UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Politics and
International Studies

HUMAN, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE TRIPOS POLITICS

PART II EXAMINERS' REPORTS

2021-2022

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR EXAMINER

Professor Chris Bickerton

This exam board covers the Politics and International Relations track and the Politics and Sociology track within the HSPS tripos, at both Part IIA and Part IIB.

Examination procedures continue to be heavily marked by the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most notably, an open book examination approach, with students taking exams on their own computers in their own rooms, and then submitting them online, was retained for this year. The most significant difference from last year was that the window for examinations was reduced to three hours, which is a return to the time of regular closed book exams. There was no official word limit for examination scripts this year. Mitigation measures introduced in previous years were no longer in place.

Maintaining this online open book method has raised a number of questions this year. From an operational perspective, there were errors made during the examination period stemming from links to wrong examination papers being sent to students. In one case, POL16, the examiner had to rewrite their examination paper entirely because it had been mistakenly released to students by the exam team. This puts a great deal of unnecessary stress on examiners in addition to what comes with the marking loads. If the online open book format is to be retained, there needs to be a full overhaul of the way this format is run and the relevant central university teams responsible for administering these examinations. This matter needs to be taken up with some urgency by the central university authorities.

Apart from these operational failures, the administration of the examinations proceeded smoothly this year. This was the result of very hard work by the undergraduate administrator and by a number of people around her in the POLIS administrative office who generously gave up their time to assist during the examination period. They are all very warmly thanked. The online Moodle site used by examiners and assessors, as well as by the external examiners, worked well this year.

Examiners and assessors worked hard to return their marks on time. A variety of extensions to marking deadlines were granted over the course of Easter term, mostly the result of staff illness. All markers worked hard and are to be thanked.

The two external examiners were Professor Juanita Elias (Warwick) and Dr Matt Sleat (Sheffield). This was the second year of service for our external examiners and they performed their duties to a very high standard. Scripts were returned promptly, moderation and adjudication of disputes was done in a reasoned and thoughtful way. POLIS very much hopes that next year they will be able to attend the exam board in person.

There was only one instance of minor plagiarism dealt with by the exam board. All scripts were put through Turnitin and a 20% trigger was introduced. All scripts above 20% were looked at by the chair of exams. In almost every case, high scores were the result of direct quotation and reference lists. This was

noticeably the case for long essays where relatively high Turnitin scores were the result of detailed and meticulous quotation and referencing.

The overall results for Part IIA Politics and International Relations are as follows. Out of ninety-seven candidates, there were two Starred Firsts, sixteen Firsts, sixty-seven Upper Seconds, two Lower Seconds, two Thirds, one Fail, and seven candidates who withdrew. This means that 18.5% of candidates receive either a Starred First or a First. 69% of candidates received an Upper Second.

For Part IIA Politics and Sociology, the results are as follows. Out of forty candidates, there was one Starred First, nine Firsts, twenty seven Upper Seconds, one Lower Second, one Third and one candidate withdrew. This means that 25% of candidates received either a Starred First or a First. 67.5% of candidates received an Upper Second.

The overall results for Part IIB Politics and International Relations are as follows. Out of seventy-four candidates, there were no Starred Firsts, there were twenty-six Firsts, forty-one Upper Seconds, two Lower Seconds, one Third, one Fail, and three candidates withdrew. This means that 35% of candidates received a First. 55.4% of candidates received an Upper Second.

For Part IIB Politics and Sociology, the results are as follows. Out of twenty-seven candidates, there was one Starred First, seven Firsts, seventeen Upper Seconds, no Lower Seconds, no Thirds, and two candidates withdrew. This means that 30% of candidates received either a Starred First or a First. 63% of candidates received an Upper Second.

Gender Breakdown of Results

Dr Glen Rangwala

The ability of POLIS to conduct an audit of exam marks by students' demographic characteristics is limited solely to a binary classification of gender. The university's information hub (Tableau) produces summaries of results by

other characteristics, but these are for the Triposes as a whole (HSPS and History & Politics) and only use the overall class mark of the student. This makes it of limited value in analysing any awarding gaps specifically within POLIS. The information about this examination round will only appear on Tableau in 2023. The Department's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group continues to try to obtain better information from the university so as to conduct its own, more timely, analysis.

Working then just with binary characterisations of gender, the results from the 2022 examinations are that there is a significant awarding gap for students taking second year papers (HSPS Part IIA, History and Politics Part IB) with male students doing better than female students, and a smaller awarding gap for students taking third year papers (HSPS Part IIB, History and Politics Part II). This can be seen with both the proportion of students awarded firsts (including starred firsts), and with the average marks received.

The results are similar to those from 2021, despite notable differences in examination format and classing system. The existence of the same pattern in 2022 as in 2021 is striking as last year's second years are this year's third years, and so the differences cannot be straightforwardly explained by the pre-existing ability of the students themselves.

Here is the information for the past two years. The classing information is for only the two HSPS tracks that are administered by POLIS – those in Politics & International Studies and Politics & Sociology. The average mark is all students taking those tracks (that is, it does not include History & Politics students, those from other HSPS tracks and students from other Triposes who borrow POLIS papers). The awarding gap is stated as female minus male.

	Difference in % of students awarded firsts (female – male)		Difference in average mark of students (female – male)	
	Second years	Third years	Second years	Third years
2021	-10.9%	+0.3%	-1.00	+0.34
2022	-6.8%	-3.4%	-1.64	+1.61

In short, the awarding gap that means that more male students receive higher marks in their second years than female students is reduced or even reversed in the third year (though note that there is still an small awarding gap in third year male students receiving more first class results than female students in 2022, notwithstanding how female students receive on average slightly higher marks).

Broken down by POLIS paper, and looking at all students in both History & Politics and HSPS taking those papers, in both years POL3 and POL4 had a significant awarding gap that advantaged male students (2022: -2.6 for POL3, -3.3 for POL4; in 2021: -3.1 for POL3, -0.9 for POL4). With over 100 students on each paper in each year, these gaps are significant. POL5, POL7 and POL8 also had significant gaps in 2022 though smaller than POL3 and POL4 (-1.7, -1.3 and -1.9 marks respectively).

By contrast, few third year papers had awarding gaps in 2022 larger than 1 mark. POL9 still has a reputation among some students as privileging male students, but there is no recent indication that this is so. In 2021, the gap was +0.5 marks (that is, women did on average very slightly better than men) and in 2022, it was -0.2 marks, which is statistically insignificant. The only third year papers with more than 5 of both female and male students that had awarding gaps of more than 1 mark was POL16, which had a gap of +1.1 (that is the average mark of female students was 1.1 points higher than that of male students on this paper).

This finding, which is largely consistent over two years, remains puzzling, and worthy of further attention. There are no straightforward reasons why female students tend to do worse, across all papers, in the second year than male students, but do as well in the third year. Looking at this through other characteristics, particularly the educational backgrounds of the students, may yield more compelling explanations than further speculation on the basis of these findings alone.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Examiner: Professor Juanita Elias (University of Warwick)

This is my second year as external examiner – I'd like to say thank you to Chris and Rosalie for what was an exceptionally smooth and easy to process. Using Moodle to access scripts and marksheets and other documents relating the examination process was very straightforward. As with last year, the provision of benchmark essays to assist with the moderation process was very useful.

As was also the case for the 2020/1 academic year, I was extremely impressed by the quality of the written work that I reviewed. The two dissertations that I looked at were both exceptional pieces of first class work. The exam answers were generally of a high standard. The changes to the examination process (shorter online examination window compared to last year's 6 hour open book examinations) are, in my view, to be welcomed. The examinations that I looked at certainly had more of the feel of 'exam answers' about them compared to the polished essays that were produced under last year's conditions. I have not been able to compare the overall spread of grades between last year and this year as this information was not available to me – but it would appear that students continue to produce high quality work, even with the shorter exam timeframe.

