

October 2022

PICKING *the* RIGHT
**POLITICAL
SCIENCE**
SPECIALISATION

Welcoming Message.

Coming to the right decision in choosing a specialisation that best suits your interest takes extensive time and effort. The opportunities usually offered by the University of Amsterdam are extremely limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accessibility became extremely limited, creating difficulties for students to gain first-hand information from both professionals and students within their specialisations' fields. It is from the lack of these opportunities that 020 decided to establish Project Major.

Project Major includes a series of booklets for the biggest courses within the Social Sciences faculty. These booklets are written by third-year students who are currently enrolled at the University of Amsterdam within the course they are writing for.

They offer insight into the characteristics and interests one would need to flourish in any given specialisation. Furthermore, the booklets include the exact courses within the specialisation, accompanied by their practicalities, such as registration dates. Finally, we provide insights into the career options that each specialisation enables. If the course has many students, 020 also creates webinars where people can direct questions to both the booklets' student authors and working professionals. By creating this project 020 hopes to adequately inform the student body where the university has not, allowing them to make a decision that best suits their interests.

If there are any inquiries or feedback concerning Project Major, we would love to hear from you. Get in touch with us via [email](#) or visit [our website](#)!

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Comparative Politics.

By Piotr Marczyński

Personal Interests

Comparative Politics mainly attracts people interested in political science as it is classically understood (e.g., studying the specifics of democracy, autocracy, and more). Studying the Comparative Politics specialisation would be to your benefit if you want to be academically trained, focusing on the broader aspects and themes of political science.

The Course

Comparative Politics (CP) is a relatively common specialisation, although it lags behind International Relations (IR) in popularity. Its content involves what is traditionally understood to be 'political science', focusing on the interplay between political actors and institutions. It is to some extent comparable to the first-year course Introduction to Political Science (IPOL), though more complex and focused. The discipline is academic in its format and goals, which can be either exciting or disappointing, depending on your priorities. However, this is not to say that CP is detached from

contemporary issues. The core idea of the course is to provide a solid theoretical background that enables you to analyse ongoing events, which is exactly what you will be asked to do in your assignments. The entanglement of empirics and theory is at heart of the entire course, and is what CP is all about.

Material

The course is divided into lecture material and tutorial material, which only partially overlap. At first, there might have been some skepticism towards the division, but after finishing the course, many saw the logic behind it. Lectures are meant to provide you with historical context, as well as the major developments in the field, while tutorials are focused on discussing the readings of each week, which is made easier knowing the context of their creation.

The readings consist mostly of the classics of political science literature, which has its positives and drawbacks. In the end, I am really glad I went through it, as I now have a solid background in the discipline. When I see contemporary literature today, I can easily place it in a research

tradition. Nevertheless, there might be people asking why there is such a deep focus on reading “older” literature, mainly from the 1960s. This is accounted for by the aforementioned lecture-tutorial divide.

Contemporary events enter the picture during tutorials in the form of student presentations, which are done in groups of three people, as well as discussions amongst students. Tutorial groups cover topics as diverse as contemporary state-formation, such as Catalonia, and the sustainability of authoritarian regimes.

Grading

The majority of your grade (70%) comes from the two take-home exams at the end of each block (35% each). In the exam you are allowed to choose one of three topics to write an essay on, which is helpful in giving the student some agency. For example, I wrote my essays on the role of the media in agenda setting, and the differences between early and late state-building using historical examples. The length of the take-home exam is around 1500 words excluding references, which forces you to develop your argument in a

to-the-point manner. Teachers seem to be quite attentive to the layout of the paper and quality of references, so it is definitely worth it to have a second look at your work before uploading.

Additionally, 20% of the grade comes from a Wikipedia entry you will need to upload. This assignment was rather peculiar and required watching a few videos about how Wikipedia functions. However, it is not too much work, as you can decide to edit a single section, as I did with democratic backsliding in the CEE section.

