UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Politics and
International Studies

HUMAN, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE TRIPOS

POL PAPERS

PART II EXAMINERS' REPORTS, 2014-2015

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

This was the first year of the new Part IIA in Politics & International Relations, within the Human, Social and Political Sciences Tripos. The process ran efficiently, and this was in no small part due to the efforts of our administrators, particularly Rebecca Burtenshaw, and the dedication of our external examiners, Profs Fawcett and Festenstein.

Profs Fawcett and Festenstein write favourably about the procedures involving the role of external examiners and the general organisation of the marking. They make three comments worthy of further attention. First, both point to the clustering of marks: that the first class marks given are clustered at the lower end of the scale, and this has an effect upon restricting the number of firsts given overall. Secondly, Prof Festenstein notes the limited written record of the outcome of discussions between markers. Thirdly, Prof Fawcett notes that some of the long essays do not use their evidence to answer the questions given.

POLIS will make a significant effort in 2015-16 to address the first issue. We will incorporate measures of standard deviation in to the marking material, and provide guidance on expectations to the examiners for the larger papers. The anticipated effect is that the proportion of students achieving first and lower second class results will increase.

The second issue will be addressed by inserting a column on the spreadsheet for recording comments about changes made after discussion between examiners. The third issue, that of long essays, has been addressed by providing more guidance to students taking the long essay paper (POL 5) in the opening lecture about explaining in their essays the relationship between the question, the argument and the evidential material

Dr Glen Rangwala

University of Cambridge

Department of Politics and
International Studies

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Examiner: Prof. Louise Fawcett
University of Oxford

This was my first year as external for the above including papers in the old PPS Tripos and the new HSPS Tripos.

We were advised that the year 2014-15 was a transitional period in which PPS and HSPS were operating at Part IIA, and PPS only operating at Part IIB.   For Part IIA HSPS I reviewed scripts/long essays in International Relations; Comparative Politics and Conceptual Issues; and Politics and IR. For Part II B PPS, I reviewed scripts in International Relations; the Politics of the Middle East; Europe; Africa, East and South Asia and the Politics of the International Economy.

I was provided with the necessary paper work, guidelines and all relevant materials in good time. I reviewed the relevant examination questions. Prior to the Examiners' Meeting we were also circulated a note regarding some concerns over marking discrepancies across papers (see Chair's note). This was helpful in identifying a potential problem area to consider beforehand.

On the day of the meeting the papers were clearly displayed in the POLIS building and scripts to be reviewed were marked up and laid out separately. Sample scripts were also provided to provide an indication of marking criteria – this was very helpful. The Chair of Examiners provided us with relevant background information and clear guidelines and was present throughout much of the process.   Internal examiners were on also hand to answer queries and provide background if needed.

The above arrangements were very satisfactory from this examiner's view point.

I reviewed a number of papers in the above categories, looking at borderline cases carefully. I found the overall standards set to be appropriate and the examining processes to be fairly conducted throughout. The marking standards were consistently good – faithful to the guidelines provided. Decisions regarding marks were clearly explained and justified.   My one observation would be that First Class marks tended to cluster at the lower end of the scale, suggesting that the full range of marks had not been used. This somewhat contradicts the guidelines in which examiners are encouraged to use the full range. We have experienced a similar problem in PPE examining in Oxford and have worked hard to expand the marks range (using 'step-marking') – with some success, particularly at the top end. That said, I did not find among the First Class scripts and essays I read that significant numbers deserved a better mark. So only a few minor adjustments were made.

I read a number of long essays. These were mostly well written and researched. A number were very good indeed. In a few, however, I noticed an apparent discrepancy between the question tackled and the evidence displayed and wondered why this was so, given that the quality of writing was good on the whole.

Overall I was impressed with the high quality of the work I read and the examining process overall. This appears as a dynamic, distinctive and challenging programme which stretches students intellectually.