I understand from my conversations with Dr Bickerton that there are wider concerns across the department about the reproduction of unassessed seminar essays in exams. We have had a similar issue at Warwick with students reproducing formative essay work in their summative essays, but are less aware of this being an issue in examinations. Our advice has been to students that they should avoid doing this, but it is not something that we are able to penalise under rules around self-plagiarism/academic standards. A tighter policing of overlap between seminar essay questions and exam questions might be useful. More generally on assessment, POLIS does have a rather conservative assessment regime (exams and essays). These methods certainly have pedagogical merit and students do like the familiarity/certainty of such an assessment regime. However, given that there is a certain level of dissatisfaction with open book online examinations, this could also be an opportunity to initiate discussion about the wider pedagogical benefits of looking to alternative/more innovative assessment methods which might stretch students further and develop a wider skill-set. Finally given the clustering of students in the 2:1 category – I do think that your marking criteria could make more explicit the

differences between low, mid and high 2:1 grades. I would be happy to share with you the marking criteria that we use at Warwick in which the differences between high, mid and low 2:1 grades are clearly set out for students.

Overall I was asked to look at the following

(a) Marking discrepancies – where the markers could not agree a mark. Of which there were 6 cases with marks ranging from 57 to 80 (two of which were dissertations)

(b) Borderline cases – in which a slight movement in the grade towards one of the grades given by a marker could result in them falling into a higher-class mark overall. There were 18 cases that needed to be looked at.

(c) Three essays on POL17 (Gender & Politics) – a module that had a slightly higher overall average mark compared to other modules. I confirmed that I felt that the grades given were appropriate and grades should not be revised downwards.

I was not given any failing scripts to look at.

I was not asked to look at any plagiarism cases.

In terms of process, it is very useful to be provided with marker comments – especially in cases of marking discrepancies (these came in an excel file and this was very much appreciated). I asked for mark books to be made available also for the decision making around borderline cases. This was generally useful, although the quality of comments varied and sometimes were hard to find. It would be very useful to provide marker comments with the borderline cases as was the case for the marking discrepancies.

These very minor concerns aside, I felt very confident that the examination process was robust and fair. The process was also well managed throughout.

Examiner: Dr Matt Sleat (University of Sheffield)

To begin, I'd just like to register a note of thanks to Rosalie and Chris who accommodated my inability to make it up to Cambridge from London during the period of the exam board and pre-meetings due to the rail strikes and for enabling me to do the external examining work remotely. And I would like to thank them for running a very efficient operation.

I do not have too much to say in my report this year. As ever, the very best work that your students produce is of the very highest quality and I was particularly impressed this year with the dissertations I had the privilege to read. Across the board, and so not just with the very best work, I was struck by the degree of intellectual independence and confidence with which students approached their assessment and which was a delight to see. And though the external examiners' were not required to be involved in awarding the prizes this year, I did take a look at the winning pieces of work and they were truly impressive works of scholarship that fully deserved the recognition.

I am aware that there is a discussion within the Department about the future of the open-book exams and I can see why this is an issue for you, although something of a relatively unique problem given your use of supervision or non-assessed essays throughout students' studies.

I think there's two things for me to say here.

I did notice a clear distinction between exams which made heavy use of secondary sources and/or statistics and data in their answers, which would have been made possible by students' access to the internet or previous work, and those exams which did not. Interestingly, this did not correspond with success in terms of grades. There were several cases I'd looked at where students had provided answers that were data heavy or relied on much secondary literature but where that either detracted from the overall quality by, for instance, them trying to do too much in the space of a single answer or where it became evident this was essentially a form of 'padding' for students who did not really know

how to answer the question. Indeed, I would say that in the majority of borderline cases I looked at this was the main issue.

One way of maybe thinking about this is that as the experience of writing essays, dissertations, and exams become more similar, it is understandable that their distinctiveness as forms of assessment, aiming to test different sorts of skills and abilities, might begin to blur in students' minds. So, whereas you might expect essays or dissertations to marshal larger amounts of data and secondary sources in defence of an argument, that isn't the same expectation we have in exams. What makes for a good exam answer is not necessarily the same as what makes for a good long essay. And if the open-book exams are here to stay one thing I imagine you'll need to be doing a lot of is making that clear to students so they know what expectations are in place for the different assessments.

But clearly the biggest general issue here is the fact that students are able to make use, if they so wish, of supervision or unassessed essays from their studies. Matters are complicated by the fact that while there is clearly something against the spirit and purpose of exams that students can essentially cut and paste previous work, it is not clear that this is necessarily unethical in terms of representing forms of self-plagiarism seeing as they were not assessed. I'm afraid I do not see any easy options here, and as we've done away completely with exams at Sheffield I do not really have any experience of what might work. Where I encountered exams where the answers did not seem to directly address the question as you would expect, I did wonder whether this was because students' have tried to shoehorn supervision essays into their answers where they weren't completely relevant. There is no way, of course, of knowing if this was the case. But it certainly does seem important that those who run the papers ensure that the exam and supervision questions are sufficiently distinct such that students are only going to be disadvantaged by over-use of previous material, and that this is communicated clearly to the students. This cannot be put in terms of direct penalties for, again, this isn't strictly self-plagiarism, but the point can be stressed that the exam questions will be dissimilar enough from their supervision essays that they are highly unlikely to benefit from using previous work.

As with last year, the examination process seemed rigorous, robust, and fair, and I have been deeply impressed by what I have seen, so I'd just end my report by congratulating everyone involved with the examination process at Cambridge for another job well done.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

POL3: International Organisation
Examiner: Dr Giovanni Mantilla

One hundred twenty-three scripts were received from students taking the POL3 exam this year, requiring 2 answers to be written in response to 13 possible question choices. This resulted in 30 Firsts, 74 2:1s, 16 2:2s, and 2 3rds, and 1 Fail. The average mark was 65 and the standard deviation 8.39.

With 85% of students doing excellently or very well in the exam (earning a 2:1 or above, compared to 80% last year), these are rather remarkable results, not least given the return of the three-hour examination timeframe. Although the proportion of Firsts dipped somewhat (24.4%, from 35% in 2020-21,) this year a much larger proportion students (60% versus 46% in 2020-21) managed to produce persuasive, well-argued and well-written essays, earning them 2:1 marks. Fewer students received marks below a 2:1 this year (15.5%) versus last year (20%).

These results suggest that the shorter (3-hour) timeframe does not hinder students' ability to do well or very well in the exam, although it may somewhat constrain the capacity of some to produce excellent, innovative First-class arguments "on the spot".

Overall, the POL3 Examiners are extremely satisfied by these results, which we read as a testament to the hard work of students and of the POL3 teaching team. Congratulations to all!

Of particular note this year was students' (generalized and positive) tendency to offer arguments in their answers rather than to rely on summaries. The only limited (and often-negative) effect of the open-book format seemed to have been students' use of pre-written text from supervision or mock exam essays to construct their examination answers. We hasten to add that this is a risky practice that tends to hinder students more than to help them. While a few students were able to successfully adapt pasted text to respond to the exam question actually being asked, most others were not, with their marks suffering in turn. Generally we discouraged the use of recycling pre-written text; happily, the overwhelming majority of students heeded our advisee, to their benefit.

Responses to questions were again unevenly distributed. Whether the question was more explicitly theoretical or explicitly thematic/empirical however did not seem to matter in terms of results: both types of questions elicited very good as well weaker answers. The average individual score for all questions ranged from 65 to 68, except for questions 4, 10, 11, and 12 which were each answered by fewer than 10 students.

There were 8 outstanding exams receiving marks of 75 and above. These exams featured essays that made clear, consistent, and compelling arguments showing a sophisticated understanding of diverse readings, also combining theoretical and empirical points to level original critiques of the literature. The twenty-two exams in the 70-74 range also had clear, consistent and compelling arguments showing deep understanding of a reasonably wide range of readings.

Exams in this upper (70+) range generally include a roadmap section indicating the steps to be taken by the essay, and generally followed them. They featured a strong authorial voice, announced and defended an argument throughout the essays, and demonstrated analytical nuance by considering counterarguments, or by referring to scope conditions, whether historical or theoretical.

Among those in the 60s range, those towards the top of the range made clear and consistent -- if mostly conventional – arguments, using a reasonable number of readings. Some faults included perhaps an odd mishandled or misinterpreted text, briefly lapsing into summarizing, a slightly narrow analytical focus, and/or some flaws in the organisation and structure of the answer. The lower 2:1s

tended to have more of a combination of these faults.