The last 10% comes from a 4-minute presentation, which was easier than the majority of the ones I had to do in the past, as you actually have time to talk for a while, so the stress of fitting within the 4-minute window fades away. My presentation was concerned with the impact of the commercialisation of the media apparatus on its ideological partisanship. Overall, the workload was highly manageable with focus placed on having a thorough understanding of the relatively small number of readings.

Third-Year Courses

The choices of third-year electives are more restricted when you compare it to other specialisations, such as IR. Nevertheless, the ones that are offered are quite solid. Also, contrary to the popular misconception, your specialisation does not restrict your thesis choice, so do not concern yourself. Below there is a list of the mandatory electives you could choose from in the academic year 2019/2020. As with all the other specialisations, you are required to pick one 6 ECTS course out of the list and one 12 ECTS course to fill in the requirement of your specialisation. While being fairly restricted, the courses are quite varied, so it should not be an issue to find something interesting to you.

▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor seminar 6 EC		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
De toekomst van links: tijd voor idealisme, radicalisme of realisme?		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Politics, media and communication		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Who participates? Immigrant minority participation in Europe and the US		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Comparative politics of North Africa		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Contested globalization		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Politics of inequality around the globe		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Who supports (liberal) democracy? The attraction of authoritarian leaders		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
> Women and Politics		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor seminar 12EC		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Divisive politics: populism, polarization, and the changing electoral landscape		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Understanding politics through psychology		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Radicale bewegingen en terrorismebestrijding		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Turkey and the European Union		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Interest Groups and Social Movements		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Resilient democracy. The Life and Works of Alexis de Tocqueville		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Organizing across borders: the politics of international organizations		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> Politics in Practice		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
> The future of Europe		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12

Popular Career Paths

One of the nicest elements of the Comparative Politics specialisation is the broadness of the course. You are not set to go into one specific direction with your future, as the options available to you are wide-ranging. That being said, those studying Comparative Politics tend to stay in the academic field and pursue a PhD.

Public Policy and Governance.

By Madeleine Pennington

Personal Interests

Public Policy and Governance (PPG) is among the least chosen of the specialisations within the Political Science bachelor's. Many students assume its content to be dry, or that the course explanation is too vague. I am here to tell you that it is neither dry, nor vague! From the first day on, you are expected to think and act like a policy expert. Many career opportunities are linked to the PPG specialisation, such working for EU institutions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, and many more.

The Course

PPG can be viewed as a course in which we, the students, are thrown into the deep end as dedicated policy experts or strategists. We are expected to critically analyse 21st century governance issues, also referred to as 'wicked problems'. Think about topics like gender inequality, or COVID-19. The aim is to highlight our rapidly changing society—good and bad—as well as its consequences, of which include the creation of distinct networks. Topics which are prevalent throughout the course are network governance, which might sound vague but becomes extremely useful in analysing our reality nowadays; the role of knowledge, as connected to science and politics; democratic decision making; and many more current challenges such as global warming, and systemic racism. As you can probably already tell, the course is highly related to current events. What is so interesting is that in every tutorial, something new is highlighted and will ultimately help you be informed of and engage with current events. Overall, PPG is far more than describing and exploring the policy cycle, it is a course filled with practical advice to help us think

independently and make decisions using a critical approach.

Some specifics of the course include the implementation of a 'critical approach', that is to say that a subject is addressed from various perspectives. Additionally, there is a "focus on cross-border combinations of problems and solutions", meaning that networks increasingly arise across borders, and hence we must use an analytical lens that transcends them. Thirdly, knowledge and skills are taught through viewing challenges and topics within their context, i.e., that suitable goals and means are linked to solutions. Lastly, education is based on ongoing research within the Political Science department, meaning that our data collection and research is of great value. If you would like to know more information about these topics, I recommend reading the course manual for PPG.

