil, John and Wright, Erik Olin, eds. 2019. *Legislature by Lot: Transformative Designs for Deliberative Governance*. London: Verso.

Grönlund, Kimmo; Bächtiger, André; and Setälä, Maija, eds. 2014. *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Sample Question:

How important is descriptive representation to accomplishing the aims of deliberative mini-publics?

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Gail McElroy

Topic: Political Representation

This year's comparative politics question for the Political Science 1 paper will focus on the topic of political representation.

Issues to consider include the following:

- How do we define representation?
- How do citizens want to be represented in politics?
- How do individual- and system-level factors shape representation?
- Are there political institutions that foster greater representation?
- Why are the views of the certain groups (wealthy, men etc.) over-represented in electoral democracies?

Readings:

Bartels, L.M. (2008) *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 10.

Blais, A., and M.A. Bodet (2006). "Does Proportional Representation Foster Closer Congruence between Citizens and Policy Makers?" *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (10): 1243-1262.

Blumenau J, Wolkenstein F, Wratil C. Citizens' Preferences for Multidimensional Representation. *Perspectives on Politics*. 2025;23(2):588-610.

Elsässer, L., Hense, S., & Schäfer, A. (2021). Not just money: unequal responsiveness in egalitarian democracies. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(12), 1890–1908

Elsässer, Lea & Armin Schäfer. 2023. Political Inequality in Rich Democracies. *Annual Review of Political Science* 26:469-487.

Gilens, M. and Page, B.I. (2014) 'Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens', *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), pp. 564–581.

Huber, J. D., and Powell, G. B. (1994). "Congruence between Citizens and Policymakers in Two Visions of Liberal Democracy." *World Politics* 46 (3): 291-326.

Lardeyret, G. (1991). "The Problem with PR." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (3): 30-35.

Mansbridge, J. (1999). "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes.'" *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 628-657.

Martini, S. and Marzi, P., 2026. Citizens' Preferences for Representation Styles: Exploring the Mandate–Independence Controversy in Eight European Countries. *Politics and Governance*, 14.

Page, B. I. (1994). "Democratic Responsiveness? Untangling the Links between Public Opinion and Policy." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 27 (1): 25-29.

Persson M, Sundell A. The Rich Have a Slight Edge: Evidence from Comparative Data on Income-Based Inequality in Policy Congruence. *British Journal of Political Science*. 2024;54(2):514-525.

Phillips, A. (1995). *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, chapter 1.

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, chapter 1.

Pitkin, H. F. (2004). "Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 27 (3): 335-342.

Powell, G. B. (2004). "Political Representation in Comparative Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7: 273-296.

Tirado Castro, A. and Banducci, S., 2026. Not just women for women: How gendered affinities affect candidate support. *Research & Politics*, 13(2)

Sample Question:

"Why do governments respond more to the preferences of affluent citizens than to those of the poor?"

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Lisa Keenan

This question will deal with the practice of action research as deployed by the social sciences. Action research is both a process of investigation and a process of seeking solutions; its central concern is with making the academic work of the social sciences relevant to practical human affairs. Although this goal of achieving transformational change gives action research a political dimension, the discipline of political science has largely ignored the calls of those arguing for a “turn to action”. While many action researchers see their role as “doing good” their critics argue that they are failing to do good research.

Aguinis, H. (1993). Action research and scientific method: Presumed discrepancies and actual similarities. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 29(4), 416-431.

Brydon-Miller, M. (2013). Deepening our Commitment to Principles of Social Justice and Redefining Systems. *The SAGE Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 199-21). SAGE Publications.

Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action Research*, 1(1), 9-28.

Bullock, G., & Hess, D. R. (2021). Defining civically engaged research as scholarship in political science. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54(4), 716-720.

Feldman, A. (2007). Validity and quality in action research. *Educational Action Research*, 15(1), 21-32.

Friedman, V. J., & Rogers, T. (2009). There is nothing so theoretical as good action research. *Action Research*, 7(1), 31-47.

Goodman, N., Bird, K., & Gabel, C. (2017). Towards a more collaborative political science: a partnership approach. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 50(1), 201-218.

Greenwood, D. J. (2002). Action research: Unfulfilled promises and unmet challenges. *Concepts and Transformation*, 7(2), 117-139.

Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (2006). *Introduction to action research: Social research for social change*. SAGE publications. [Ch 4, 5, 6]

- Ch 4 - An epistemological foundation for action research
- Ch 5 - Scientific method and action research
- Ch 6 - Social science research techniques, work forms, and research strategies in action research

Hammersley, M. (2004). Action research: a contradiction in terms? *Oxford Review of Education*, 30(2), 165-181.

Heikkinen, H. L., Huttunen, R., & Syrjälä, L. (2007). Action research as narrative: Five principles for validation. *Educational Action Research*, 15(1), 5-19.

Lundy, P., & McGovern, M. (2006). The ethics of silence: Action research, community 'truth-telling' and post-conflict transition in the North of Ireland. *Action Research*, 4(1), 49-64.

Michelitch, K. (2018). Whose research is it? Political scientists discuss whether, how, and why we should involve the communities we study. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(3), 543-545.

Noor, M. S. A. M., Jhee, Y. S., & Kamarudin, M. Z. (2023). An ongoing discussion about validity and quality in action research. *Malaysian Journal of Action Research*, 1(1), 23-34.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2001). Introduction. In Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 1-10). SAGE Publications.

Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action research*. Sage publications. [Ch 2, 3, 4 (pp.65-83)]

- Ch 2 - Theory and principles of action research
- Ch 3 - Setting the stage: planning a research process
- Ch 4 (pp.65-83) - Look: Building the picture

van Bommel, S. (2024). Embracing collaborative research in political science in Australia and beyond. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 59(4), 396-410.