The exams in the 50-59 range -- despite having some discernable argument – tended to feature one or more of the following flaws: an inability to sustain the argument, long unstructured sections, reliance on a very narrow range of readings, or reasonably serious misunderstandings of the readings.

The three exams below 50 did not have a clear arguments, featured important contradictions and/or non-sequiturs, wavered in their argumentation, went into tangents, or simply offered a pastiche of snippets from the readings without clearly relating to the question asked.

The only failing exam resulted from the student answering one question (poorly) rather than two.

POL4: Comparative Politics

Examiner: Dr Tomas Larsson

This year 172 students took this paper. The exam followed the usual format, consisting of 9 questions on the general section of the paper (Section A) and 2 questions for each of the country modules taken in Michaelmas term (Sections B-H). Students were asked to answer a total of three questions, one from Section A and two from different module sections.

The distribution of marks was as follows: 39 students obtained a first-class mark; 112 students obtained a 2.1 mark; 19 students obtained a 2.2 mark; 2 students obtained a third-class mark. The average mark for the paper was 65.

Some questions were clearly more popular among students than others. In Section A 38 students attempted Q2 while no student attempted Q8. For the module sections, all questions were answered. However, in some modules there was a markedly uneven spread between the two questions. For instance, close to 90 percent of students taking the Brazil-Bolivia module and the France-

Germany module answered Q18 and Q21, respectively. Answers were more evenly spread within the other country modules.

The overall quality of the scripts was high. However, a common mistake, to which the exam conditions may have contributed, was for students to recycle materials from past supervision essays. Examiners encountered many such 'cut-and-paste' answers, which often provided a discussion relevant to the general topic of the question but generally failed to answer the precise exam question. Many answers to Q4, for instance, failed to notice that the question is not (just) about authoritarian stability but rather an invitation to compare authoritarian and democratic regimes. In a similar vein, answers to Q7 often proceeded on the basis of hazy notions of what 'fragmentation' of a national party system might refer to. Another common mistake was to ignore key terms of the question. For instance, two questions referred to trajectories ('economic trajectories' in Q13 and 'regime trajectories' in Q23) but many answers failed to specify what, more precisely, these might refer to. As has been the case in past years, the very best answers demonstrated a firm grasp of such conceptual matters and provided direct and precise answers to the questions asked.

Students generally demonstrated very good familiarity with, and understanding of, politics in different parts of the world. However, they did not always make as good analytical use of empirical 'cases' in their answers as might be possible. This was particularly evident in Section A, where the very best answers tended to use different cases to make different analytical points, while weaker answers tended to use several different cases to drum home a single point. For instance, the stronger answers to Q2 tended to discuss cases where war had been an obstacle to state formation but also cases where it had not, and the stronger answers to Q5 tended to discuss cases of elite-driven democratization alongside cases where other factors loomed larger. Answers based on an explicit recognition of variation in political experiences across time and space tended to develop more complex, nuanced, and insightful arguments.

POL5 & POL19: Themes and Issues in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

POL5 and POL19 were operating on a larger scale than ever before, with almost a hundred questions offered to the various candidates to choose from. Of the 272 essays that were dealt with by the Examiners, 83 were First class (70 or more, of which twelve were 75+); 163 were Upper Seconds (60-69); 21 were Lower Second (50-59); four were Third class (40-49); with one received a failing mark. The mean mark was 66.4, the median was 67, and the mode was 66.

Stronger essays were praised for a number of reasons: they were accomplished and original, subtle and engaging, mature and confident, interesting, insightful and compelling, they were well researched and analytically rich, contained a clearly-stated argument that was persuasively and methodically presented and sustained throughout, they proceeded from a sharp conceptual foundation and developed a broad-ranging analysis, they addressed counterarguments systematically, they were well structured, they stayed focused on the question, engaging critically with the way it was posed, they focused on a manageable number of central points, they selected case studies intelligently, they were well anchored in the relevant scholarship, which was synthesised effectively, they deployed a wide range of sources effectively, and a wide range of interesting examples, they were well informed and carefully referenced, their conclusions were underpinned by appropriate evidence, they were thoughtful, showed independence of mind, and were well written.

Weaker essays, by contrast, were criticised for being overly descriptive, poorly structured, lacking a clear or persuasive argument, paying insufficient attention to the building blocks of the argument, not sustaining their argument over the length of the essay, not presenting enough evidence to support the argument, offering assertions instead of argument, wildly overstating claims, including the making of grand claims that did not stand up to scrutiny, presenting examples without consideration of their context, not grounding the discussion in the existing academic literature, leaving too much unsaid as if the reader can fill in the details for themselves, being too abstract and broad brush, answering a different question to the one at the head of the essay, losing sight of or being insufficiently focused on the particular question, in particular focusing on normative argument when that was not what was asked for, discussing historical periods other than the one specifically picked out by the essay question, lacking a sense of comparative perspective, insufficient engagement with counterarguments, adopting overly-broad categories, failing to link specific

claims to the broader question under examination, conceptual imprecision (including contorted definitions of concepts, or concepts being deployed when it remains vague just how they are being defined), over-reliance on particular sources, misunderstanding the theoretical sources or historical material being deployed, repetition, overuse of jargon, and having excessively short bibliographies, as well as for errors in the presentation, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typography.

POL6: Statistics and Methods in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

As in previous years, the assessment for this paper consisted of a coursework element (a report of maximally 5000 words on a data analysis project) and an online exam (a two-hour exam). Both elements counted for 50% of the overall mark. This year 44 candidates submitted the coursework assignment and 45 candidates took the exam (18 HSPS Part IIA, 10 HSPS Part IIB, 16 History & Politics Part 1B, 1 History & Politics Part 2).

There were many good results, but also considerable variation. More specifically:

- For the *overall marks*, the average mark was 63.9, with 11 candidates receiving a First class mark, 26 candidates a 2.1 mark (2 of which were 69), 4 candidates a 2.2 mark, one candidate a third class mark, and 3 candidates a Fail mark.

- For the *coursework element*, the average mark was 64.1, with 13 candidates receiving a First class mark, 23 candidates a 2.1 mark, 6 candidates a 2.2 mark, one candidate a third class mark, and one candidate a Fail mark.

- For the *exam*, the average mark was 62.2, with 10 candidates receiving a First class mark (which included marks of 80 and 79), 23 candidates a 2.1 mark, 7 candidates a 2.2 mark, one candidate a third class mark, and 3 candidates a Fail mark.

It was noteworthy that while 21 candidates received at least one First class mark for an element of the course, only two candidates obtained First class marks for both the coursework and exam elements.

For the coursework, candidates had to choose a topic from a provided list. The choices of topics were as follows: 19 candidates investigated voting behaviour in elections, 8 candidates focused on patterns of conflict, 6 candidates looked at attitudes towards globalisation, 5 candidates undertook a project on Sustainable Development Goals, 4 candidates chose the topic of the political dynamics of the COVID-pandemic, and 3 candidates focused on patterns of corruption.

The characteristics of the data analyses and reports were similar to previous years, and there was some extremely good work. Almost all reports presented a clear research question and a quantitative analysis to address it. The best reports presented convincing interpretations of the statistical results. They provided good accounts of the data that were used and analysed. The reasons for why some reports did not receive marks higher than a 2.1 were very similar to previous years: some lack of clarity in the links between theoretical arguments and statistical results; a lack of balance between the different aspects of the report (e.g. too much emphasis on background literature and descriptive statistics); a failure to mention descriptive statistics and/or regression assumptions; and sometimes mistakes in the interpretation of model results. A few reports had a confusing focus and/or limited statistical analyses, and received lower marks. It is, once again, worth emphasising that the best reports usually had a relatively narrow but well specified focus, which allowed the effective use of existing literature and provided sufficient to present data, variables and results.