Examiner: Prof. Matthew Festenstein
University of York

I reviewed papers in political thought, including dissertations, for these parts of the Tripos. The quality of assessment on display here is excellent: the examinations were demanding and wide-ranging, and the marking seems exceptionally thoughtful and well-justified, including detailed comments in support of the marks given and clear procedures for dealing with significant discrepancies between markers. The standards were appropriate for the programme, particularly in providing scope to stretch the stronger students, and comparable to similar programmes in those UK institutions with which I am familiar.

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.

This was a transition year, with the replacement of PPS with HSPS. On the face of it, the new Tripos will sweep away the difficulties sometimes experienced in moderating across different subjects and cultures of assessment and should allow for a more resolute focus on the attainments of the students on particular 'tracks'. Especially given the complexities of transition, the overall process was run by the Examinations Officer and the administrative team in a very efficient and (from my perspective) transparent way, and minor problems that cropped up were quickly resolved.

I have two observations that I would encourage POLIS to consider in the light of this transition. The first is that there is scope to stretch marking both at the bottom and 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 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. 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 reflection on marking practice in the light of the new classification rules so that you feel assured students are not disadvantaged by these. The use not only of the final mark sheet but of

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Politics and
International Studies

summary statistics at IIA and IIB, including mean and standard deviation for each paper (including the dissertation), is to be encouraged in order to help keep an eye on this.

Second, the timeframe for marking, and sheer volume, seems to have restricted opportunities for discussion between first and second markers of scripts. The process in place for resolving discrepancies is robust and procedurally defensible. However, I would encourage discussion between markers as part of this process – and, if possible, recording of any further comments as well as changes in mark that result.

Finally, I should note that this remains an intellectually very distinctive and attractive programme in Politics, and POLIS are to be commended for developing and sustaining this.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS

POL3 (HSPS): Ethics and World Politics
Examiner: Dr Duncan Bell

This year 112 students from HSPS took Pol 3: Ethics and World Politics (108 in HSPS Part IIA, 4 in PPS Part IIB). 18 of them received a 1st class average mark (17 in Part IIA, 1 in Part IIB). 87 received 2.1s (85 in Part IIA, 2 in Part IIB). 6 received a 2.2 average mark (all in Part IIA). 1 candidate in Part IIB received a split 2.1/2.2 mark (as average marks were not awarded in the now-superseded marking scheme used in Part IIB).

The average mark for the paper was 65. The most popular questions were Q1 (49 answers), Q6 (39 answers), and Q3 & 14 (37 answers each). The least popular questions were Q8 (3 answers), Q14 (4 answers), Q13 (6 answers). The remainder of the answers were fairly evenly distributed across the paper. In general, each of the Sections in Part I (the normative significance of borders, human rights, and the ethics of war) and in Part 2 (human rights, the ethics of violence) attracted a good level of interest – there was no obvious clustering. The most common interpretive problem encountered by the examiners was a confusion between statist and nationalist arguments (in Section I of Part I). While they can overlap, these are different things.

Scripts awarded 1sts and high 2.1s demonstrated both a good understanding of the material taught during the year, and an ability to develop a clear, cogent and strong line of argument. They also illustrated their answers with a range of appropriate empirical (or hypothetical) examples. The very top performers presented arguments with an impressive level of technical sophistication and theoretical precision. A large number of students adopted a strategy of summarising bodies of literature relevant to the question, rather than making a proper argument. When done very well, such a strategy will score at the very best a mid-2.1, though most of the time it results in a low 2.1 (or below). As noted above, the best answers are not competent summaries of the literature, but arguments developed by the candidate, using the literature (where relevant) to support their case. The weakest scripts either failed to understand the implications of the question, failed to address the question properly, or contained serious factual mistakes and interpretive errors. Some of the lowest

marks were a result of poor timing, where candidates failed to write three full answers. If a candidate produces two excellent answers, but only has time to scribble a page for the third one, they will most likely end up with a 2.2 mark or lower. Good planning and time-keeping are essential.