As far as the readings go, a theoretical basis gives you the grounds to start making real-life-like papers. You will most likely be required to write several 'policy observations' which, in non-Coronavirus times, involve you going out into the field and

observing for yourself different situations based on the readings. Thanks to our advanced technology, the change from going into the field and observing something in real-time can be transferred smoothly to desk-research. The two examinations will question your knowledge on the theories brought forward during the lectures and those analysed in the ‘policy labs’ (tutorials), together with practical case studies. An example of an assignment is analysing the relationship between policy and democracy by observing a public meeting. How did this meeting impede civilians from the participation process? What role does expert knowledge entail? These are some of the questions that can be asked during such analyses.

Third-Year Courses

One 6 ECTS and one 12 ECTS course—besides your bachelor thesis, which is in itself 12 ECTS—are required to complete your specialisation. For the remaining 30 ECTS, choices do not have to be within your specialisation or even in the Political Science department necessarily. This also applies vice versa: you can do your bachelor thesis

and an additional 18 ECTS on the side in the second semester and more flexibility in the first semester!

♥ <i>Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor Seminar 6EC</i>		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
Aside from the courses mentioned below, you can also follow two courses from the Future Planet Studies department: 5132GOST6Y - <u>Governance and Systemic Transformation</u> and 5132PET6Y - <u>Political Economy of Transnational Food Chains</u>			
➤ Contemporary challenges in governance: Knowledge, Power and Democracy in a Fragmented Society	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
➤ Green Economy and Society	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
➤ Citylab 020: Sex and the city	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	6
♥ <i>Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor Seminar 12EC</i>		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ Framing and supporting societal transformations toward sustainability	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ Corporate responsibility	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
Radicale bewegingen en terrorismebestrijding	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ Transnational governance	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ Organizing across borders: the politics of international organizations	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ Politics in Practice	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12
➤ The future of Europe	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	12

It is important to note that although certain thesis topics informally belong to a certain specialisation, all political science students can choose any thesis topic they desire.

Popular Career Paths

One of the greatest strengths of the PPG specialisation are the myriad career paths made available to you; PPG graduates do not go in any specific or restricted direction post-university. Career options include being a government’s policy advisor, working in a non-governmental organisation (NGO), working in a consultancy, or even in representative politics. The aforementioned list is but a small sample of what PPG students go on to work in post-graduation, as the specialisation above all permits for broadness.

Political Theory.

By Walker Haskins

Personal Interests

It is generally known within Political Science that the Political Theory specialisation is the smallest but don't let that deter you! Small class sizes, intimate tutorials, and the absence of lectures mean that you'll make stronger connections with your peers and teachers than any other specialisation. No other course offers the individual instruction, time to discuss, and learning together that Political Theory does.

But we know it's not all about quantity, but also quality. Your Political Theory classes are full of some of the UvA's best and brightest. The course may be small, but it attracts a certain type of student--intellectually oriented, passionate about ideas, and eager to discuss and debate the minutiae of political theory and philosophy.

So what type of student should take Political Theory? Any student who prefers the general over the particular, who prefers ideas over facts, who wants to address the roots of

problems, and not just their branches, and most fundamentally, that student who never stopped asking "why"? Want to know things? Pick any other specialisation. Want to understand them? Pick Political Theory.

The Course

Prof. Olsthoorn's own words put the Political Theory track best:

In the Political Theory specialisation track you will receive a thorough and challenging introduction into the most important social and political ideas and thinkers of today. You will be taught by a group of internationally leading researchers working on a range of themes: gender and diversity, capitalism, socialism, democracy, human rights, the ethics of war, global justice, and the history of political thought.

Put another way, the Political Theory specialisation is a modern, topical introduction to political theory. It is modern in so far as it heavily centers on contemporary thinkers and theories, and topical in that it studies topics, rather than political theory as a whole; instead of learning history or memorising exposition, students directly engage with a range of themes

in political theory ranging from “what is political theory?” to “is selling organs moral?”. And finally, the specialisation is an introduction. While the diehard philosopher or political theorist won’t be disappointed, neither will the aspirant who has never touched a philosophy text before in their lives. Political Theory is for everybody who wants to understand the great questions of our time using the modern greats.

