UNIVERSITY OF
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Department of Politics and
International Studies

HUMAN, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE TRIPOS

POL PAPERS

PART II EXAMINERS' REPORTS, 2015-2016

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR EXAMINER

This was the first year that the examiners for Politics and International Relations were responsible for the class-list for the full Part II. The procedure worked well, and was run efficiently by Helen Williams and Charlotte Moss in the POLIS office. Particular thanks are due to them, and to our two external examiners, Prof Louise Fawcett (Oxford) and Prof Matthew Festenstein (York) for overseeing the process and deliberating over the difficult and borderline cases.

The opportunity to organise the examinations for Politics & International Relations papers by the examiners from that track has enabled a number of changes that have made the marking process more rigorous and equitable. The standardisation of the mean average marks has been introduced across all papers, ensuring that the rescaling of marks can take place if necessary. Measures of standard deviation in marking were also introduced, which also enabled rescaling if those marks were too heavily bunched in a small range. Together these measures have contributed to increasing confidence when first class degrees were awarded. This year, 20% of students at Part IIB were awarded firsts, a figure that is in line with broader university-wide practice. 4% of students received a 2.2 or lower at Part IIB, and although this figure is low, it reflects the sense from the external examiners that only a few scripts that they read on or near the borderline could legitimately be graded as deserving a mark lower than 60.

This year also introduced the practice of sending feedback on long essays to Part IIA students. This was done with the intention of providing some assistance to students who were considering the writing of dissertations in their final years. While a few responses to the receipt of feedback were disputatious, on the whole the practice seems to have been welcomed by many students, and it seems worthwhile to continue it for at least another year.

The report from the senior examiner has come to include an analysis of exam results by gender. This year, there were no larger papers in which there was a significant difference (> 2 points) between the mean average marks of male and female students. 23% of female students received a first, while 17% of male students received a first. 4% of both male and female students received a class of 2.2 or lower.

Dr Glen Rangwala

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Examiner: Prof. Louise Fawcett
University of Oxford

The external examining process ran very smoothly this year with the able assistance of Helen Williams and Chair Glen Rangwala. Our task was made more simple by the reorganization of the degree such that all scripts reviewed now fell into the new HSPS Part II.

Prior to the examiners' meeting we had, as usual, received and reviewed the relevant examination papers and been clearly informed as to the procedures and schedule.

Our main task as external examiners was to assess and evaluate borderline cases and the overall marks spread across scripts. To help us in this task papers were laid out with any outlier or queried papers clearly marked for our attention. Examiners individual marks and comments were also available – a very helpful practice. Benchmarking scripts with 'typical', ie low, mid, and high-range marks were also laid out for consultation, which, as in the past, was very helpful.

The overall standard was, in general high, and in line with an excellent degree at a first class institution. There were relatively few poor quality scripts and the 2:ii marks were judiciously given. As might be expected, many marks clustered in the 2:i range, at the higher or lower ends. Regarding the allocation of first class marks, we felt that these were initially on the lowish side and that the marks themselves tended to be on the lower end of the marks scale. It may be that these marks (many in the low 70s) were entirely justified in individual cases. Nonetheless, given the rubric, and injunction to use the full range of marks, this point would seem to be worth further consideration. This is not a case for grade inflation, but for using the marks range more fully, particularly at the higher end. In the event the external examiners did raise a number of borderline 2:i marks to a first.

That said, there were some very high marks which were entirely deserved and we also read some excellent dissertations (two of which shared a prize). The dissertation range was wide and answers often innovative. The absence of a single party line as regards methodology is particularly welcome. In the dissertations as in the examination scripts, the degree reveals is pluralist quality in the best possible way.

Overall, this was a very pleasant experience and a very smooth day; many thanks to the Chair of Examiners and his team for their hospitality and organization.

Examiner: Prof. Matthew Festenstein
University of York

I reviewed papers in political thought, including examinations, long essays and dissertations, for this part of the Tripos.

The standards evident in the paper-setting and marking are appropriate for the examination and qualification. Questions in the timed examinations were stretching and tested a wide range of the candidates' expertise in this area. Both the long essay format and the dissertation allowed for the probing of a wider range of candidates' skills, including research skills, and created the conditions for some exceptionally good work. Marking processes seemed robust and in practice the marking was exceptionally thoughtful and well-justified, including detailed comments in support of the marks given and clear procedures for dealing with significant discrepancies between markers, where these arose.

The overall format for assessment – a blend of timed examination and dissertations and long essays – is similar to comparable programmes in this area. The standards are high and the markers demanded a lot of the candidates, as might be expected, but very reasonably so, and within the range of comparable programmes.

The processes for assessment and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted. The examination process combined a scrupulous attention to procedural fairness with a careful consideration of the merits of each case. The practice of inviting the external examiners to review and discuss particular cases is to be commended: it allows for understanding of relation between the profiles of papers, particular candidate's marks, and classifications, and provides an important opportunity to discuss assessment in the context of the wider teaching and learning goals of POLIS. The external examiner's general role and particular tasks were explained very clearly. The externals were supportive last year of the use of summary statistics at parts IIA and IIB, including the mean and standard deviation for each paper (including the dissertation), and this was implemented this year. Throughout the examination process, I found the quality of communication excellent. My own role was clearly outlined, necessary materials made available promptly, and both the Examinations Officer and the wider POLIS administrative team were very responsive to questions and requests. Particularly given the demanding deadlines, the whole process was handled efficiently, clearly and with attention to detail.

