

Robinson History & Politics

In their first year (known as Part IA) all History and Politics students take three core papers – POL1: The Modern State and its Alternatives, POL2: International Conflict, Order and Justice, and an interdisciplinary paper called Evidence and Argument – together with an outline paper in History. We have expanded the range of History papers available since we published the prospectus for 2018 entry, so we thought it would be useful to give you some more information about the first-year course.

Once your offer has been confirmed, or possibly sooner, your college will ask you to choose your History paper from the following six options:

- British Political History, 1485-1714 (History Paper 4)
- British Political History, 1688-1886 (History Paper 5)
- British Political History since 1880 (History Paper 6)
- European History, 1715-1890 (History Paper 17)
- European History since 1890 (History Paper 18)
- North American History from c. 1500 to 1865 (History Paper 22)

Course descriptions for these papers, together with the current reading lists, can be found online at <http://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/prospective-undergrads/history-politics>.

Evidence and Argument

Evidence and Argument is our bridge paper for first-year History and Politics students which is designed to provide an introduction to key concepts, approaches, and methods from across the two disciplines. It will be taught through eight classes spread across Michaelmas Term and Lent Term, together with an accompanying series of lectures.

Both the History Faculty and the Department of Politics and International Studies at Cambridge are unusually broad and eclectic in their interests and approaches. In History, interests range from the traditional realm of ‘high’ politics to social and cultural history, the history of political thought, and the use of quantitative data to reconstruct economic and demographic changes which stretch across decades or even centuries. Some Politics lecturers see themselves as ‘political scientists’, developing theories and models which seek to explain processes of political change, whilst others eschew social science and focus on understanding the meanings and intentions of political actors. Why do these disciplinary choices matter? How do they shape the kinds of evidence we use and the arguments we construct?

Evidence and Argument will explore these questions through six case studies, based on original sources and ongoing research projects. It will be examined through a coursework essay of 3,000-4,000 words and a 1.5-hour written exam.

Suggestions for background reading

Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (1997; paperback edition, 2001)
John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2004)
David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (2002)
Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (2012)
Stefan Berger et al. (eds.), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (2003; second edition, 2010)
Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists* (2016)
Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (1962 and subsequent editions)
Russell Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (1996 and subsequent editions)
Iain McLean, *Public Choice: An Introduction* (1987)

POL1: The Modern State and its Alternatives

This paper is one of the two first-year Politics papers taken by students in History and Politics and Human, Social and Political Sciences (HSPS). It seeks to understand the practical and imaginative foundations of modern politics and the reaction and resistance to them: the title of the paper was changed in 2016 to reflect this focus. POL1 is structured around set texts, which are not there to be analysed as texts per se but to be considered for the arguments they contain.

The paper begins with the modern state – the predominant basis on which political authority and power are constructed across the world today to try to avoid disorder. Where there is no modern state, there tends to be civil war or occupation by other states. Where modern states are ineffective, politics is unstable and sometimes violent, and governments struggle to manage the economy. But the modern state also is a site of violence and an instrument of power that has been used at times in history to inflict suffering on those subject to its coercive capacity at home and imperial reach abroad.

Within modern states, representative democracy has become the predominant form of government in the world. As an idea it excites because it appears to offer equality, liberty and self-rule, but it also frequently disappoints in practice as it rarely does realise these values and the goods it promises frequently clash with each other. The second part of the paper looks at the origins of representative democracy. It seeks largely, although not exclusively, through the American experience of democracy to unpack the paradoxes of representative democracy as a form of government that rhetorically invokes the ‘rule of the people’, the apparent historical success of representative democracy, and its relationship to the conditions of material prosperity and the distribution of wealth.

The final part of the paper examines the coherence and persuasiveness of a number of political critiques of the modern state and representative democracy and the nature of disagreement in politics. It considers the critique made by Marx of the democratic modern state as the capitalist state, Gandhi’s rejection of the violence and alienated sovereignty of modern politics in search of a return to a soul-based civilisation, and Fanon’s critique of colonisation by European modern states. It concludes by

contemplating the nature of political disagreement itself in relation to human nature and the problems of modern politics.

POL1 will be taught through supervisions and lectures spread across Michaelmas Term and Lent Term, and will be examined through a 3-hour written exam.

Suggestions for background reading

David Runciman, *Politics* (2014)

John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (1979 and subsequent editions)

Alan Ryan, *On Politics* (2012)

POL2: International Conflict, Order and Justice

POL2 is Cambridge's first-year international relations paper which, like POL1, is taken by students in History and Politics and HSPS. It is designed to introduce students to politics beyond the state. The dominant traditions in the study of international relations in the West since World War II have emphasized the power of and relations among states – their conflicts and efforts at coordination. But as new global realities have emerged in recent decades, new theoretical approaches have emerged which seek to re-interpret conventional histories of international order. The paper was revised and the title changed in 2016 to incorporate these new approaches.

Some critics of mainstream international relations argue that scholars need to pay more attention to actors beyond the state – such as international organizations, social movements, multinational corporations, or terrorist groups – in order to understand international politics. Others have argued that the traditional focus on interaction between states has obscured the ways in which alternative logics – such as race, gender, or supposed civilizational divides – shape the world we live in. This paper seeks to explore international politics in the broadest sense – allowing students to make up their own mind on what issues matter, whose experiences should be the basis for theory, and what methodological tools we can use in this pursuit.

POL2 is taught through supervisions and lectures spread across Michaelmas Term and Lent Term, and will be examined through a 3-hour written exam.

Suggestions for background reading

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963)

Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan* (2003)

Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2004)

Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2008)

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climat*