The large majority of exam scripts provided competent answers to the questions, with some truly excellent scripts that provided clear and concise interpretations of results and thoughtful reflections on the statistical analyses that were presented. As in the past, some candidates were let down by not reading the questions carefully enough and failing to answer some parts of them. The scripts that received low 2.1 or 2.2 marks usually made some mistakes in the statistical interpretation of results and included limited detail on the substantive interpretation of these results.

It was concerning that several scripts received Fail marks this year (which then also led to several candidates receiving an overall Fail mark for the paper). These scripts failed to answer several questions, and – in the questions that were

answered – showed only a limited understanding of the issues covered in the paper. The nature of these scripts suggested that these candidates had not engaged much with the paper in the course of the year. If students keep up with the taught material in Michaelmas term and the beginning of Lent term, and come to the practical sessions and supervisions, then there will certainly be no danger of failing the paper.

POL7: The History of Political Thought to c. 1700
Examiner: Dr Sylvana Tomaselli

37 POL7 scripts were submitted in 2022 (compared to 45 in 2021, 24 in 2020, 47 in 2019, 42 in 2018, and 38 in 2017). The quality of most of these scripts reflected the excellence of the lectures offered for this paper as candidates did not simply reproduce the knowledge they had acquired from them, but showed considerable understanding of the concepts, issues, and contexts covered by the lecturers. The average mark across all scripts was like last year just under 67. However, some answers were unquestionably deserving of the very high firsts (high 70s, indeed 80) that they received.

What contributed to making these scripts outstanding is that their authors thought about the wording of the questions very carefully. They made most of the opportunity these terms opened up to display detailed knowledge and responsiveness to nuanced phrasing. Thus, they addressed what the people had been blamed for by the different critics of democracy in ancient Athens in answering question 9: 'Did opposition to democracy amount to no more than blaming the people'. The less impressive scripts merely listed what was said by critics about the ignorance and self-interestedness of the people. Such answers did not tackle the question as it stood. Likewise, candidates who tackled the More question divided between those who reflected on what might (or might not) be deemed fairness and those who did not in answering: 'Does the 'fairness' that is identified by Raphael Hythloday as a key quality of the Utopian commonwealth imply it should be regarded as a democracy'. The best essays reflected on the nature of fairness in Utopia, whether its governance could be deemed democratic, and whether a conception of fairness related to its governance. Amongst the very best answers were some on Aristotle and Roman political thought.

There were 12 first-class marks, 5 lower seconds, and the rest obtained upper seconds. There 16 answers on Plato, 17 on Machiavelli, 11 on More, 7 on Locke, and 6 on Aristotle. All other authors were discussed by at least one

candidate, with the question on Aquinas receiving 2 very strong answers. It may be that the question on Hobbes was deemed particularly challenging as it met with little response. Candidates who were not familiar with Machiavelli's *Discourses* inevitably struggled with the question: 'What is the significance of Machiavelli's claim, in his *Discourse on Livy*, that the ancient Romans were more virtuous than they were fortunate?'. In such cases, they wrote of *fortuna* in *The Prince*, with no less inevitable consequences. For the Plato question, 'Is Plato's ideal city best seen as an attempt to satisfy the requirements of human nature?', some reflected on the precise requirements of human nature according to Plato's *Republic*, considered the city of pigs as well the ideal city in relation to meeting such requirements, and specified whose (if not all human beings) requirements might or might not be met in Kallipolis.   In sum, whatever the topic candidates who read questions attentively, thought of the issues underpinning them, and demonstrated close attention to the detailed argumentation in the set texts wrote engaging scripts and were duly rewarded for doing so.

 In Section B, there were some impressive answers amongst the 6 that tackled Greek critics of democracy as well as those which discussed 'For early modern political theorists, how important was the question of origins in determining both the nature and the location of sovereign power?'. Weaker responses to the latter question tended to leave out or brush over one or more of the key terms 'origins', 'nature', or 'location'. All Section B questions received at least one answer bar two, namely 'To what extent did medieval thinkers recover the classical understanding of civic liberty?' and 'How important was justice in the resistance theories of the sixteenth century?'. The question on Roman political thought and early Christian thought each attracted 5 replies. The question of Renaissance humanist political thought ('How important in Renaissance humanist political thought is the use of comparison?') received most (8), some of which were very impressive in that they revealed extensive reading of the texts and the scholarly literature. They noted comparisons between individuals as well as regimes and specified the precise nature of their use by various Renaissance humanists.

As Dr Chris Brooke noted in his report for this paper last year 'a small number of essays did read as if they had their origin in supervision essays that were addressing a different question altogether, and candidates do need to be advised on the one hand that it's pretty obvious what they are doing when they hand in an essay that speaks more to the themes of, say, last year's Tripos question on a particular topic than to the question in front of them, and that on the other hand they are never likely to do especially well if they do that.' It is to be hoped that

candidates do not resort to such strategies in 2023 and that Dr Brooke's comment will therefore not need repeating.

POL8: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890

Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

One hundred and five candidates sat this paper, working remotely on an open-book basis, and with a three-hour time limit.

Overall, the general standard of answers was lower than in previous years. Eighteen candidates were awarded a mark of 70 or above; seventy-eight candidates received a mark in the 60-69 range; seven in the 50-59 range; one in the 40-49 range; and one received a mark below 40. The median mark was 66; the mean was 65.4. The shorter time allotted for the exam may have played a role in this, but it was also noticeable that a number of candidates were making extensive use of material that did not directly bear on the question asked. In at least some cases there was evidence to suggest the use of material from supervision essays or notes with little regard to its relevance to the question. As ever, it cannot be emphasised enough that strong answers focus closely on the question posed; a generic overview of the topic is not sufficient. The best candidates displayed in-depth, first-hand knowledge of the set texts and provided analytical rather than merely descriptive answers to the questions.

There were 177 answers on Section A topics and 138 on Section B topics. All questions received at least one answer. Overwhelmingly, the most popular A topic was Wollstonecraft (46 answers), followed by Rousseau (27), Mill (21), Marx (18), Burke (13), Bentham (11), Constant (9), Kant (7), Hegel (7), Hume (5), Smith (5), Montesquieu (4) and Tocqueville (4). For Section B, Gender and Political Thought was most popular (40 answers), followed by Empire and Civilization (34), Nationality and the Theory of the State (17), the French Revolution (14), the American Revolution (10), Luxury and Commercial Society (9), Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany (7), Socialism before 1848 (3), Social Science (3) and Natural Law and Sociability (1). The spread of marks across topics was less than it has been in some previous years, though candidates outperformed the mean mark on Natural Law and Sociability, Kant, Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany, Luxury and Commercial Society, Hume, Burke, Bentham, American Revolution, and Wollstonecraft. On

average, candidates performed marginally better on Section A than Section B. The three topics with the lowest average mark were (in descending order): the French Revolution, Nationality and the State, and Montesquieu.

Turning to individual topics, I begin with Hume. This was a relatively straight-forward question; weaker answers seemingly relied on lecture notes and were not fully in control of the conceptual linkages in Hume's argument; the better answers were more textually grounded. The Montesquieu question caused problems, with a number of candidates taking the reference to 'popular sentiment' as a warrant to restrict their discussion to republican forms of government, rather than think about the broader implications of the quotation. The Rousseau question received a few conceptually sharp answers, but there were rather too many instances of candidates giving a generic overview of Rousseau's thought with insufficient focus on the concept of the general will. On Smith, most candidates had a sense of what was at stake in the question, but answers engaged less closely with Part IV of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* than would have been desirable. Burke attracted some solid answers, confident in the contrasts they drew between his treatment of the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution. Several candidates were able to draw on Burke's pre-revolutionary writings to elaborate their answer. The best answers gave a sophisticated account of his thinking about the foundations of political society, political judgement and the politics of necessity, drawing variously on Bourke, Bromwich, Pocock and Armitage. There were some very strong answers to the Wollstonecraft question, which combined full treatment of the first *Vindication* with thoughtful, and in some cases rather original, discussion of its relation to Wollstonecraft's wider œuvre. Conversely, some candidates displayed only a limited knowledge of this text, and their answers suffered accordingly. For Kant, the standard of answer was generally high, though some candidates could have been clearer in distinguishing between the set texts. The question on Bentham gave scope for some nuanced treatment of the relationship between the principle of utility and variations in the positive law of different countries; the best answers took the opportunity to present Bentham as a more complex thinker than he sometimes appears. The question on Constant attracted a surprisingly large number of candidates who could not adequately define the word 'usurpation', and one or two whose knowledge of the primary texts did not appear to extend much beyond the lecture of 1819. Answers to the Hegel question tended towards the basic; it would have been good to see more discussion of the institutions of civil society and state. There were some good responses to the Tocqueville question, suggesting a decent knowledge of the text, though some candidates missed the significance of his comments about the

homogeneity of opinion in the upper echelons of French society. The best answers on Mill gave a clear explanation of the ways in which his utilitarianism differed from that of Bentham and proceeded to investigate tensions within his thought. Some candidates displayed an impressive knowledge of the intellectual context of Mill's works. Answers on Marx were typically constructed around a contrast between the discussion of alienation in the 1844 manuscripts and the analysis of commodification in *Capital* vol. 1. Done well, this could take answers quite far, but what was striking was that few candidates showed any awareness of the break with Feuerbach in 1845-6, or its implications for interpretation of the later works in the light of the early writings.