Overall, the quality of assessment on display here was excellent: the examinations were demanding and wide-ranging, and the longer written forms allowed for some outstanding students to develop their ideas. In the area of political thought and political theory this is a centre of excellence, which is reflected in the rigorous standards on display, distinctive intellectual agenda, and quality of student achievement.

It remains the case that there is scope to stretch marking particularly at the top of the range. In particular, the new classification rules, while sensible, provide a significant incentive to consider stretching at the top, since these rules may have the effect of depressing the number of firsts (and starred firsts) awarded: the major role played by the mean has the effect that 'low' first class marks can be easily outweighed by mid-level 2.1 marks. (Of course this effect may appear in all class bands but there seems to be less of a reluctance to mark high in the 2.1 or 2.2 ranges.) It is commendable that there are criteria for the upper end of the first class range, and markers should be encouraged to use them. As has been discussed before, I believe, colleagues may also find it helpful to consider introducing commonly agreed steps on the marking scale to reduce clustering around the 68-72 range. At any rate, I would recommend some further reflection on marking practice in the light of the new classification rules so that you feel assured students are not disadvantaged by these.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

POL3: Ethics and World Politics
Examiner: Dr Duncan Bell

This year 114 students took the paper. The average mark was 65. The examiners awarded 19 Firsts, 81 2.1s, 13 2.2s and 1 3rd class mark. The highest mark awarded was an 80, the lowest, a 49.

Answers to questions were unevenly distributed across the paper. By far the most popular question in Section A was on global distributive justice (75 answers). Also popular in Section A were questions on whether liberal cosmopolitanism was imperialist (30 answers), political conceptions of human rights (36 answers), and the role of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Just War tradition (48 answers). Nobody, meanwhile, answered on Richard Rorty's account of human rights, while only 3 answered on the legitimacy of a world state. By far the most popular questions in Section B concerned the legitimacy of multilateralism (48 answers), with the remaining answers spread fairly evenly across the questions.

As always, the best answers in Section A combined precision in outlining the theoretical material employed with a strong and coherent line of argumentation, while those in Section B combined sophisticated theoretical understanding with a good range of empirical material. It is much better to pursue a strong line of argument in some depth rather than giving a brief overview of the range of positions covered in the course readings. Even the best surveys of positions will struggle to score beyond a mid-2.1, as answers of that kind allow little space to exhibit a sophisticated understanding of any position or argument. Depth and theoretical sophistication are much more important than a demonstration that you have done the set readings. Answers in the low 2.1/high 2.2 range usually contained errors in exposition, or a failure to understand some of the material being discussed. The very lowest marks were a result of failure to properly complete the examination – it is vital that you give three full answers, otherwise a 2.2 or below is guaranteed. Overall, though, the examiners were satisfied with the range and quality of scripts. The best of them demonstrated a very impressive understanding of complex material, and the ability to make a cogent argument.

This is the last year that Pol 3: Ethics and World Politics will run. Next year it will be replaced by a new IR paper.

POL4: Comparative Politics
Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

There were 121 candidates who took this year's POL4 exam. For the mandatory Section A, the most popular questions were Q8 on war and state formation (39 answers) and Q1 on democratisation (35 answers), while Q7 on political parties (15 answers) and Q9 on a possible European pathway of state formation (13 answers) also received a significant number of answers. Less popular were Q2 on authoritarian states (8 answers), Q6 on international state-building (8 answers), Q4 on civil society (3 answers), Q3 on systems of government (no answers), and Q4 on the role of economic interests (no answers). For the other sections, 74 candidates answered questions from Section B (Q10: 21, Q11: 53), 37 candidates answered questions from Section C (Q12: 20, Q13: 17), 54 candidates answered questions from Section D (Q14: 33, Q15: 21), 46 candidates answered questions from Section E (Q16: 19, Q17: 27), and 31 candidates answered questions from F (Q18: 11, Q19: 20).

On the whole, the candidates performed well in the exam and there were relatively few weak scripts. To give some idea of the distribution of marks, the 98 candidates from the Pol/IR stream achieved 11 First class marks, 73 marks in the 2.1 range (quite a few of which were in the higher 2.1 range), 13 marks in the 2.2 range, and one Third class mark.

The scripts showed similar patterns of strengths and weaknesses as in previous years. Most candidates were able to provide good empirical details in their answers (with pleasingly few inaccuracies), especially in the answers to questions from Sections B-F. The best answers combined some discussion of more general issues and concepts with useful and directly relevant empirical material, and directly addressed the question. Some of this is naturally more difficult to do in the answers to Section A questions than to the other questions, but the best answers in Section A managed to successfully integrate examples in the discussion. Answers who did not do this (as was, for example, the case with some of the answers to the question on political parties) received lower marks.

