

# POLITICAL SCIENCE

## Course 17

### Department Contact

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### Description

Political science and government majors study the systems people set up to organize their societies, from neighborhoods to nations. Prospective future industries include political science, law, public policy, and related fields, and for careers in government, business, law, research, teaching, or journalism. The political science department at MIT sponsors an internship program in which students work in governmental agencies, legislative offices, community associations, international organizations, and advocacy groups at all levels. Undergraduate majors and minors in the Political Science department receive a personalized, hands-on education with small classes and seminars.

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Undergraduates: 11

### Introductory Classes

#### 17.01 **Justice**

Provides an introduction to contemporary political thought centered around the ideal of justice and the realities of injustice. Examines what a just society might look like and how we should understand various forms of oppression and domination. Studies three theories of justice (utilitarianism, libertarianism, and egalitarian liberalism) and brings them into conversation with other traditions of political thought (critical theory, communitarianism, republicanism, and post-structuralism). Readings cover foundational debates about equality, freedom, recognition, and power.

#### 17.03 **Introduction to Political Thought**

Examines major texts in the history of political thought and considers how they contribute to a broader conversation about freedom, equality, democracy, rights, and the role of politics in human life. Areas covered may include ancient, modern, contemporary, or American political thought.

#### 17.04 **Modern Conceptions of Freedom**

Students read early modern political theorists, and trace the growth of the value of freedom. Examines the modern definition of freedom, and the obligations that people accept in honoring it. Also investigates how these obligations are captured in the principles of our political association. Studies how the centrality of freedom plays out

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in the political thought of such authors as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke and Montesquieu. Students also debate which notions of freedom inspire and sustain the American experiment by carefully reading the documents and arguments of the founding of the United States.

### 17.05 **Humane Warfare: Ancient and Medieval Perspectives on Ethics in War**

Explores questions of justice and ethics in war by focusing on primary texts of pre-modern works of history, philosophy, literature, and Biblical interpretation. Readings from antiquity include Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Cicero. Examination of the Biblical tradition of just war, itself informed by the classical tradition, includes readings from early and Medieval Christian and Islamic thinkers and proceeds through the early Renaissance, with the beginning of a formalized doctrine of just war theory. Readings about current ethical dilemmas of war are discussed throughout and are given sustained attention at the end of the term.

### 17.30 **Making Public Policy**

Examines how the struggle among competing advocates shapes the outputs of government. Considers how conditions become problems for the government to solve, why some political arguments are more persuasive than others, why some policy tools are preferred over others, and whether policies achieve their goals. Investigates the interactions among elected officials, think tanks, interest groups, the media, and the public in controversies over global warming, urban sprawl, Social Security, health care, education, and other issues.

### 17.40 **American Foreign Policy: Past, Present and Future**

Reasons for America's past wars and interventions. Consequences of American policies. Evaluation of these consequences for the US and the world. History covered includes World Wars I and II, the Korean and Indochina wars, the Cuban Missile Crisis and current conflicts, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan, and against al Qaeda.

### 17.46 **US National Security Policy**

Provides a comprehensive introduction to the making of US foreign and national security policy. Examines the laws that guide policy-making, studies the actors and organizations involved in the inter-agency process, and explores how interaction between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches shapes policy development and implementation. Students acquire practical experience through policy writing and a crisis simulation. Designed for students interested in international relations, security, and public policy.

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### 17.50 Introduction to Comparative Politics

Examines why democracy emerges and survives in some countries rather than in others; how political institutions affect economic development; and how American politics compares to that of other countries. Reviews economic, cultural, and institutional explanations for political outcomes. Includes case studies of politics in several countries. Assignments include several papers of varying lengths and extensive structured and unstructured class participation.

### Course 17-Friendly [UROP Areas](#)

- Political Methodology Lab
- MIT Election Data and Science Lab (MEDSL)
- MIT Governance Lab
- Political Experiments Research Lab (PERL)
- Poverty, Violence, and Development Working Group

### Skills

- Strong communication and presentation abilities
- Ability to conduct thorough analysis on data sets
- International and culturally sensitive perspective
- Critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities

### Possible Future Jobs

- **Policy analyst:** Policy analysts work by trying to change, adjust, or implement new public policies, regulations, and laws. They often work either directly in government or for non-government organizations which extensively lobby for policy adjustments. Even some for-profit companies use policy analysts to help steer regulation and political action in favorable ways.
- **Political consultant:** Political consultants work on election campaigns for political candidates. They may help candidates develop media strategies, explain their platforms to the public, create advertisements, respond to opponents or engage in fundraising. Other consultants may work in research or polling.
- **Legislative assistant:** A legislative assistant (LA) drafts and edits legislation, including bills, rules or other items. Other job duties include generating ideas for legislation and writing speeches to introduce new legislation to a committee or legislature, such as the U.S. Congress or a state legislature.

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### Career Industry Examples

Business

Government

Law

Consulting

Intelligence analyst

Political science

Education

Journalism

Public policy

### Sample Employers

Bain & Company

Blueprint Talent Group

Charles River Associates

U.S. Federal Government

State Government