On Section B, leaving aside those topics for which the number of answers precludes meaningful generalization, we turn first to Luxury and Commercial Society. There was a pleasing breadth of material brought to bear on the question, with some good discussion of Melon and Ferguson. Over-reliance on Hont's essay on the early Enlightenment Luxury debate, often an issue in the past, was less evident this year. The American Revolution attracted some strong answers, many of which made effective use of material from lectures. Weaker answers failed to give sufficient attention to the constitutional debates of the 1780s, focusing instead on the 1760s and 1770s. The French Revolution question divided candidates, with some struggling to adapt material on representation to the question. The best answers found inventive ways to think about the relationship between the changing political context and the political thought of revolutionary actors. On Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany, the standard of discussion of the set texts was generally high, but almost all candidates could have usefully done more to distinguish criticism of the 'centralised state' from that of the 'mechanistic' or 'absolutist' state. The Gender and Political Thought topic attracted some very strong, conceptually-focused answers. Many candidates could marshal impressive amounts of exemplary material. Weaker candidates provided purely descriptive answers that lacked analytical depth. Nationality and the State was generally answered well with some strong discussion of Mazzini and Fichte. One candidate answered solely with reference to material from the Empire and Civilization topic; another answered predominantly with reference to C20th anti-colonial nationalism and the work of Benedict Anderson. In both cases the answers failed to adequately address the question. On the Empire topic, the standard was up on last year, with most candidates having something useful to say about the differences between settler colonies and the case of India, though some appeared to have only patchy knowledge of the Mill and Marx primary texts.

POL9: Conceptual Issues and Texts in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

There were seventy scripts for POL9. 21 received a First-class mark overall (of which ten were marked at 75 or higher); 45 an Upper Second; three a Lower Second; and one a Third. The median mark was 67, the mean 67.0, and the mode 68. Answers were nicely distributed across the range of questions on the exam paper. Every question was attempted at least once (though Q9 was attempted only once), and no question dominated attention. Three questions received more than ten attempts, with 15 for the question on international order (Q4), 14 for the question on the legacies of past injustice (Q2), and 12 for the question on technology (Q3). Students are often nervous in the face of POL9, insofar as they have no experience of taking an exam paper in timed conditions where they just have to write a single essay. On the basis of this batch they have no reason to be. The essays, almost without exception, were substantial, well-argued, and interesting.

Turning to the individual essay questions, those on whether politics was a game required more sustained attention to just what might be being claimed in saying that it was. The popular question on whether politics could overcome the legacies of past injustice saw essays drawing on a pleasingly wide range of theoretical perspectives (including Arendt, Césaire, Fanon, Foucault, Gandhi, Lenin, Nietzsche, Nkrumah, Said, Shklar, and Williams), though sometimes the balance between theoretical framing and empirical discussion required adjustment, usually in favour of the latter. Case studies were often African (Rwanda, Congo, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Burundi, Sierra Leone) and, less frequently, from the Middle East (Israel/Palestine, Iran, Syria), often in discussions of anti-colonial, post-colonial, or decolonising politics. Indeed, it was striking that when Anglo-American examples were deployed they always had a racial aspect: slavery, Black Lives Matter, Grenfell Tower.

Theorists informing the essays on technology and modern politics included Arendt, Castoriadis, Condorcet, Constant, Foucault, and Runciman. African case studies were quite popular, and while these were full of commendable empirical detail they sometimes struggled to sustain broader claims about the transformation of modern politics. Other essays, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on Facebook. Along the way there were some interesting treatments of

distinctions including state/civil society, public/private, and war/peace, and of questions relating to political participation.

The question on great powers and international order often focused on the United States in recent history, though strong essays often included discussion of the rise of China. Good essays moved back and forth between empirical material and some of the theoretical models in the literature. Less impressive were boilerplate accounts of the Liberal International Order, there were some curious choices of empirical detail, and some candidates might have reflected more on the relationship between "unilateral" action and international order.

Good answers to the question about whether we are living in post-democratic times were those that had a tighter grip on a plausible concept of "post-democracy" or on relevant arguments in political economy, In the absence of these, essays sometimes made things a little too easy for themselves, wandering off into discussions of "populism" in general and Donald Trump in particular, and substituting *bien pensant* opinion for rigorous argument. The essays on imagining politics beyond the climate crisis were strong, taking the question of "imagination" seriously and offering meaty empirical treatment, including serious attention to political economy ("green capitalism", Tooze, etc.)

Answers to the question on masculinity were informed by a good range of feminist theorists—Brown, Enloe, MacKinnon, Pateman, Young—sometimes juxtaposed against Hobbes and Tilly, but essays sometimes had too much of a tendency to survey gendered aspects of modern domestic and international politics rather than engaging in a focused way with the problem of "inextricability" picked out by the essay question, and sometimes the move from particular examples to a more general case proceeded more by insinuation than argument.

The essays on liars in politics were not sharply focused enough on the specific matter of lying, rather than, e.g., the "dirty hands" problem or thoughts about morality in politics more generally. The one essay on the Global North and Global South had a glorious simplicity to it, in the spirit of Lenin's famous question "who? whom?", and was very well done. Essays on politics and war were weaker, bringing relevant considerations into view or providing summaries of authorities' opinions when they might have been more energetically engaging in focused argument.

Stronger essays on the benefits of inequality worked closely with an interesting case study (Chile) or developed a complex philosophical argument; weaker essays were either too short, or focused too much on questions of equality rather

than inequality. And the essays on secular politics were always decent, including discussion of both Western and non-Western countries, but sometimes a bit more attention to particular cases (France, the US) was required in order to make their empirical claims persuasive.

POL10: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890

Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

Ten candidates sat this exam, which was conducted remotely, on an open-book basis, and in a three-hour window. The standard of answers was high. Four candidates received marks of 70 or above; five received marks in the 60-60 range; one received a mark in the 50-59 range. The mean mark was 66.4; the median mark was 66. In total, there were sixteen answers on Section A topics and fourteen on Section B. In two instances there was evidence to suggest more or less extensive use of previously-prepared materials with a corresponding drift in focus from the specific question at hand.

As was the case last year, answers were spread across a range of topics: four answers on Rousseau; three each on Wollstonecraft, the French Revolution, Gender and Political Thought, and Empire and Civilization; two on Kant and on Socialism before 1848; and one each for Hume, Montesquieu, Smith, Bentham, Constant, Hegel, Mill, Natural Law and Sociability, Luxury and Commercial Society, and Nationality and the State. Natural Law, Luxury and Commercial Society, Bentham and Constant attracted particularly strong answers; the weakest answers were on Wollstonecraft and the Gender topic. In the former case, weaker answers failed to give adequate attention to the concept of natural benevolence; in the second, weaker answers were very limited in conceptual depth. A similar remark might be made about the spread of marks in answers to the Rousseau, French Revolution and Empire and Civilization questions; what distinguished the better answers was a clear focus on the question, good knowledge of the primary texts and the issues they raise, and an analytical approach to the material. The same qualities characterise the best answers on this paper year in, year out.