In addition, the answers that received marks on the lower end of the distribution suffered from one or more of the following problems. First, some essays didn't sufficiently focus on the specific question at hand or address the key concepts mentioned in the question. The clearest examples of the former issue were some answers to Q9 (on whether a European pathway to state formation exists), which is a question that, logically, cannot be satisfactorily answered by focusing primarily on cases and patterns of state formation outside Europe. However, it happened in a few other essays too. Some examples of the latter issue could be found in answers to Q10 that didn't sufficiently engage with the notion of 'religious nationalism'. Second, some essays provided more a list of possible issues and factors rather than a focused answer on the specific issue or factor that the question asked about. Examples included a few answers to Q11 (on the importance of 'rentier state' factors in Egypt and Saudi Arabia), Q14 (on the relevance of internal party features for explaining the success of populist parties in Western Europe), and Q16 (on the importance of political leadership in democratic consolidation in South Africa and Zimbabwe). This is probably the result of trying to use large parts of supervision essays to answer exam questions, which should be avoided. Third, some answers (for example on Q15 and Q17) did not sufficiently deal with the arguments and literature that the questions refer to to be fully satisfactory.

Overall, however, the examiners were encouraged by the quality of this year's exam scripts and hope that this will continue in the coming years.

POL5: Conceptual issues in politics and international relations
Examiner: Dr Iza Hussin & Dr Tomas Larsson

58 candidates for POL5 submitted two essays each, chosen from a list of 31 questions. Essays covered most of the essay topics, questions 9 and 19 most popular with 6 essays each. Overall, 27 esssays received a first class mark, 69 an upper second, 20 a lower second, and none received a third class mark. 10 candidates received a first class average mark for the paper (and of these 8 candidates received first class marks for each of their essays), 40 candidates an upper second class mark, and 8 candidates a lower second class average mark. All candidates submitted at least one essay that received an upper second class mark or higher. The highest mark was 75.

Few essays received marks below 60. Almost all essays showed evidence of careful engagement with the topic, reading and research in the relevant fields, and provided clear and well articulated answers to the questions, presented in well-organised, clearly cited, proofread essays with correctly formatted bibliographies. The very best essays went above these criteria to also articulate strong and consistent arguments supported by case studies, examples, or close engagement with empirical material or theoretical analysis. Their readings were broad but synthesised throughout the analysis, and the arguments were carefully linked to empirical or analytic material. The very best of these essays demonstrated original thought and bold arguments allied to careful reading and research, delivered in well articulated and proofread packages.

Essays receiving lower marks generally suffered from a lack of attention to the implication and scope of the question, did not adequately or accurately define the terms of the question, and showed unclear organisation and argumentation. Another key issue was choice, justification and use of

examples and empirical material. Generally, essays should have paid closer attention to the wording of the question and the issues at stake in the question, considering alternative arguments and clearly outlining the scope and logic of the answer provided.

POL6: Statistics and Methods
Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

This paper was taught for the first time this year, and 21 candidates took the exam. The exam consisted of a mandatory Question 1 (which had several parts), and two optional questions of which candidates had to answer one. Of these optional questions, Question 2 (on how to design a quantitative project on voting behaviour in the 2014 Scottish referendum) was clearly the more popular with 19 answers. The performance of the candidates was mostly good: 6 candidates received a First class mark, 11 candidates a 2.1 mark (of which two had a mark of 69), and 2 candidates received 2.2 marks. Unfortunately, there were also one Third class mark and one Fail mark.

The average quality of the scripts was very good, and the examiners were impressed with the quality of quite a few of the answers. In particular, many of the answers to Question 2 were very strong. Most of the candidates showed a good understanding of the main elements of research design, and the best answers formulated precise research questions, indicated possible hypotheses, discussed the data required to test these hypotheses, and provided some reflections on the methodological challenges that would be involved in such a project. The few weak answers to this question covered only some of these elements, or included incoherent or inconsistent statements in parts of the answer. More generally, most answers could have discussed possible methodological challenges more (potential issues to discuss here would be the quality of the data, the difficulty to operationalize certain concepts, and the representativeness of samples). The two answers to Question 3 were not very strong, and failed to discuss in any detail the advantages and drawbacks of quantitative data to explore 'reality' and integrate a useful example into this discussion.

The quality of the answers to the various parts of Question 1 was somewhat mixed. The best answers showed a good understanding of statistical concepts and the models that were used in the question, and provided good substantive interpretations of the presented statistical results. Quite a few answers showed solid understanding of the issues involved, but did not sufficiently explain the answers or discuss the substantive interpretations to get a higher mark. For example, several candidates gave very concise answers to Question 1.5, focusing on only one possible rationale for using the indicated model, where there were, in fact, several reinforcing rationales (and answers were rewarded for focusing on several or all of them). Unfortunately, there were also several weak answers which showed limited understanding of the statistical issues and concepts, or made claims that were clearly wrong.

It was disappointing to see that some of the answers to Questions 1.1 and 1.5 were missing or very limited, as the basic information to address these questions was provided on some of the lecture slides. Overall, the examiners had the impression that some candidates would have benefited from attending more lectures and practical sessions in the course of the year. However, it should be emphasized again that the performance of many of the candidates was very good.

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

42 candidates sat this paper. In Section A, the most popular question this year was on Plato (with 23 answers), followed by that on Machiavelli (17), More (15), Aristotle (10), Hobbes (10), Locke (4) and Augustine (1), with no answers on Aquinas. In Section B, the most popular question was on Renaissance humanism (14), followed by that on the debates in ancient Athens on the difference

between democrats and anti-democrats (9), theorists of sovereignty (6), early modern international law (5), Roman political thought (4), Calvinist resistance theory (4), toleration (3), the English Civil War (2), reason of state (1), and papal and secular power (1), with no attempts at the questions on the early Christians, medieval citizenship, or Roman law. Several of the candidates chose to answer two questions in that Section.