POL4 (HSPS): Comparative Politics
Examiner: Dr Christopher Bickerton

This was the first year of the new Pol 4 paper, where assessment was conducted entirely through an end of year exam in Easter Term. The exam paper was divided up, with the first section containing 9 questions each of which tested material covered in the Michaelmas term lectures. The remaining sections were composed of 2 questions each and each section corresponded to a module taught in Lent term. As students were asked to answer 1 question from the first section and then 1 question from the two module-sections which they had taken in Lent term, each student answered 3 questions in total.

112 students took this paper in total. The distribution of the marks was as follows: 8 students were awarded a First; 94 students were awarded a 2.1 (49 students obtained an 'upper' 2.1 and 45 obtained a 'lower' 2.1); 9 students were awarded a 2.2; and 1 student obtained a Third.

In section A, the spread of answers to individual questions is as follows: 17 students answered Q1, 12 students answered Q2, 1 student answered Q3, 1 student answered Q4, 3 students answered Q5, 14 students answered Q6, 12 students answered Q7, 11 students answered Q8, 41 students answered Q9. In other words, 66 out of 112 students answered a question on the theme of state formation. 16 students answered a question on the theme of modes of interest representation and 30 students answered a question from the theme on democratization and regimes.

The spread across the sections devoted to individual modules corresponds to the numbers taking those modules. 29 students answered Q10, 33 students answered Q11, 43 students answered Q12, 7 students answered Q13, 12 students answered Q14, 17 students answered Q15, 12 students answered Q16, 17 students answered Q17, 12 students answered Q18, 20 students answered Q19, 13 students answered Q20 and 9 students answered Q21.

Overall the best answers combined a critical analysis of literature/concepts with a direct attempt at answering the question. Often, the literature itself was used as a way of structuring the question e.g. with question 19 on sanctions or question 17 on mainstream responses to the rise of populism, leaving little room for a critical treatment of the scholarly literature itself. In instances where only one or two examples were used in any detail, there was no awareness that this posed problems of generalizability and that single cases may not be representative of a phenomenon as a whole.

Department of Politics and
International Studies

The following remarks raise issues relevant to specific questions. Not all questions will be discussed here, only those raising particular issues.

On Question 2, there was relatively little attention given to the meaning of institutional differences, with many relying on the framework provided by Gerschewski without justifying this in terms of the question itself.

Question 8 was specifically about the European context and yet many students discussed Centeno's work on Latin America and articles on state formation in South East Asia. The comparison in this question should really have been intra-European rather than with other regions. It is also important to add that the question was asking student to outline specifically the role played by war in state formation in Europe. This could have been done by identifying the distinctiveness of war in comparison to other dynamics of state formation, perhaps by suggesting there was a temporal dimension (war plays an important role early on, less so later, for instance). Alternatively, it could have been argued that war has played both a formative and a destructive role in state formation. Instead, most students answered the question by evaluating the validity of Tilly's argument, which is not the same thing. The best answers considered analytically and empirically the role of war but did not frame the issue as Tilly versus competing explanations.

Question 9 was answered well overall though there was a tendency to use it simply as an occasion for testing Charles Tilly's thesis about "states make war and war makes states". Tilly's argument may not export particularly well beyond the early modern European period but there were many other ways of answering this particular question. Indeed, one might have answered this question very well with no reference to Tilly at all. There was also a strong tendency to assume that Tilly's argument works perfectly for early modern Europe, with a very undifferentiated account given of modern Europe's development.

On questions 10 and 11, the comparison of Egypt and Saudi Arabia was commonly used but not always to its fullest effect. Students rarely systematically compared the two cases and even more rarely picked up interesting differences and similarities. Q10 was most obviously pointing at the very least to the fact that authoritarianism in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia has been resilient in spite of very great differences in the economic records of both regimes. And yet few students framed their answers around this initial and arresting difference, to then probe further as the essay develops. Q11 deserved more systematic consideration of the specificity of religious discourse as opposed to other kinds of political discourse.

On question 12, the better answers took issue with the term 'national interest', pointing out that how it is defined may determine one's views on the balance of power between President and Congress.