POL11: Political Philosophy and the History of Political Thought since c.1890

Examiner: Professor Duncan Kelly

This year, 27 students took this paper from Part IIb HSPS (of which three did not submit a final examination), and 37 took it as a History paper, the latter comprising 20 from the History Tripos, 12 from History & Politics, and 5 from History & Modern Languages. This year, History students and HSPS students took the paper in different formats, with History students (including Joint Honours) sitting the examination in a five-hour window, with a firm word limit of 4500 words total per script, and HSPS students sitting the examination in a three-hour window, without an official word limit. For all students, the examination was open-book, open-note, and taken remotely. While the scripts varied in total length, word count was in no way a predictor of success, and many successful scripts were on the shorter side.

In 2022, each question received at least one answer, including at least one attempt at either a or b for the two-part questions. This use of the full range of the paper is encouraging, and suggests students are revising on a wider set of topics. In HSPS, the most popular questions in §A were on imperialism (8) Nietzsche (6), Second International Marxism (5), Weber (5), and Rawls (6), while in §B, patriotism/decolonization (6), and the history of political thought (5) had most takers. Among the several questions receiving no answers this year by HSPS candidates, Marxism and the First World War, Lukács, rights, ecology, the crisis of Weimar, and the early Frankfurt School. This stands in some contrast to the division between History and HSPS student choices over recent years, and is interesting to note. In the History and the History Joint Honours scripts, the most popular topics were Weber, Theorists and Critics of Imperialism, and Liberal Critics of Totalitarianism, with nine answers each. Punishment and Postcolonialism received eight answers each. Other popular topics included Nietzsche (5), Hayek (5), Politics and Morality (6), and Ecology and the Future of Humanity (6). Three questions received no answers from the History scripts, though were attempted by HSPS students: British Theorists of the State; State, Sovereignty, and Political Obligation; and 22a, on Patriotism and Nationalism (22b did receive answers). Several questions received only one answer: the Crisis of Weimar; The Earlier Frankfurt School; Theorists of Welfare and Democracy; Multiculturalism, Toleration, and Recognition (one each on parts a and b); and Equality, Needs, and Welfare. These sole answers

were often excellent. Efforts at questions that have previously been largely neglected by History students but often taken up by HSPS students, in particular International Relations and War, generated some truly outstanding answers from among the History scripts as well as HSPS.

This was a very impressive set of scripts, especially for having been written in yet another unusual and difficult year. Successful scripts provided clear and direct answers to the questions asked, using the question to structure and guide the response. The most successful scripts managed to open up, rather than close down, the question, taking the examination as an opportunity to consider the wider conceptual stakes of what was being asked, and showing attention to the nuance behind a seemingly straightforward answer. Weaker scripts often interpreted the question reductively, so that it would read in line with previous examination questions, with the risk (especially high for remote assessment) of appearing to rely on previous supervision material. Again in line with earlier reports, and all the more important for remote assessment, the best answers combined conceptual sophistication and nimbleness with a deep base of historical knowledge and keen selection of relevant sources.

The questions with a "two or more of the following" structure, or that otherwise invited a discussion of a subset from a list of authors, pose a particular kind of challenge. Here, offering a paragraph-by-paragraph summary of several authors in turn could produce some interesting essays, but in general did not generate first-class results. The strongest essays selected authors based on relevance to the question asked; even if the reasons for the selection were not initially obvious, the essay generated a justification for its selection through the argument about the authors' interconnections and the insights those connections might yield on the question as posed. In some cases, the best essays could still move author by author, yet would do so in a way that remained anchored in the question asked, avoiding irrelevant summary, and that was structured around a running argument, rather than appearing as a list of similarities and differences (or, in the lower II.1 range, a list of authors).

As stated previously, we are looking not only for knowledge, but for what one can do with that knowledge. This requires, in part, an understanding of the relevance of one's knowledge to the wider questions raised, and of the larger theoretical and political stakes of a historical moment (Section A) or

philosophical topic (Section B). Section B offers the most obvious opportunities to stake one's own claims and defend a clear philosophical stance, but similar opportunities are present in Section A as well. Making use of them requires close attention to texts, in a manner that goes beyond lecture material. The best responses were able to treat texts for their close nuance, complexities, and ambiguities, while also taking a stance on how we understand their status as both philosophical projects and political interventions.

POL12: The Politics of the Middle East

Examiner: Dr Glen Rangwala

The exam was taken by 24 students, of whom 5 received a mark in the 70-79 range, 14 received a mark in the 60-69 range, and 5 received a mark in the 50-59 range. Students taking it came from the Triposes in HSPS, History and Politics, and Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, and it was pleasing to see that there was at least one student in each of those Triposes who received a mark of 70+. Each script was each double-marked according to the same standards, irrespective of Tripos.

In terms of the spread of answers, most students (19) took one of the 'mini-subjects' in q.12, with the question on why the Gaza Strip serves a persistent flashpoint being the most popular of the three options. The next most popular question was q.10, on the conception of the Middle East as a zone of crisis, which drew 11 answers; as this was a new topic for the paper, it was pleasing to see the high level of engagement with the issues. In addition, q.5 on sectarianism was also popular, drawing 8 answers. Most of the other questions drew a fair number of answers too, so there was a quite good distribution across the paper; the only exception was q.7, on post-nationalism, which drew no answers.

The most successful answers this year adopted a clear focus at the start within the scope of the question, explained that focus, and sustained it through a detailed, critical evaluation throughout the scope of the essay. This year

however there were a lot of long essays that gave long descriptive or narrative accounts, either not making an argument, or arguing about something that didn't really respond to the question. It can be presumed (not least due to their length) that at least some of these accounts were prepared beforehand and simply transplanted into the submitted essay, given that the exam was taken in an 'open book' format. Although using prepared material was not prohibited, and candidates were not penalised for this, it may have had the unintended effect of making some essays drift away from relevance to what the question was asking.

There were a small number of cases in which the essay did not seem to be responding to the question at all. This was particularly the case with q.1, which asked about how "periods of rule in the Middle East by European imperial powers" shaped nationalism, but which led to essays that discussed at length the development of nationalism under the Ottoman Empire; and with q.2, which asked about "authoritarian governments … under which no mass uprisings have taken place since 2010", but which produced two answers that heavily used the case of Egypt, which experienced a mass uprising in 2011. In both cases, it was difficult to see this as an honest mistake, since the question was clear, and the individual essays could not be judged to have
"concentrate[d] on the subject matter of the question", the requirement for a mark of 50 or higher. It cannot be emphasised enough that a single essay of this sort, which wholly disregards the question, can have a disproportionately large effect in bringing down the overall mark for a paper, and indeed the overall class of a student.

On the more positive side, it was encouraging to see that there was a lot of critical engagement with advanced academic literature in the essays this year, more so than before. A good number of the most successful essays brought out a theme or theory out from a text, and used it often fairly centrally in the development of the argument, but were also able to show its limitations or provide another critical twist. There were fewer essays this year than usual that were commentaries on current events, perhaps reflecting the lower extent to which the Middle East has been featuring in UK news headlines, and the result was more reflective, analytical essays which often tried to take in a broader scope of recent history or made a more sustained effort at comparison.

POL13: British and European Politics
Examiner: Dr Julie Smith

This is the third year that Pol 13 candidates have taken their examinations for this paper online, but the first time that they were required to do so within the traditional three hours available in Tripos examinations. The upshot of this reduced timeframe, which was wholly outside the experience of the Finallists of 2022, was that many essays suffered somewhat from poor writing/editing, as candidates seemed to lose the thread of their arguments and/or of specific points. Whether this arose because candidates became distracted while writing or was a result of poor editing arising from copying and pasting materials (this was, after all, an open-book exam) is not clear. However, the disparity between these scripts and both pre-Covid invigilated examinations (2019 and earlier) and the two previous online examinations (2020 and 2021) was noticeable.