A few points emerge that reiterate reports of previous years. The first is that while some candidates clearly mastered a wide array of subjects, some were more narrowly focused on the Ancients, and while these included excellent and clearly distinct answers, some came close to repeating the same material. The second is that some scripts seemed oblivious of the fact that they needed to be legible. The third is that, in some cases, there was a lack of critical engagement with the question and/or inattentiveness as to its precise nature. This was evident, for instance, in some of the answers to the question on More ('To what extent should we regard Thomas More's *Utopia* as exposing the perils of hereditary monarchy?') in which monarchy and aristocracy were amalgamated into one, their hereditary aspect left unexamined, every social ill deemed, by More, to be attributable to hereditary monarchy, and the government of Utopia itself left bereft of scrutiny.

Those who had read the set texts with attention to detail, showed awareness of the conceptual issues and the issues within the scholarship, and engaged with these issues and the manner in which the authors dealt with them, as ever, did best. The few, who had read only one of the set texts (e.g. *The Prince*), or who had a very superficial understanding of a set text (e.g. *Leviathan*), or who did not explore the full implications of the questions, rehashing their weekly essays or regurgitating their lecture notes, did least well.

As has been said many a time in examiners reports, what is needed is clear evidence of textual knowledge, showing a concern with the key concepts behind the question, but allied to an argument about how the evidence relates to the question. This requires knowledge of the texts in the first place, but that should be taken to mean an *understanding* of what they seek to achieve and how they do so, not mere restatement of what it was that the author wrote.   This may very well require some knowledge of the intellectual and historical contexts in which the authors under consideration wrote, and that knowledge needs to be woven into the answer where appropriate, as opposed to mechanically repeated regardless of the question or the answer given to it.

Overall, the answers to the bulk of the questions were nevertheless solid, and some were very impressive indeed.

POL8: The History of Political Thought from c.1700 to c.1890
Examiner: Dr Ruth Scurr

89 candidates sat this paper, 22 obtained Firsts, 62 II.1s, 4 II.2s and one Third.

The most popular questions by far were on Rousseau (35 answers) and the French Revolution (31). After this, the most popular questions were Wollstonecraft (21), Gender (16), Empire (16), Constant (15) and Nationalism (14). All other questions had 10 or fewer answers. The least popular were German Romantics (3), Natural Law (2) and Social Science (0). The marks ranged up to 79 and overall the standard was high this year.

As in previous years, those who read widely and were able to assemble their learning in a well-structured and fluent answer to the question (as opposed to just displaying their knowledge and erudition in the round) did best. Knowledge of both primary texts and their context is required for successful answers in this paper.

Those who did least well had not done enough work and attempted to rely on Part I level knowledge, or displayed poor time management leading to a very short third answer. Some candidates did not focus sharply on the question and provided a general overview instead of a specific answer.

Most candidates rose to the challenge of answering the intricate and thought-provoking questions. A significant number chose to answer two questions from Section B. In many cases it was clear that attending lectures had greatly benefited their answers. The best were able to combine the information obtained from lectures with wider reading to craft nuanced and informed answers.

In general candidates made good and clear use of primary and secondary texts. Answers on Constant were particularly strong this year, in all cases avoiding the temptation to draw on Part I work and displaying a subtler and more historically informed approach. Some answers on Rousseau and Mill relied on superficial readings of the primary texts and were disappointing.

More than one candidate came close to breaking the *'**Avoid** overlap between your answers'* rule.

This said, it was a very good year for the History of Political Thought 1700-1890 Paper

POL9: Conceptual Issues and Texts in Politics and International Relations
Examiner: Prof. David Runciman

There were 97 candidates for this paper and overall 16 agreed firsts were awarded by the examiners. However, there was also a relatively long tail of 2.2s. The distribution between answers to the passages of text (q. 1-4) and to the questions (q. 5-8) was fairly even: 42 for the passages and 55 for the questions. The best answers in each case combined wide-ranging arguments with good attention to detail and used this exam to show the range and depth of reading about politics that students had undertaken over the past three years. Weaker answers fell back on part 1 material, or used particular examples or case studies from other papers without adapting them to the question/passage under discussion. Overall the standard was higher than in some previous years, but a couple of persistent problems recurred:

- Length: many of the weakest answers were relatively short, with some only 5 or 6 sides long. This is a three hour exam and there is an expectation that students write at length on their chosen topic. Scripts that were under length (7 sides or fewer) were marked down. In a 3-hour exam students writing 3 separate essays would not expect to achieve a decent mark by writing only 2 sides for each, but that is what 6 sides in this paper amounts too. We are not asking for length for its own sake, but it is important that students use the time to display as well as they can the range and depth of their knowledge. This cannot be done if the essays are too short.

- Attention to detail: a number of answers to the passages of text ignored points of detail (for instance the reference to China in passage 3). Equally, a number of answers in both parts of the paper used examples that were lacking in detailed analysis and ended up simply making a generic or superficial point. Detail matters in essays of this length as it provides a chance for students to develop and complicate their arguments. The best answers went beyond generic examples to explore the ways in which different aspects of the case under review invited different interpretations.