On question 15, most students answered the question entirely through a reference to history (cultural legacy, Cold War legacy, history of dissidence) even though the question is referring to why Eastern European states took divergent democratization paths *since 1989*. More recent events such as economic crises in Russia or EU membership were not mentioned. For such a question, the decision to focus purely on historical explanations deserved more justification.

On question 17, it would have been good to see more reflection on the meaning of 'success'. Does a successful response to populism by mainstream parties mean eliminating them from the political system through the formation of an anti-populist *cordon sanitaire*? Or does success mean an incorporation of the concerns of populist parties into mainstream political life? Most answers tended only to describe rather mechanically the various response strategies identified by Bale et al.

On question 20, there was a frequent discussion of ethnic violence in Indonesia at the time of the Asian financial crisis (anti-Chinese violence in wake of economic collapse in Indonesia) as if this was an argument about the ethnic conflicts stemming from democratization. Few candidates properly differentiated between democratization and economic crises as sources of ethnic violence.

POL5 (HSPS): Conceptual Issues in Politics and International Relations
Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

The 57 candidates for this paper submitted two long essays each. These essays covered most of the list of possible essay questions, with questions 10 (on climate change policy, 7 essays), 36 (on revolutions, 6 essays), 1b (on colonisation and wars in Africa, 5 essays) and 28a (on religion in American politics, 5 essays) being the most popular. Overall, 21 essays received a first class mark, 84 essays an upper second class mark, 8 essays a lower second class mark, and 1 essay a third class mark. Five candidates received a first class average mark for the paper (and all five of these candidates received first class marks for each of their essays), 49 candidates an upper second class mark, and 3 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.

It was pleasing that so few essays received marks below 60. The large majority of essays provided clear and focused answers to the questions, showed evidence of a significant amount of reading and research, and were adequately referenced and edited. It is clear that many students worked diligently on their essays. The best essays, while focusing on very different topics and applying quite different approaches, all found a good balance between conceptual points, arguments, and the substantiation of these arguments (through theoretical or empirical analysis). They based their analysis on a broad set of sources and considered different arguments and interpretations. However, very few of them were willing to push their arguments (and the support for them) as far as they could have, which explains the relatively low number of very high marks.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Politics and
International Studies

Essays which received lower marks tended to rely on only a small number of arguments (thus ignoring possible counter-arguments) and sources, rely too much on quotations rather than the candidate's own words and arguments, and/or stray too far from the questions set. A more common issue affecting many essays was that the relation between the general arguments in the essay and the specific cases/examples/supporting claims was not sufficiently explained, or – in a few cases – that the examples or specific claims were hardly introduced or set up at all. The presentation of the bibliography was also problematic (for example, through inconsistent formatting, or not putting the entries in alphabetical order) in several essays.

**POL6 (PPS) : The History of Political Thought Since C.1890 and Political Philosophy
Examiner: David Runciman**

Twenty-one PPS candidates sat the paper this year (along with fourteen candidates from History). The overall standard of performance was good and higher than in some previous years, with four PPS students getting agreed first-class marks (as opposed to three with agreed 2.2s) and overall more first-class than 2.2 marks awarded. A significant number of student also got high 2.1s. The best scripts were very impressive, with excellent range and a good balance between historical knowledge and conceptual understanding. It was also good to see that there was a wider spread than normal in the range of questions tackled, without the usual bunching of answers around a few authors (Nietzsche in particular). There were a high number of answers on Hayek, which reflects the additional lectures on Hayek that were available this year. There was also a good spread of answers for section B. This suggest that the lecturing is encouraging students to range more broadly over the paper and also that students are going beyond authors that they have studied in previous years (there were fewer answers on Weber and Schmitt). This was good to see and should be encouraged.