Sample question:

- More than seven decades after it was first deployed why does action research continue to be a marginal activity in the academic social sciences?

POLITICAL SCIENCE 2

The examination “**Political Science 2**” can only be taken by students not enrolled in any SF political science module. It requires students to answer two general questions about the nature of politics. There will be a total of five questions on the exam. None of the questions will require knowledge of any SF political science module. A reading list for this examination, as well as sample questions, can be found below. Students, however, are advised to prepare broadly for a variety of possible questions addressing this material.

Students must answer two questions out of the five offered. All questions deal with the general nature of politics, with a particular focus on the question of how best to approach the study of politics.

Ahmed, Amel, and Rudra Sil. 2012. “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4): 935–953.

Bates, Robert H. 1997. “Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 30 (2): 166–169.

Bates, Robert H., Chalmers Johnson, and Ian Lustick. 1997. “Controversy in the Discipline: Area Studies and Comparative Politics.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30 (2): 166–179.

Blyth, Mark. 2006. “Great Punctuations: Prediction, Randomness, and the Evolution of Comparative Political Science.” *American Political Science Review* 100 (4): 493–498.

Blyth, Mark M., and Robin Varghese. 1999. “The State of the Discipline in American Political Science: Be Careful What You Wish For?” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 1 (3): 345–365.

Desch, Michael. 2015. “Technique Trumps Relevance: The Professionalization of Political Science and the Marginalization of Security Studies.” *Perspectives on Politics* 13 (2): 377–393.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2004. “A Perestroikan Straw Man Answers Back: David Laitin and Phronetic Political Science.” *Politics & Society* 32 (3): 389–416.

George, Alexander L. 1994. “The Two Cultures of Academia and Policy-Making: Bridging the Gap.” *Political Psychology*: 143–172.

George, Alexander L. 1997. “Knowledge for Statecraft: The Challenge for Political Science and History.” *International Security* 22 (1): 44–52.

Laitin, David D. 2003. “The Perestroikan Challenge to Social Science.” *Politics & Society* 31 (1): 163–184.

Laitin, David D. 2015. “A Tale of Two Eras: The Caucus and Perestroika.” *Perspectives on Politics* 13 (2): 420–422.

Levine, Daniel J., and David M. McCourt. 2018. "Why Does Pluralism Matter When We Study Politics? A View from Contemporary International Relations." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (1): 92–109.

Munck, Gerardo L., and Richard Snyder. 2007. "Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics: An Analysis of Leading Journals." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (1): 5–31.

Ward, Michael D. 2016. "Can We Predict Politics? Toward What End?" *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1 (1): 80–91.

Sample Question:

How have debates over methodology and relevance shaped the direction and identity of politic science as a field?

POLITICAL SCIENCE 3

The examination “**Political Science 3**” can only be taken by students enrolled in POU22011 (History of Political Thought A). It requires students to answer two questions relating to this module. There will be a total of five questions on the exam. There are no additional readings associated with this examination. A mastery of the materials taught in those lectures and contained on those syllabi (including of course any optional or additional reading suggestions) up to the end of the Michaelmas Term is sufficient preparation.

Students must answer two questions out of the **five** offered. All questions deal with material covered in POU22011 (History of Political Thought A).

Sample questions:

1. Ancient Athens was the birthplace of politics. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
2. Why did Plato oppose democracy in the Republic?

POLITICAL SCIENCE 4

The examination “Political Science 4” can only be taken by students enrolled in POU22031 (Comparative Politics A). It requires students to answer two questions relating to this module. There will be a total of five questions on the exam. There are no additional readings associated with this examination. A mastery of the materials taught in those lectures and contained on that syllabus (including of course any optional or additional reading suggestions) up to the end of the Michaelmas Term is sufficient preparation.

Students must answer two questions out of the five offered. All questions deal with material covered in POU22031 (Comparative Politics A).

Sample questions:

1. Do the ten characteristics that Lijphart uses to distinguish majoritarian from consensus democracies yield an accurate, useful and exhaustive list of the various types of democratic political systems?
2. Why does anyone bother to vote in elections?

POLITICAL SCIENCE 5

The examination “**Political Science 5**” can only be taken by students enrolled in POU22021 (International Relations A). It requires students to answer two questions relating to this module. There will be a total of five questions on the exam. There are no additional readings associated with this examination. A mastery of the materials taught in those lectures and contained on those syllabi (including of course any optional or additional reading suggestions) up to the end of the Michaelmas Term is sufficient preparation.

Students must answer two questions out of the **five** offered. All questions deal with material covered in POU22021 (International Relations A).

Sample questions:

1. Is Keohane’s explanation of international cooperation the same as Axelrod’s explanation of cooperation between egoists? Answer drawing on readings and IR theory.
2. Under what circumstances do domestic lobby groups matter in international politics? Answer drawing on readings and IR theory.

POLITICAL SCIENCE 6

The examination “**Political Science 6**” can only be taken by students enrolled in POU22040 (Introduction to Political Science Research).

A mastery of the materials taught in those lectures and contained on those syllabi (including of course any optional or additional reading suggestions) up to the end of the Michaelmas Term is sufficient preparation. There are no additional readings associated with this examination.

Students must answer two questions out of the **five** offered. All questions deal with material covered in POU22040 (Introduction to Political Science Research).

Sample questions:

1. What does it mean to be an ethical researcher in Political Science?
2. How should a piece of research in Political Science be evaluated?
3. “Political scientists cannot produce research that has both internal and ecological validity.” Evaluate this statement.