POL10: The History of Political Thought from c.1700 to 1890
Examiner: Dr Ruth Scurr

9 candidates sat this paper, 4 obtained Firsts, 4 II.1s, and 1 II.2.

The most popular questions were on the French Revolution (5 answers) and German Theorists (3 answers). Other questions had two, one or no answers.

As in previous years, those who read widely and were able to assemble their learning in a well-structured and fluent answer to the question (as opposed to just displaying their knowledge and erudition in the round) did best. Relevant knowledge of both primary texts and their context is required for successful answers in this paper.

Those who did least well had not done enough work. Some candidates did not focus sharply on the question and provided a general overview instead of a specific answer.

Most candidates rose to the challenge of answering the intricate and thought-provoking questions. 6 out of the 9 candidates chose to answer two questions from Section B. In many cases it was clear that attending lectures had greatly benefited their answers. The best were able to combine the information obtained from lectures with wider reading to craft nuanced and informed answers.

In general candidates made good and clear use of primary and secondary texts. Answers on the German Theorists were particularly strong this year, in all cases displaying a subtle and historically informed approach.

None of the candidates came close to breaking the *'Avoid overlap between your answers'* rule.

It was a very good year for the History of Political Thought 1700-1890 Paper.

POL11: The History of Political Thought since c.1890 and Political Philosophy
Examiner: Dr Duncan Kelly

For POL11 this year, 48 POLIS students took the paper, and the average overall mark across the exam was 66%. As this implies, the general standard was high, and in fact, the examiners agreed 10 firsts, and there were several very high 2i marks.

The best scripts exhibited historical awareness, conceptual subtlety, and an ability to construct an argument in response to the question that didn't attempt to do everything. Those who followed this obvious outline for Section A topics were convincing because they had selected a manageable number of issues or problems related to the question from the wide knowledge-base they obviously had. They showed knowledge of the major texts, an awareness of their conceptual implications and an historical sense of their plausibility in context. Those who excelled at the Section B topics either showed subtle awareness of the tension between the historical evolution of modern political concepts and their contemporary use in political philosophy, or they were exceptionally clear about the plausible as well as the implausible implications of contemporary concepts and arguments about, say, freedom, property or obligation. The real difference between high first class and solid 2i marks were found in the ability to be precise, focused and fluent, using telling detail and keeping to a coherent structure thought about in advance, but utilized properly as a response to the question. Those who simply rehearsed supervision style answers struggled more to actually answer or take a stand on the question asked, and use their judgment on the day rather than repeating standard positions from lecture notes.

Most questions on the paper were attempted (though nobody tried the legacy of Gierke for British state theory), but the typically popular questions on Nietzsche, Weber, political morality/obligation, Hayek, were more mixed than usual. Too many people clearly repeated lecture notes/quotations and examples, and while there were some brilliant answers, the average for these questions was actually between 63-65%. There were terrific answers on the Frankfurt School, some excellent answers on justice and feminism, and it was gratifying to find serious engagement with Rawls's political philosophy both in terms of text and context this year. The question on punishment was also tackled well and by several people too. The most obvious problem to note in this year's exam was that a couple of people answered questions on socialism without relevant recourse to particular texts and contexts, i.e., they wrote about Marxism in the 20th century generally, but were answering questions about the Second International for instance, but gave no discussion of, say, Bernstein. This was a little peculiar, of course, but more than one person did this, which seems to suggest a problem in terms of revision, planning, and execution.

Overall, this was a strong set of scripts, with only the usual remarks required to close. Namely, that candidates need to be reminded that there are 3 questions, which are equally weighted, so that spending too much time on the first one or two, and not enough on the third, is likely to have a dramatic effect on your average result. This paper is difficult, and is designed to test awareness of historical context and conceptual innovation in modern political theory; to do well, it is necessary to combine politics, history and theory, and those who take this paper with those interests in mind, will surely continue to do well.

POL12: The Politics of the Middle East
Examiner: Dr Glen Rangwala

34 students took this paper, and the quality was generally encouraging. Six students received average marks of 70 or more, and a further ten students received average marks of 65-69. Five students were in the 55-59 range, but no-one was below it. All the questions on the exam paper were taken by at least two students. The most popular questions were on sectarianism (q.14, 20 answers) and the politics of the Persian Gulf (q.10, 10 answers).

The best essays, as always, retained a close focus on the question while demonstrating awareness of a broad range of relevant arguments. The less successful answers, by contrast, were let down by the mismatch between the topic of the question and their actual discussion. An example of this is the question on how Israelis' and Palestinians' understandings of the past served to perpetuate the conflict (q.9). This was a difficult question, but those candidates who thought seriously about what sorts of arguments could be made for how the historical understandings of the participants informed their conflictual actions were rewarded with some of the highest marks awarded for single essays this year. By contrast, those who provided simple descriptive narratives of the modern history of the conflict without regard for what the question was asking received some of the lowest marks. A number of students answered the question as if it were asking 'to what extent do…', weighing its influence up against other factors, but the question was 'in what ways do..', which requires a different sort of answer. It has to be assumed that the two students who just wrote about how territorial ambitions perpetuate the conflict, the subject of the supervision question during the year, didn't know anything about the conflict aside from their own supervision essays, and were marked down accordingly.