As in previous years, the biggest challenge for students was to use the time in the exam to show detailed knowledge of the texts and concepts they were discussing, rather than writing general or summary essays. The best answers managed this by using the question to focus on particular aspects of an author, text or argument and developing points that went beyond the most familiar or broad-brush analysis. Weaker answers tended to be light on detail and approach the questions as an opportunity to generalise about non-specific ideas. In Section B, though the questions do not specify particular authors or texts to be discussed, good answers do look in some details at specific material and use it as the basis for any critique. Successful answers in section B were able to make a link between historical material and contemporary analysis; weaker answers tended to fall back on history of political thought as a substitute for engagement with analytical arguments. It is important for students to remember that section B requires additional skills to section A, including some knowledge of recent political philosophy.   Students who approach this paper as an opportunity to show a variety of reading and detailed knowledge across different approaches to political thought and political philosophy tend to do well

**POL7 (HSPS): History of Political Thought to c.1700
Examiner: Miss Sylvana Tomaselli and Dr Ruth Scurr**

46 candidates sat this paper, 7 obtained Firsts and the rest II.1s with one or two exceptions. The most popular answers were on Machiavelli (17), Locke (14), Plato and Aristotle (13 each), Hobbes (8), More (5), Augustine and Aquinas (5 each) in §A. For §B, the most popular answers were on Greek Democracy and its Critics and Renaissance humanist political thought (13 each) followed by Toleration in the later 17th century (11), Sovereignty (8), Reason of State (6), Early Christian political thought (3), and Temporal and spiritual in medieval political thought (1) . The marks ranged up to 80 for some scripts, and the over-all standard was high this year.

It may well be that candidates took heed of the 2014 Examiners' Report (which should be recommended reading for all taking Political Thought Papers). It made two major points:

> [1] Those who read widely, but are able to utilize their erudition in a well-structured and fluent answer to the question as opposed to just displaying their knowledge and erudition in the round, as ever, did best. [2] Those few who clearly had not done enough work, in far too many cases rehashing even Part I paper level answers on Hobbes, did least well.

This year very few fell into the trap of rehearsing the material acquired in Part I. Most tackled authors not covered in the First year. Candidates also benefited from the fact that the questions did not appear deceptively easy and indeed were thought-provoking. They rose to the occasion and seemed to enjoy the challenge.

Indeed, they appeared to have taken in two further points made in last year's report and thus made good and clear use of the texts, showed wider reading around the subjects and argued a case convincing as opposed to sitting on the fence. The questions on Aristotle, More, Locke, Renaissance Humanism, Sovereignty and Reason of State received particularly sophisticated and impressive answers.

One or two candidates mismanaged their time and their final essay costs them a higher class. More than one candidate came close to breaking, or fell foul of, the *'Avoid overlap between your answers'* rule

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

POL7 (PPS): The Politics of the Middle East
Examiner: Dr Glen Rangwala

This was the first year of the Middle East paper, and it drew a good number of students. 26 students took the exam, and a further 2 students took the paper by long essay.

In general, the quality of exam scripts and long essays was high: there were quite a few scripts demonstrating an outstanding level of understanding, and two thoroughly researched and innovative long essays. Three scripts were judged by the both examiners to fall below the 2.1 standard, but there were none below the 2.2 level.

The best scripts and long essays for this paper drew upon detailed knowledge to make their arguments, whilst recognising and evaluating critically contrasting arguments. The very best ranged

across material from the different reading lists within the same essay, demonstrating independent thinking and well-structured writing intentions.

The most significant limitations were as follows. First, quite a few exam essays did not demonstrate a good understanding of key concepts in the questions (eg 'post-Islamist', 'Arab states system'): this indicates a limited extent of careful reading. Secondly, a few students adopted a strategy of giving a straightforward answer to the question in the opening section of the essay, and filling the rest of the essay with factual information to back up their starting assertion. Even if the information is entirely correct, this is an approach that cannot reach a 2.1 standard: it's not making an argument. It'd be much better to recognise different real or plausible potential answers, and evaluate between them. Thirdly, there was a surprisingly large number of basic factual inaccuracies, often quite trivial in form (such as in stating the years of particular events), but which cumulatively within the same script led to a sense of carelessness.