Grading

The majority (75%) of the final grade for Political Theory comes from two required essays. These include a midterm essay (30%) and a final essay (45%). The mid-term essay is somewhat shorter and easier than the final essay. While the topic is limited to only that which appears in course readings, the essay has only a 2000 word limit, and is graded somewhat easier. In contrast, the final essay has a 3000 word limit, and can be on any topic in political theory or philosophy.

A relatively small portion (15%) of your grade comes from a news story presentation. As the name suggests, this consists of taking a news story and presenting it with a special

emphasis on applying political theory to better understand it. The presentation must then be transformed into a 500-word critical analysis, submitted later in the week. The entire exercise revolves around practically applying the knowledge provided by the course.

The final 10% is tutorial participation. Did you actively debate and discuss in class? Did you submit discussions? Were you on time when the tutorial started? Anyone who puts genuine effort into the class will do excellently in this respect.

Third-Year Courses

Like all specialisations, Political Theory students take one 6 ECTS elective and a 12 ECTS elective during the thesis semester, chosen from a designated “restricted electives list” (pictured below). This forms the second part of the specialisation.

▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor Seminar 6EC		6
> The Political Theory of Human Rights	■	6
> Green Economy and Society	■	6
> Queering Capital: Gender, Race and Sexuality Under Contemporary Capitalism	■	6
> The Animal Rights Debate: An Introduction	■	6
> Islamic political theory	■	6
▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor Seminar 12EC		12
> The Politics of Gender and Race in Postcolonial History	■	12
> Tolerance and the limits of freedom	■	12
> Feminist theories	■	12
> Changing the System: Political Theory and Economic Institutions	■	12
> Resilient democracy. The Life and Works of Alexis de Tocqueville	■	12
> Politics in Practice	■	12

Popular Career Paths

One of the benefits of Political Theory is its broadness, which translates itself into different opportunities on the job market. Some pursue a doctorate's degree and throw themselves into research, whereas others work for think tanks, and more.

International Relations.

By Antoon Versieck

Personal Interests

Within the Political Science degree, the majority of students choose the International Relations specialisation. Generally speaking, the specialisation is for students who have excellent knowledge about current affairs and are not afraid to share their opinion on what is happening around the world. Most students who specialise in International Relations desire to work with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or pursue a diplomatic career.

The Course

The first essential element to understand is that in order to succeed in this specialisation, having a great understanding of current affairs is not enough. Instead, International

Relations mainly involves analysing the underlying structures of those affairs. Therefore, the first half of the International Relations specialisation focuses specifically on the theories that exist within the field, closely comparing them to one another. Once you gain this understanding, the second half of the specialisation focuses on broad topics that are present everywhere. These topics include development politics, global & pharmaceutical value chains, colonialism, environmental politics, civil society organisations, transnational human rights regimes, migration, and sustainable development goals.

Many of the mandatory readings involve articles concerning the aforementioned topics. Besides simply reading the articles, an important element is understanding the theoretical perspective from which the author explains the situation. These articles are not only discussed during tutorials, but tutors will also challenge you by explaining how another theoretical camp would analyse international events. Every week, one group (usually consisting of two to three people) within your tutorial

presents an academic article and analyses the theoretical perspective employed by the author, as well as which political camp they belong to. Those who do not present that week make an assignment where they criticise specific points of the mandatory readings and, if possible, correct the author.

Grading

Half (50%) of your total grade comes from the two exams you have to take. The weight of the exams are divided equally, and are therefore each 25% of the total grade. For the first exam you must write two 750-word essays (with the standard 10% margin). You normally get five days to work on this exam. The second one, however, is quite different. For this exam, you need to write three shorter essays. For each essay, you get 30 minutes to write and hand it in. It is therefore vitally important that you know exactly what to write, since there will be no time to look up the answers in your notes.

Another important element of the International Relations specialisation is the final assignment, which counts for 25% of the total grade. Here, you need to write a scientific essay of

an event where international relations take centre stage. The broadness of the paper gives students the freedom to write about almost any topic they are interested in, ranging from the conflict in the South East China Sea, to Iran's diplomatic relations with the United States. The purpose of this essay is to not only to fill an academic gap within your chosen topic, but also to argue and explain from your specific IR theoretical framework.