This year most students demonstrated good knowledge of the range of arguments made by relevant authors. The question on the codification of the shari'ah (q.6) prompted most students who answered that question to reflect closely and carefully on the arguments of authors such as Vikor and Hallaq, comparing their approaches, and identifying what they could be seen to have missed. Some questions,

such as this, can be usefully answered through engaging in careful critical analysis of key texts, as it leads to a nuanced answer to the exam question.

Other questions prompted essays which combined textual analysis with the deployment of detailed empirical examples. The question on the usefulness of the concept of rentierism (q.4) required an explanation of that concept, which most students taking the question were able to provide; the distinguishing factor from there was how closely the conceptual account could be made to fit with examples. In this, a pleasing number of students were able to convey substantive information accurately about a range of cases, from Algeria to Kuwait, in order to interrogate the concept.

There were two specific issues that problematised a number of essays this year. The first was that three questions specifically asked for a comparative understanding: qq.5 and 7, which asked candidates to explain the diversity of approaches to discrimination and the implementation of the idea of an Islamic state respectively; and q.14, which asked for a comparison between the reasons for sectarian polarisation in Syria and Iraq. Many students answering these questions were able to make comparisons, but a significant minority only discussed one case at length, typically Tunisia for the sub-question on gender discrimination, and Iraq for the question on sectarianism. Clearly comparison between cases is not possible if candidates only know about and discuss one case.

The second issue comes from candidates avoiding key terms in the question. The question on the effect of the 'unresolved legacies of colonialism' (q.1) does require answers that impute meaning to that term: there isn't a single answer to what those 'unresolved legacies' might be, but essays which just wrote generally on the effects of colonialism in the region were missing an important component of the question. Similarly, those who wrote on 'Islamic institutions' (q.8) without providing a clear understanding of what was meant by that term retained a level of ambiguity that hindered their clarity.

One pleasing aspect of this year's scripts was the extent to which students were able to relate established debates to contemporary events. An example of this was the ways in which the question on hostility across the Persian Gulf (q.10) was answered by using contending approaches to understanding Iranian foreign policy in order to discuss the Vienna deal of July 2015. The number of students who used recent examples, and did so usually well, provides encouragement to the course's aspiration that an historically and theoretically grounded approach can usefully inform our understanding of the contemporary Middle East.

POL13: The Politics of Europe
Examiner: Dr Peter Sloman

The Politics of Europe paper was recast this year to include a new module on British politics and a heavily revised module on European integration. It attracted 23 candidates, of whom 18 answered questions on British politics, 19 answered questions on contemporary issues in Western European politics, and 9 wrote on European integration. The overall performance was relatively strong, with 7 first-class marks (5 agreed, 2 disagreed), 13 upper seconds (12 agreed, 1 disagreed), and 3 lower seconds (all agreed).

The most popular questions were question 7 on the politics of austerity (12 answers), question 2 on the relationship between New Labour and Thatcherism (10), question 14 on the impact of European integration on equality within and between member states (7), and question 1 on the lessons of the 1970s for British social democracy (6). There appears to have been a certain amount of clustering around questions which were perceived to be close to supervision topics, but there was a reasonably wide spread of answers overall, and only two

questions – question 11 on the transformation of the West European state and question 13 on the origins of the Maastricht Treaty – attracted no takers.

The best candidates were able to combine rich empirical evidence with some critical reflections on the secondary literature, and apply this knowledge precisely and persuasively to the questions. Some of the answers on austerity (question 7), British social democracy (question 1), New Labour (question 2), and territorial politics (question 9) were particularly strong. On the other hand, many candidates struggled to answer the questions on coalition government (question 3), European welfare states (question 10), and equality in the EU (question 14), which required them to think about familiar topics in new or specific ways. Otherwise competent candidates frequently let themselves down by bringing in irrelevant material or focussing on only one part of the question. The very weakest answers made little reference to scholarly debate and appeared to rely on the candidate's general knowledge. Marks for Section C on European integration tended to be lower than for the other sections, but this was largely because most of the answers here were on question 14 (which was not well done) and also because some candidates were running out of time. Well-prepared candidates who had thought about what they wanted to say still performed well on this section.

One of the attractions of marking POL13 is that it gives a snapshot of the political views of some of Cambridge's best-informed students. On the strength of this year's scripts, students seem to regard austerity as a neoliberal imposition (with a few exceptions along the lines of "it's Greece's fault"), view the EU's egalitarian credentials with suspicion, and remember Tony Blair and the coalition with a certain amount of nostalgia. Let's see what the class of 2017 brings.

POL14: The politics of Asia
Examiner: Dr Tomas Larsson

This was the first year this paper was offered. In all, there were 18 candidates, all of whom took the paper by sit-in examination. The markers gave nine first-class marks and two lower second-class marks.
The remainder of the marks fell in the upper second-class range. The highest overall mark given for an exam script was 73, which was achieved by two candidates. The lowest average mark was 60. The average overall mark for all candidates was 66.

The most popular questions on the exam were questions 2 and 5, each attempted by seven candidates, and questions 7 and 16, attempted by six and five candidates, respectively. The best answers were elegantly written and well structured, presenting clear arguments that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the relevant literature as well as significant insight into the history and politics of several Southeast Asian countries. The very best answers also tended to display a high level of theoretical engagement and/or analytical proficiency.
The less successful answers often lacked a clear analytical strategy and/or empirical depth. A fairly common mistake was to lean excessively on one or two readings, rather than, as would be preferred, to engage with a wider range of relevant readings. The least successful answers were poorly written and structured.