In general, most students showed they could combine broader thematic analysis with attention to the politics of particular places. It was good to see that the empirical material drawn upon by students ranged across the region, from detailed discussions of the place of Islam in Morocco through to engaging accounts of gender politics in Oman. There was useful attention to the particularities of politics in Iran, Turkey and Israel, alongside the more 'standard' reference points in Middle Eastern studies (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq). It was particularly encouraging to read close, critical engagement with the two case studies of Turkey and the 'new sectarianism'. One pleasing aspect of the exam scripts was that all the questions were attempted by at least one student, and no question received more than ten responses: one hopes that this reflects the diversity of interests and approaches that the course was intending to stimulate.

POL8 (HSPS) & POL15 (PPS): History of Political Thought from C.1700 to c.1890
Examiner: Prof. J.C Robertson

There were 7 candidates from History, 10 from Polis. Once again the standard was generally high; the outstanding scripts this year were from Polis. Even the weaker scripts, however, engaged with the texts and worked hard to give a coherent account of the arguments in question. All but six questions received answers, suggesting that lecture coverage equips candidates to choose from the full range of authors and topics with confidence in the framework in which they will be examined. (The unanswered questions were those on Bentham, Constant and Marx, and on Natural Law, Nationalism, and Social Science.) Questions in Paper 4/Pol 15 will tend to be more precisely focussed than those in Paper 20/Pol 8, but candidates generally showed themselves able to respond, adapting their answers to bring general principles to bear on the specific issue of the question. Though most answers to the Rousseau question suggested that the candidates were unsure of the precise context of the quotation from the Letter to Mirabeau, they nevertheless showed degrees of ingenuity in working out how it might be applied to the *Social Contract*. Polis candidates disproportionately answered the questions on Rousseau (6 Polis answers) and on the French Revolution (7 Polis answers). Four History and four Polis candidates availed themselves of the opportunity to answer two questions from Section B, with no adverse consequences for their overall marks. Numbers from History may have been affected by the new Paper 6; but the scripts suggest

that this remains a paper which stretches Part II candidates, giving them the opportunity to move up a level from Part I (Part IIA in HSPS).

Int 8 (PPS): The History and Politics of South Asia
Examiner: Dr Tomas Larsson, Dr David Washbrook and Dr Sunil Purushotham

There were nine candidates for this paper. Eight candidates took the paper by sit-in exam, and one student opted for the long essay. Among the candidates who took the exam, there were four first-class marks, 10 upper second-class marks, and two lower second-class marks. The markers gave the long essays agreed upper second-class marks.The most popular questions on the exam were numbers 6, 13, and 14. There was a relatively large number of questions that no candidate attempted (namely, questions 2, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 18, 19, 20). The weaker answers tended to brief, missing obvious points and/or to be highly descriptive and providing little in the way of argument.

POL8(PPS): The Politics of Europe
Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

There were eight candidates taking the exam for this paper, while five candidates submitted long essays. In the exam, six candidates received upper second class marks from both markers, one candidate received lower second class marks from both markers, and one candidate received one upper second class and one lower second class mark. The average mark was 63.9 (63.0 for the first marker, 64.8 for the second marker). Candidates answered five questions from Section A of the exam paper, 11 questions from Section B and 8 questions from Section C. Questions 6 (on the political effects of populist parties in Western Europe) and 11 (on why the EU is such a divisive issue in UK politics) were the most popular, with five answers each. Questions 7 (on austerity policies in Western Europe) and 12 (on the EU referendum in the UK) each received three answers, while question 1 (on the origins and development of European integration) received two answers. On the other hand, questions 5 (on EU enlargement and foreign policy) and 13 (on the UK constitution) did not receive any answers.

The average mark for the long essays was 61.9, with one essay receiving a first class mark, six essays receiving an upper second class mark and three essays receiving a lower second class mark. Five essays focused on the question on Euroscepticism in the UK, three essays on austerity policies in Western Europe, and two essays on EU enlargement.