Another grading element are the weekly written assignments. These assignments are graded by your tutor. The main purpose of these assignments is to criticise two main arguments of the weekly readings you need to do. It is therefore crucial that you read the articles with a critical mind, and not take everything the author says for granted.

The final 10% of the grading goes to participation within your tutorial: did you actively debate during your tutorial? Were you on time when the tutorial started? Did you bring up interesting perspectives? Those are the questions that tutors will grade you on.

Third-Year Courses

Concerning the third year, there are two electives you must choose from your specialisation: one course of 6 credits and one course of 12 credits. In combination with these two electives you usually write your thesis, which also consists of 12 credits. Therefore, the two electives and your thesis are usually done within the same month. The benefit of specialising in IR is the large scope of electives they offer. The electives of the 2020/2021 academic year include:

▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor Seminar 6EC		6
> Iran's Encounters with the West: The Revolution and its aftermath		6
> Military Intervention and gender before, during and after conflict.		6
> The political economy of development: the role of the IMF and the Worldbank		6
> Green Economy and Society		6
> Politics of Drugs		6
> The Politics of EU-integration in the Western Balkans		6
> Comparative politics of North Africa		6
> Contested globalization		6
> Globalization and Islam		6
> Politics of inequality around the globe		6
> Refugees, rights and realities		6
▼ Restricted-choice electives: Bachelor seminar 12EC		12
> City Power: cities as actors in the global political economy		12
> Framing and supporting societal transformations toward sustainability		12
> Gender, Human Security and Violent Conflict		12
> The Politics of Gender and Race in Postcolonial History		12
> Understanding politics through psychology		12
> Conflict, security and development		12
> Corporate responsibility		12
> Turkey and the European Union		12
> Changing the System: Political Theory and Economic Institutions		12
> EU & US relations in a globalized world		12
> International political economy		12
> International Relations within a postcolonial context: Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.		12
> The Politics of Health and Illness		12
> Transnational governance		12
> Organizing across borders: the politics of international organizations		12
> The future of Europe		12
> The other side of conflict: peace beyond the absence of war		12

There are two important elements: first it is important to note that, although certain thesis topics informally belong to a certain specialisation, all political science students can choose any thesis topic they desire. Second, it is not uncommon that certain electives and thesis topics get changed, removed, or added. Therefore I highly recommend that you check the UvA study guide page (www.studiegids.uva.nl) for more up-to-date information.

Popular Career Paths

Those who specialise in International Relations tend to follow similar academic paths. The most common path is pursuing a Masters in International Relations. However, quite a few students also decide to enrol themselves in other courses, such as Development Studies, Diplomacy, European Politics, or International Security.

Concerning the working field, the options highly vary. Whereas some decide to move into the governmental sector and aim to work as a governmental official in embassies, others decide to involve themselves in the non-governmental sector.

The range of options is wide, and it is therefore rather difficult to say what the most popular options are. However, this also provides valued flexibility in choosing where you go in life.

A Concluding remark.

020 hopes that this booklet has fulfilled its intended purpose in simplifying the decision-making between the various Political Science specialisations.

As both a political party and a student-run organisation, we truly believe in a more pragmatic and in-depth approach to picking the right specialisation.

As a party, we hope that we are one day able to push this initiative through the University councils, shifting the responsibilities for this booklet to the University itself.

However, as fellow students, we will fill this gap up until that moment. Because a crucial decision like the one you are about to make, should be made with the utmost care.

If you have any specific questions for the students who participated, you can always send them an email:

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If you have any feedback or comments on this particular booklet, please reach out to us on our [Instagram](#)! To get to know us better, check out our [website](#).

Right now, we need unity, progressive ideals that aren't afraid to look at history, and pragmatic policies rooted in science that get the job done, while leaving no one behind.

Sincerely,

Your 020 Team.

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