POL15: The politics of Africa
Examiner: Dr Sharath Srinivasan

Covering the breadth of the politics of sub-Saharan Africa in historical and contemporary perspective, including topics of comparative politics as well as the international politics of the continent, this paper challenges students and lecturers alike to be attentive to country- and region-specific particularities whilst also addressing core theoretical and thematic concerns that lend themselves to broader analysis and argumentation. Students who master the core readings and case material included in the classes and lectures, and who can deploy this knowledge in their examined work with due attention to sources, are able to achieve a low II.i with little difficulty.

However, many students find it challenging to achieve a high II.i or a First. Those who do are able to draw on subtle and well-grounded empirical knowledge, often of individual countries or comparisons across countries relating to discrete issues, to substantiate, qualify or rebut major lines of argument in the broader literature. The best candidates understand what is at stake, theoretically and thematically, in the question, and address this through focused grounded analysis.

With no settled canon and drawing on diverse disciplinary and methodological approaches, a primary challenge for students is to craft their own trajectory and understanding, and to be flexible in reading across the course material. Independent thinking and reasoning quickly stands out in the work of the best performers, and it manifests itself in moving beyond rehearsed debates and piecemeal use of country case empirics to prove a point. Candidates who make careful choices on country cases throughout the year and who get beyond the core readings and designated case studies develop their own confidence in tackling the core themes of the paper.

In 2015-16, 25 candidates took the paper. All students sat the end-of-year exam: there was no option of assessed essay this year. The overall performance by candidates was to the expected standard. The average mark obtained was 64. Impressively, four students obtained Firsts, with one student achieving a mark of 76. This student combined clearly structured argumentation with in-depth use of empirical cases and author sources, to advance highly original answers. Three students were awarded marks in the II.ii range, with the lowest mark being 54. This candidate demonstrated only limited knowledge of the course material and core themes, the answers were short and the argumentation was unclear. Other candidates who scored II.ii marks also tended towards descriptive generality, a lack of engagement with key sources and weaknesses in argument. More generally, students who deploy general knowledge or knowledge from other papers taken throughout their degree at the expense of the course material, run the risk of not answering the question at hand in the content of the paper. The use of broader knowledge is welcome, but it must be in conversation with the content addressed in the paper. On the other hand, candidates who drew upon literature from across the course to answer questions on specific topics were often able to enrich and strengthen their arguments and avoid formulaic answers.

The most popular questions were Q1 (on the legacies of colonialism, 12 scripts), Q12 (on democracy in Africa, 12 scripts) and Q9 (on 'Africa rising' and Africa's international status, 11 scripts). These questions were answered well on the whole, but with a very diverse range. Whilst the overall level of accuracy and citation was high, candidates on this course should be careful to ensure they do not make mistakes with important facts or the arguments of major authors, as this will be marked down.

POL16: Conflict and Peacebuilding
Examiner: Dr Devon Curtis

There were 45 candidates for this paper. Four candidates received first class marks from both examiners and 5 candidates received a first class mark from one examiner and a high 2.1 mark from the other examiner. 32 candidates received 2.1 marks from both examiners, 3 candidates received 2.2 marks from both examiners, and one candidate received 3rd class marks from both examiners.

We were pleased that most candidates assessed the arguments in the literature and evaluated different perspectives. Many students carefully integrated case study examples into their answers, and effectively used these examples as evidence for their arguments. Many of the very best answers showed a good grasp of conceptual debates, wider themes of transnational and regional linkages around the production of conflict and peace, and were able to question some of the assumptions in the policy and scholarly literatures. On the other side of the spectrum, the weaker answers were vague and/ or incoherent, and failed to make a logical argument that was situated within the literature. There were at least two incomplete answers.

Every exam question was attempted by at least three candidates. The most popular questions were Q5 attempted by 24 students, and Q1 attempted by 17 students. Answers to Q5 were generally well done, with many candidates drawing on appropriate examples and literatures. Candidates had more difficulty with Q1. While there were three outstanding answers to this question, many other students struggled to engage with the idea of 'universal theories of conflict', and instead resorted to well-rehearsed answers about whether identity is a cause of conflict. Candidates are reminded to answer the specific question asked on the examination, rather than an answer they prepared for a supervision or revision essay.

Only six candidates attempted Q2, with one very thoughtful answer but two other candidates conflated development assistance and liberal peacebuilding, without explaining the connection. Twelve candidates attempted Q3 and these answers were generally fairly solid, although in some cases candidates provided excellent accounts of gendered understandings of conflict, but faltered when assessing the implications for peacebuilding. Q7 had the highest average mark on the exam, and all eight candidates attempting this question had sophisticated answers that carefully weighed up arguments and counter-arguments.

The two case study questions (Q11-12) were well done, showing that many students had mastered the case study material and themes. The stronger answers for Q12 were able to discuss the interaction between different levels of analysis. We were pleased that several candidates used material from the case study readings and lectures to answer other questions on the examination.

As always, weaker scripts were let down by insufficient attention to detail, imprecision, a lack of focus, or an argument with insufficient evidence.

We were generally very happy, however, with the thoughtfulness displayed in many of the answers, and candidates' knowledge of a wide body of literature and arguments, and the ability to support or refute arguments using appropriate case study examples.