Most of the exam answers provided solid answers to the questions posed, and showed a good empirical understanding of the topics covered. It was disappointing that no candidate received an overall first class mark. Although a few single answers received a first class mark, many of the best answers failed to consider any possible alternatives to their arguments or provided a good and detailed general overview of the topic rather than an essay fully focused on the exam question. The latter was, for example, the case for several of the answers to Question 11, which focused more generally on Euroscepticism in the UK rather than specifically on why the EU has been such a divisive issue (it is possible for Euroscepticism to be high in general without political parties being divided on

it). Common problems in the weaker essays were empirical mistakes and, in a few instances, incoherent arguments.

Most of the long essays provided clear answers to the question and showed that the candidates had done a considerable amount of reading for them. The essay which received a first class mark combined a clear argument (defended against alternative claims) and good and detailed empirical material. The essays which received lower second class marks failed to provide a fully coherent answer to the specific essay question (as was the case for some of the essays on Euroscepticism in the UK) or made several unsupported empirical claims.

POL9 (PPS): 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 who draw upon case material included in the classes and lectures, and who can deploy this knowledge in their examined work, are able to achieve a low II.i with little difficulty.

However, most 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. 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. A previous examiner for this paper hit the challenge squarely on the head: "The real skill then must be in understanding what is at stake, theoretically, in any particular question, and in showing both good empirical knowledge of particular places and communities in Africa, and an understanding of how to make empirical knowledge 'count' in answering the question."

In 2014-15, 19 candidates took the examinations for this course, eight of whom chose to submit two 5,000 words essays as the method of assessment. The examiners considered the overall performance by candidates was to the expected standard. Of the eight candidates who took the course by assessed long essay, four essays achieved first class marks (a quarter of essays). Two candidates who wrote assessed essays achieved a first class mark overall and the others all obtained a II.i. While the average score of 65.1 for candidates taking the paper by long essay was quite good, the examiners noted high variability in the quality of the essays, which reflected the comments of supervisors that many students were not well organised in working on their essays during term and thus submitted essays that were often unpolished and based on limited reading. Some long essays were of an exceptionally high standard, demonstrating breadth of knowledge and sharp

understanding of the literature, considerable research, thoughtful and original argumentation and rigour and clarity of expression.

For the 11 students who sat the examination, one achieved a first class result and the remainder achieved a II.i. The average mark for candidates taking the course by examination was 64.9. The questions answered showed considerable unevenness, suggesting that students either shared their focus on certain topics or that the questions themselves varied in their level of appeal. The most popular questions were: 1 (on legacies of colonialism, six students), Q9 (on failures of democratisation, five students) Q6 (on violence and conflict, four students), Q12 (on aid and donors, four students). There is always a danger in sticking too closely to a standard answer, as it is likely to bear high similarity to answers of other candidates. Candidates who drew upon literature from across the course to answer questions on specific topics were often able to enrich and strengthen their arguments. 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.

POL11 (PPS): Politics of East Asia
Examiner: Dr Tomas Larsson, Dr Iza Hussin and Dr Kun-Chin Lin

There were nine candidates for the paper. This year, seven students took the sit-in exam, and two students opted for the long essays. Among the candidates who took the exam, the markers gave five first-class marks, seven upper second-class marks, and two lower second-class marks. As for the long essays, there was one first-class mark, and three upper second-class marks. The most popular questions on the exam were questions 6, attempted by four candidates, and questions 5 and 15, each attempted by three candidates. As in previous years, the best answers were elegantly written and well structured, presenting clear arguments which demonstrated knowledge of relevant literatures as well as significant insight into the history and politics of China and Southeast Asia. The less successful often lacked in analytical precision and/or empirical depth. For example, some answers to question 6, on provincial government in China, provided a discussion of the more encompassing category of "local" government (which includes village and township government).

As there were only two candidates taking the paper by long essay, it is not possible for us to provide any meaningful analysis of student performance this year with regards to this particular form of assessment. This was the last year that this paper was offered. In the HSPS Tripos there will, however, be an expanded set of offerings in the area of Asian politics, with students enjoying two relevant paper choices: The Politics of Asia (POL14) and China and the International Order (POL19).