As usual, the paper was undivided, meaning candidates could answer solely on British politics, solely on European integration, or write on a combination. A majority of students focused solely on British politics but just over a quarter of responses related to the EU part of the paper. The questions on Thatcherism, New Labour and Devolution were the most frequently answered questions overall, with 'crises' the most frequently addressed European question. No-one attempted questions 10 or 16, and just one wrote on the issue of a German Europe (Question 19). The average marks for most of the questions were very similar, although responses to the British politics questions on policy paradigms (Question 10) and inflation in the 1970s (Question 2) were perhaps not as strong as others.

There are several solid scripts but very few were outstanding. The strongest essays focused directly on the questions as set, rather than appearing to rehearse pre-prepared answers, engaged with relevant academic literature and provided considerable relevant detail. By contrast, particular problems arose from candidates failing adequately to address the question as set and a reluctance or inability to define their terms. For example, in response to question 7, few candidates explained the normative criteria they used to assess whether the UK Parliament is too weak or too powerful. The key lesson for candidates should be to learn the mantra: answer the question.

POL14: US Foreign Policy

Examiner: Dr Steven Ward

30 students attempted the POL 14 exam in 2021-22. Of these, there were 8 *1sts*, 19 *2.1s*, 2 *2.2s*, and 1 *3rd* (though this exam script suffered from radical incompleteness in two of the three answers). The highest overall score was 77; the lowest overall score was 48; the average score was 66.33; the median score was 67; the standard deviation was 6.11. In general, I was quite impressed with the quality of the exam scripts.

The exam's format changed this year. In previous years, students have chosen three questions from across two sections. This year, students chose one question from each of three sections, which were designed to provide comprehensive coverage of all the material covered in the paper. This change generated some anxiety among students due to the more restricted choice of questions, but a comparison with results from last year suggests that overall performance on the exam was not affected.

Students clearly gravitated toward some questions more than others. In Part I of the exam (covering theory and concepts), 2 students answered question 1 (on neorealism, security, and domestic conflict), 3 students answered question 2 (on US domestic institutions and foreign policy), 9 students answered question 3 (on national identities), 9 students answered question 4 (on Donald Trump's influence on US foreign policy), and 7 students answered question 5 (on whether the 2003 Iraq War was more a realist or a liberal war). In Part II of the exam (covering the evolution of US foreign policy), 2 students answered question 6 (on US expansion across North America), 2 students answered question 7 (on the United States' emergence as a great power), 3 students answered question 8 (on US engagement in Europe during the first half of the 20th century), 6 students answered question 9 (on American strategic mistakes during the Cold War), and 17 students answered question 10 (on US foreign policy after the Cold War). In Part III of the exam (covering contemporary issues and debates), 7 students answered question 11 (on whether the US should accede to Russia's demand to stop NATO expansion), 2 students answered question 12 (on the role of ideology during the Cold War and today), 8 students answered question 13 (on whether the United States should maintain security guarantees or reduce them), 0 students answered question 14 (on whether the

erosion of American hegemony would make it more difficult to manage global problems), and 13 students answered question 15 (on whether the unipolar moment is over). Some of this variation likely represents variation in how much emphasis different topics received in lectures and supervisions; some may also represent variation in the perceived complexity of questions (for instance question 12 may have seemed especially complex, while question 15 may have seemed more straightforward).

Essays that scored exceptionally well shared some common characteristics. They 1) offered a clear answer to the question; 2) demonstrated mastery of relevant material from the paper (both readings and lectures); 3) clearly defined all terms and concepts; 4) exhibited a significant degree of originality, in the sense that the argument developed went well beyond simply summarizing readings or lectures; 5) were well-structured, well-organized, and clearly-written.

Essays that scored poorly also shared some common characteristics. They often 1) failed to answer the question asked, or offered an answer to a question that had not been asked; 2) failed to demonstrate mastery of relevant material from the paper, due to a combination of sins of omission (ignoring obviously relevant material) or commission (interpreting or summarizing material from the paper incorrectly or ineffectively); 3) failed to define key terms and concepts; 4) failed to demonstrate originality, by declining to go beyond summarizing material from readings and lectures; 5) were poorly organized, poorly structured, poorly written, and generally difficult to follow.

A final note is in order on the relationship between supervisions and exams. During the period leading up to the exam, some students expressed anxiety about whether the questions on the exam would match questions on which they had prepared supervision essays. The implication is that some students expected to use supervision essays as, essentially, templates for or drafts of exam essays. This view is misguided and was an obstacle to success on the exam. The objective of the exam is to incentivize students to master material across the *entire paper*, in a way that allows them to synthesize ideas from different parts of the class. To that end, the construction of exam questions is aimed at 1) offering students the opportunity to demonstrate that ability; and 2) rewarding students who read and learn broadly across the paper guide, rather than

restricting themselves to preparing to answer only specific questions related to a small handful of topics. The latter approach was sometimes reflected in unsuccessful answers that appeared to rely heavily on recycled material from supervision essays. This is an understandably tempting practice given recent changes in the administration of exams, but it results in essays that are disjointed, poorly directed, and that do not provide full, coherent answers to questions posed in the prompt. It is, in short, not an effective path to a first-class exam script.

POL15: The Politics of Africa

Examiner: Dr Sharath Srinivasan

In 2021-22, 17 students took the Pol15 Politics of Africa examination. 12 students were from HSPS (10 single track Pol&IR; 2 Pol&Soc) and 5 students were from History and Politics. The examination was open-book and taken remotely. Per the University mode of assessment adopted by HSPS in 2021-22, students had a three-hour window in which to answer three questions with no word limits. This format varied from the previous year (open-book and remote, but a 6 hour window and a 4500 word count limit for the total script). Consequently, the scripts this year showed different strengths and weaknesses. As with the previous year, students were given a choice of 16 questions (one per each lecture topic over the course of the year) rather than 12 in years past when the examination was closed book, but the questions were once again more nuanced and specific to ensure students had to address the question at hand and not just use pre-prepared content. Compared to the previous year, this strategy was not as successful, and several students used pre-prepared content but without fully addressing or answering the specific question.

Pol15 is a demanding paper, with wide-ranging content across time and space that is interdisciplinary, critical, heavily empirical as well as distinctly conceptual and thematic. Students who thrive in this paper develop their own distinct specialisms over the course of the year, which in turn allows them to develop their own argumentative approaches and empirical case study choices. In finding their own scholarly voice, they proceed with confidence in the knowledge that they cannot know 'everything' or divine the 'perfect' answer to a question, rather it is the rigour, thoughtfulness, and depth of the arguments that they choose to develop that will matter the most. Students who enjoy Pol15

and get the most out of it find their passion in the paper and direct their examination strategy and preparation accordingly. It is in preparation for the examinations that students ensure they develop original lines of argument that are well substantiated through engagement with scholarly debates and case evidence. Good exam preparation involves drawing from across the paper, making connections and taking command of the key debates and disputes in original and distinctive ways.

The 2021-22 cohort for Pol15 was an engaged, hard-working, and successful group. The large majority of them clearly enjoyed the paper and this was evident in their examination performance. Where it was not, it seemed especially a problem of the open book format leading to pre-prepared essay arguments that were not truly answering the examination question. The failure to answer the question – always a risk with Cambridge exams – can be especially pronounced with open book exams. Overall, though, the results were strong. The average mark was a high II.i (67.9), and there were 4 First Class marks. The top student scored 77 for what was a truly excellent script. This student's answers showed a combination of exceptionally well-reasoned and well-evidenced argumentation on the questions with a passionate originality and quality of scholarly engagement with the big debates in politics of Africa that underlay the questions.

Students answered nearly the full range of questions, however they clustered around certain topics. The most popular questions were Q14 (digital technology, 8 answers), Q13 (protest and social movements, 6 answers), and Q4 (post-independence development, 5 answers), followed by Q1, Q8, Q12, Q15 (all 4 answers). The answers on Q13 were especially strong, but also on Q15 and on Q16. The best essays were intellectually ambitious, but also fully engaged and anchored in the scholarly debates, and they often developed arguments through uniquely thoughtful empirical examples. These essays were vigilant in making sure they answered the question, often taking command of the question to demonstrate how it could only be adequately answered by addressing bigger debates or approaching it with critical scrutiny. Where the essays used empirical examples, they did so fulsomely, not just referring to cases and countries in passing, but rather giving sufficient space to weigh and reason arguments through these empirical examples and the scholarly debates that attach to them. Some of these scripts went beyond the lectures and set texts, drawing upon arguments from scholarship well beyond the reading guide. This was not essential or even expected, however the value they brought was to the quality and originality of argumentation in the answers.