POL17: Politics and Gender
Examiner: Dr Lauren Wilcox

This was the first year that the course was offered. Twenty-two candidates sat the Tripos paper, of whom six were awarded first-class marks, with fourteen upper seconds and two lower seconds.

The more popular questions were generally clustered in the first half of the paper (which spoke to course material from Michaelmas Term), with nine answers for Q1, on descriptive representation, eight for Q2, on gender quotas in democracies, fourteen for Q3, on rights, seven for Q4, on discrimination in employment, and four for Q5, on equality and difference, Q1 specifically called for 'discussion in relation to an empirical example', and the stronger essays were generally those that deployed a case study about which they showed real knowledge, and on which they reflected with some care; by contrast, weaker essays offered one or two striking statistics about recent British politics, but no more than that. The answers to Q3 were often stimulating, though few identified what a 'gender-specific right' might be, and too many candidates were a bit quick with theorists such as Onora O'Neill and John Rawls, whose arguments cannot be batted away quite so easily. Almost all the answers to Q4 deployed the same example of the politics of parental leave, which strongly suggested that they were reproducing material from lectures. Candidates are advised that in these circumstances their answers will stand out to the extent that they can offer their own criticism or distinctive commentary on such material—otherwise it can look like an exercise in passive regurgitation.

Fewer candidates attempted Q6-11, which addressed course themes explored in Lent Term, with only one response for Q6, on deconstruction and feminist politics, and for Q11, on the relationship between feminism and other movements around issues of gender and sexuality. There were nine answers to Q7, on war, which were generally well done, though the weaker essays offered too much description—listing various ways in which war is a gendered phenomenon—in place of developing a clear argument that directly engaged with the question that had been posed. The three answers to Q8, on security, were decent; the four answers to Q9, on globalization, struggled to define terms in ways that would have helped with the articulation of a well thought-out argument. Finally, the answers to Q10, on the concept of gender and the contemporary politics of the body, were well done, and pleasingly varied in their focus and approach, generally displaying a strong understanding of the literature and relevant arguments.

POL18: The Idea of a European Union
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Nine candidates sat the paper. There were four answers on each of Qs 9 (Hayek) and 10 (neo-mediævalism), three on 4 (the United States of Europe), 5 (anarchists and socialists), and 7 (political Catholicism), two on 3 (1789-1815), 6 (legal theorists), 11 (France), and 12 (the future), and one on 1 (Rousseau) and 2 (Saint-Pierre), with no attempt at Q8 (Muslims). The general quality of the answers was good, and a handful of the essays were really very good indeed, offering sophisticated discussion of primary texts, secondary literature, and relevant political contexts. Of the nine scripts, two ended up with a first-class mark, with six upper seconds and one lower second.

The paper was a challenging one, insofar as the questions did not always neatly map onto individual topics from the syllabus, but rather often encouraged candidates to think across the breadth of the course, and put material together that had been encountered in its different parts. Given the fairly small number of answers to each of the questions, and the pleasing range of approaches that was taken when answering them, it is difficult to make generalisations about how candidates fared on the paper. Nevertheless, a few observations follow. Discussion of the 'United States of Europe' (Q4) had curiously little reference to the USA as an obvious political model and inspiration (and essays on this topic spent a bit too much time on Mazzini). Essays on political Catholicism (Q7) sometimes slipped too quickly into a bland and not entirely to-the-point rehearsal of standard positions in the secondary literature (e.g. Lipgens vs. Milward). Answers on Hayek (Q9) were sometimes a bit quick to run together the single market and the Eurozone. It is always worthwhile paying close attention to the wording of the questions—e.g., to the reference to 'particular challenges' in Q5. Finally, a number of essays would have been stronger if the candidates had had a bit more of a grip on historical narratives, than they were able to demonstrate—especially with respect to the history of France (Q3, Q11).

POL19: China in the International Order
Examiner: Dr KC Lin

We marked thirty (30) scripts. Students were free to choose four out of twelve questions on the exam. This is the inaugural year of this module and the final exam.

The average mark was around 66. Eight scripts received an agreed mark of 70 or above, and no one failed. The standard deviation was initially below the expectation of 6, due to what we perceive to be a fairly uniform level of general competence of the answers. Questions 5, 9 and 10 received disproportional numbers of answers, while question 6 had no taker.

The scripts were stronger in the historical analysis of Chinese foreign policy orientation during the Cold War, China's recent positions in international regimes, and in determinants of Chinese overseas direct investment and contribution to UN peacekeeping operations. While generally capable of relating to international relations theories, most students seemed to have avoided questions that directly asked for applications of main schools of IR theories to a specific issue (Q1 on US-China relations and Q12 on hegemonic power transition).

The most common criticisms for the exam scripts centered on two problems: 1) a superficial understanding of realist, liberal-institutional, and constructivist theories and associated hypotheses. We sense that students have forgotten quite a bit of the fundamentals of Pol 2 despite reminders in lectures. 2) A lack of specificity in identifying foreign policy actors and their interests in relations to the context of the questions. As a result the explanations veered toward being static and oversimplified. This problem was found in the 2.2 exams, and may derive from a lack of attention to the required readings, or inadequate reflections on how countries' strategic calculus and policy options evolve over time.