



St Hilda's College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

June 2025

Politics for PPE

Congratulations on your place at St Hilda's College! I very much enjoyed meeting you in the interview. I hope you will find the College and Oxford an exciting, friendly, and supportive environment to study in over the next three years.

I am the Organising Politics Fellow at St Hilda's, and the first course which you will be doing in politics is Introduction to the Practice of Politics (Part B of the reading list). In this course, we will examine how politics is organized and practiced in different contexts. We will examine revolutions, political regimes, the institutions of democracy, how voters behave, and the functioning of political parties comparatively across the world. The second term will then be dedicated to political theory (Part A of the reading list), which focuses on the work of major thinkers and concepts central to political theory, so we can understand the normative reasons for different institutions. The third element of the course, which you will study across the different terms, examines different research methods for politics and will teach you to analyse politics using data.

In the attached reading list, I suggest some readings to give you a taste of the subject. The items in bold will be especially useful for the first term of study. Please do not feel you need to read every item on the list, but it will help you to make a confident start in the autumn if you are able to engage with some of the material. We also hope you will enjoy many of the suggestions on the list! Please do be in touch if you struggle to source any of the reading, but most are available through large bookshops or second-hand from online.

Enjoy your summer! I look forward to welcoming you with the other Politics tutors to the St Hilda's community in October.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ceri Fowler

Fellow and Tutor in Politics

Suggested Preliminary Reading for Politics

Your first-year course is in two formally-examined parts: political theory and empirical politics, and a third part – methods of political analysis. The first two (Parts A and B) will be taught by a combination of college-provided tutorials, and departmental lectures, and will be formally examined in the Preliminary examination at the end of the first year. The third part (Part C) will be taught through lectures and laboratory sessions in the Department of Politics and International Relations, and assessed through a 2,000-word essay to be submitted at the start of your third term. There are some recommendations for all three below, followed by some further reading which may interest you and which will give you a flavour of the course and the Politics department more broadly.

A. For political theory:

Adam Swift, Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians (Cambridge: Polity, 2001 and second edition 2006)

Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Political Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 and revised edition 2006)

David Miller, Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Catriona McKinnon (ed.), Issues in Political Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 and revised edition 2014)

B. For empirical politics:

Arendt Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries, second ed. 2012, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

This is a strong suggestion as you will need to read the book in Michaelmas Term if you do not before arrival! This book is important in bridging the work you will do in college tutorials on empirical politics, and in departmental classes on methods of political analysis. For now, you might focus on Chapters 1-3, 7, 8, and 15-17.

Sobolewska, Maria, and Robert Ford. Brexitland. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

This book is about Brexit and how the UK came to Leave the EU in 2016, a case we will study in some detail when we examine political parties and voters. It has an accessible style and may be a good place to start your reading.

William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona M. Golder, Principles of Comparative Politics, second ed. 2013, Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Don't try to read the whole book at this time. You might read Chapter 1 to understand what the authors mean by "institutional design", and Chapter 12 "Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies" to apply this idea of "design" to the major classificatory tools we use in distinguishing between democratic regimes.

Robinson, James A., and Daron Acemoglu. Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty. London: Profile, 2012.

This is a modern classic which we will use in tutorial.

C. For the **methods** component there are two main textbooks (in addition to reading Lijphart above):

Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy D. Whitten (2008) The Fundamentals of Political Science Research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. – Chapters 1-4

This book provides an introduction to the scientific study of politics. It is designed to make you familiar with the basic tools needed to be a critical consumer of scholarly research in political science. The book begins with a discussion of what it means to take a scientific approach to the study of politics and how to develop a research design. In your preparation, please concentrate on Chapters 1-4. The more technical part of the book focusing on analytical techniques will be covered in depth during the lectures and data labs.

Shively, Phillips W. (2012) The Craft of Political Research (9th edition). Pearson Classics in Political Science.

This book is a supplement to Kellstedt and Whitten. Please read Chapters 1-2, which deal with the development of research puzzles and designs in political science research.

Further suggestions you may enjoy

Chenoweth, E. and Stephan, M.J., 2011. Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia University Press.

Dahl, Robert. On Democracy. 1998 (and later editions).

Weiss, Penny A., 2009. Canon Fodder: Historical Women Political Thinkers

Srinivasan, Amia. The right to sex. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

Goldstone, Jack. Revolutions: a very short introduction, Oxford, 2014

There are also lots of podcasts available now. In particular, you may be interested in listening to episodes of [this podcast](#) by a Professor here at Oxford, who discusses leading researchers' work with them. Lots of these topics will be relevant for many of the papers you'll study throughout Politics. You could also look at the Political data analysis articles now regularly being produced by popular outlets such as the Financial Times and the Economist.