POL12 (PPS): Politics of the International Economy
Examiner: Dr Helen Thompson

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Politics and
International Studies

21 candidates took the exam after 3 students taking the paper withdrew in Easter term. There were 3 agreed firsts, one of which was an 80 and 78, 14 agreed upper seconds, 2 agreed lower seconds, and 2 candidates with a 59 and a low 2.1 mark.

At the very top level, the quality of the answers was outstanding. The best script showed an extremely effective command of the empirical material and used that knowledge to make incisive, analytically sharp, and original arguments. What was somewhat disappointing was beyond the top three scripts how few first class answers there were. Most candidates showed a generally good understanding of the empirical material but analytically did not quite know how to use it to answer the specific questions set.

This problem was perhaps most acute on the financial crisis question, which 16 candidates answered. Most candidates rehearsed the different causal elements of the financial crisis without quite getting to grips either with their relation to each other, or what the relative importance of each said to the matter of the avoidability or not of the crisis. Many candidates here spent too much time on the role of the American state in encouraging home ownership through subprime lending and mortgage securitisation and rather little on the problem of bank funding and dependency on short-term money markets.

Some candidates at the lower end did not answer the questions directly or missed the analytical point of the question. Most egregiously, two candidates entirely misread the term 'exchange rate management' on the monetary union question and answered as if the question had said 'the Exchange Rate Mechanism' despite the fact that putting this term in the question would have rendered it syntactically meaningless. Several candidates on the question on the change in the American approach to Bretton Woods and economic multilateralism between 1944 and 1948 did not mention the death of Roosevelt and Truman's ascent to the presidency as if there were an *a priori* domestic political continuity represented by 'the US' or 'the Americans' during the period at issue.

More generally, candidates would do better to engage with questions with more substantive precision. In part this is a matter of ensuring that questions are answered directly and at their analytical centre. It is also though important that candidates do more than explain an empirical point and then add a quick analytical reflection at the end of the paragraph. The best answers were those where each paragraph was from start to finish contributing to the development of an analytical claim that was then pushed further or qualified in the next stage of the argument.

POL13 (PPS): Conceptual Issues and texts in modern politics
Examiner: Dr Helen Thompson

56 candidates took the paper in 2015. There were 8 agreed firsts and 2 more candidates where a candidate received one first class mark. There were also 8 agreed lower seconds and 2 more candidates received one lower second mark. This year there were no third class scripts.

The scripts showed a significant improvement on 2014. There were proportionately fewer short answers although a number of the lower seconds were still awarded to candidates who wrote less

than five pages. Within the upper second range, proportionately more candidates received a mark of 65 or above.

This year far more candidates answered a text question than in 2014. Generally, the text questions were also answered better at least at the top end. All the agreed firsts came on a passage question. Candidates seemed to focus their answers more clearly and precisely on passages than on the general questions. In part this disparity arose because many candidates did not answer the general questions very directly. For example, only one candidate on the question about contingency really got to grips with the contingency versus necessity antithesis on which the notion of contingency relies. No candidate made a clear distinction between that which could or could not be otherwise by virtue of political agency and that which could have been otherwise by virtue of chance in the material world. Similarly, most answers on the compatibility of modern democracy and modern technology paid rather little attention to modern technology itself. Here nobody got much beyond the internet, and several candidates tried to answer the question as if technology were itself the fundamental issue in democracy's ability to adapt to crisis.

Certainly the best answers, especially on the passages, showed a considerable analytical flair and engaged directly and intelligently with specific material. Otherwise promising answers of both kinds, however, were rather let down by an apparent unwillingness to make arguments through a command of detail about something of substance. Many examples were under-developed, and too many candidates still fell back at least in part of their essays on rehashing various political theorists' approaches to the issue at hand. Candidates need to think harder about the way they make arguments so that their essays both use evidence through cases more effectively and have a sharper analytical structure. On this paper this requires candidates to reflect more on the pertinence of the material they bring to bear on either the propositions on the passage or the analytical terms of the general questions.