POL16: Conflict and Peacebuilding

Examiner: Dr Devon Curtis

There were 48 candidates for this paper. One candidate wrote the exam through two 3000-word essays, the remaining 47 candidates answered three questions from a list of twelve questions. The exam was undivided and included one question on Colombia and one question on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The standard was generally very high and we were pleased to see that students were able to make connections between different parts of the course. In revisions sessions, several students were worried about the fact that many questions from past exam papers combined different topics but most students coped with this very well on the exam. Indeed, some of the best scripts connected topics and arguments in interesting, sometimes novel, ways.

Sixteen students received first class marks, two students received 2.2 marks, and the remaining students received 2.1s. There were a significant number of students with marks in the 67-68 range.

The strongest answers made coherent, convincing arguments with strong supporting evidence. We were impressed by the use of the literature from across different parts of the paper guide and the ability of many students to critically assess different perspectives and arguments. The strongest answers were very strong indeed, with thoughtful, creative and original answers. As usual, weaker answers did not fully address the question or made an unclear argument or set of arguments. Sometimes the evidence and examples were not carefully explained, or did not seem to support the overall claims. It sometimes seemed that a candidate had prepared for a slightly different question, and lost focus.

The most popular questions were Q5 (attempted by 19 candidates) and Q11 (attempted by 17 candidates). The answers for Q5 were mixed. Many

candidates discussed the role of China in peace operations, but did not fully assess what this meant in terms of local dimensions of conflict. Some of the best answers for this question interrogated or discussed which local dimensions of conflict were relevant. The best answers were for Q1, where many candidates presented sophisticated answers, often with interesting theoretical and empirical discussion. Only a handful of students attempted Q2, with one student providing an excellent argument about globalisation with relevant examples from Cambridge. There was a wide range of marks for Q3, with some of the highest firsts awarded for this question, but also some lower 2.2 marks. The weaker scripts were simplistic, polemical or disconnected. The stronger answers interrogated the underlying assumptions of the question and used the literature effectively. The answers for Q4 were more consistent, although a couple of scripts stood out with excellent analyses of examples, such as ebola. Answers to Q6 tended to be very strong, with thoughtful reflections on the underlying logics of humanitarianism and peacebuilding, whereas candidates struggled a bit with Q7. Some answers for this question lost focus although it was clear that candidates were familiar with relevant literatures. Q8, Q9 and Q10 generated some strong answers with innovative examples. The case study questions of Democratic Republic of the Congo (Q11) and Colombia (Q12) were generally well done, with candidates showing an impressive knowledge of these two cases and the ability to connect this case study knowledge to thematic arguments.

We were pleased that so many candidates engaged directly with the specific examination questions and were able to construct insightful, convincing, and sometimes innovative arguments. We were impressed by the breadth of knowledge and general fluency with the material.

POL17: Politics and Gender

Examiner: Dr Lauren Wilcox

The exam for POL 17: Politics and Gender was sat by 27 candidates in academic year 2021-2022. The exam was a three-hour, online exam that was open note. Candidates answered three out of eleven questions. The average mark overall was just under 69, with a standard deviation of about 4.5. Eleven candidates earned overall marks of 70 or above for a first, and the remaining

sixteen earned marks in the 60s for 2.1s. The most popular question attempted was #8 on war, with sixteen responses, followed by questions #1 on political representation, #3 on human rights discourse, and #7 on humanitarianism and development, all with ten attempts. Question #5 on technology and gender inequality was only attempted by one candidate.

The strongest answers showed considerable originality, moving well beyond the material from lecture presentations and engaging material from extended reading lists, other courses, and beyond. The strongest answers also developed a sustained response to the question on its own terms with appropriate examples, displaying both strong authorial voice as well as nuanced engagement with a wide variety of different theoretical perspectives. There were several particularly strong essays meriting marks in the upper 70s and lower 80s.

A number of essays apparently relied too heavily on supervision essays and other prepared material, and attempted to craft responses to the questions rather obviously around previous work rather than answering the question on its own terms. Such essays tended to score lower, with occasional marks on individual essays falling into very low 60s and upper 50s.

POL18: The Politics of the International Economy

Examiner: Dr Jeremy Green

31 candidates completed the POL18 exam this year. 6 candidates received a 1st class mark, 23 received a 2:1, 1 candidate received a 2:2, and 1 candidate failed due to two radically incomplete answers.

Overall, the quality of the scripts was high, with a good level of knowledge and understanding across the topics that were examined. The stronger answers were distinguished by a more analytical framework, more consistent argumentation, and a deeper level of insight and originality. They also demonstrated broad reading and a high level of empirical accuracy. Some answers displayed good knowledge and understanding, but focused too much on recounting historical

dynamics rather than developing a clear argument in response to the question. Weaker answers were characterised by their descriptive nature, ambiguity surrounding the core thesis, and an overreliance on lecture content.

There was some evidence of copying and pasting, with some very long answers that demonstrated an unusually high degree of empirical detail and accuracy for a 3hr examination. Some of these answers did not focus explicitly on answering the question set, presenting large amounts of extraneous detail instead, and these scripts were marked down accordingly.

In terms of specific topics, Bretton Woods and the Eurozone were both popular, with a large number of students answering these questions and generally writing very strong answers. A larger number of students wrote on the rise of the West this year, with answers generally of a good standard. The questions on more contemporary topics tended to be answered much less frequently.

POL20: Religion and Politics

Examiner: Dr Iza Hussin

The POL20 exam was attempted by 10 students. The quality of responses was high, with 4 students receiving average marks of 70 or above, and the rest of students receiving marks in the high 2.1 range. All questions in Section A were attempted by at least one student, with the highest numbers answering 2 and 4, and in Section B, all questions except 6, 7 and 13 were answered.

The very best answers demonstrated that students had independently considered the course readings and supervision questions, and placed them in the context provided by lectures and seminars. Strong answers addressed the questions with clarity from their introductions, providing clear empirical support of the arguments, a clear structure, a consideration of counter-arguments, and a firm grasp of the conceptual issues at stake in debates over "religion," "secularization," "modernity," etc. They combined this with engagement and critique of the major relevant theoretical perspectives, placing them in

conversation with each other, but without simply summarising the theories. They explicitly considered which empirical cases worked best to illustrate their arguments, and made clear how the cases demonstrated variation, critical junctures, or similarities which elaborated upon the analysis presented.

Less successful answers typically did not address the actual question, showed a more limited grasp of key concepts, made unfounded assertions, summarised readings without providing arguments in response to the questions, and/or leaned heavily on a limited range of readings. At times, these showed evidence of having been drawn without further careful thought from supervision essays or notes, and needed to have been better deployed to directly answer the questions posed.

POL21: The Idea of a European Union

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

There were three candidates for POL21 The Idea of a European Union. On the one hand it is hard to discuss an exam paper which only generates three scripts, because there is not much to go on as a basis for generalisation. On the other hand it is made somewhat easier in this particular case because—unusually—all three candidates attempted the same three questions, on the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, on nationalism in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and on imperialism in the period 1870-1914.

Essays on Saint-Pierre were good, though more careful attention to what it might be to be "utopian" would have been welcome. Placing him in an irenic tradition doesn't exactly acquit him of the charge of utopianism, for example, and an attempt to present him as a "pragmatic utopian" needed more on discussion of the pragmatism. The essays on nationalism were often sharp but could have done better to focus more sharply on the first half of the nineteenth century; discussions of, e.g. Nietzsche and the foundation of the EEC were a bit of a stretch. There was some excellent discussion in the essays on empire of topics such as imperial expansion, international law, and federalism, though they often had a constricted optic, focused either on the second part of the period under examination (so 1890-1914 rather than 1870-1890), or too

narrowly on socialist reflection on imperialism rather than on broader arguments.