The science of politics

A quick overview of what we study here

François Briatte
March 2016
This talk is dedicated to the memory of **Giulio Regeni**, a Cambridge PhD student who was killed in Egypt earlier this year.

Regeni’s research was about trade unions and the labour sector of post-2011 Egypt.

He was a visiting scholar at the American University in Cairo for year 2015–16.
Outline of the talk

● The **relevance** of political science
● The **irreverence** of political science
● **Knowledge** opportunities
● **Professional** opportunities
● Questions & Answers
1. The **relevance** of political science
“Clarity of thought, intellectual willingness to define, delimit and defend one’s understanding of a word, a term or a theory, is a good thing in a democratic society that wants to solve complex problems.”
“Managing the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean at the moment requires, for example, a reflective understanding of what it means to be a stateless asylum seeker.”
If we knew as much about Wahhabism as we do about particle physics, the world would be a different place.
The relevance of political science

Examples of important themes

- **Violence**
- **Inequality**
- **Ideology**
Violence

- What makes up civil war?
- What makes up organized crime?
- What is environmental policy?
- What is population targeting?
Distance (Srebrenica – Lille) = 1,420 km
Distance (Donetsk – Lille) = 2,519 km
Inequality

How much do you know about...

- The distribution of wealth between individuals
- The distribution of wealth between countries
- The distribution of votes in elections
- The distribution of seats in parliaments
Inequality

- The distribution of **wealth** between **individuals**
- The distribution of **wealth** between **countries**

Just or unjust? Avoidable or unavoidable?

- The distribution of **votes** in **elections**
- The distribution of **seats** in **parliaments**

Good or bad? Democratic or undemocratic?
Ideology

- Capitalism, socialism
- Nationalism, separatism
- Environmentalism, industrialism
- Social justice, welfare
- Egalitarianism, neoliberalism
2. The irreverence of political science
Sarah Palin: politician

Elinor Ostrom: political scientist
Political scientists

• are not professional politicians: these are two distinct (and very different) professional groups

• are not affiliated with political parties: we publish our own independent research

• will not tell you what to do, think or vote: science is not a replacement for individual choice
Bernard Manin on fighting terrorism

“… le paradigme de l’exception est inadapté à un phénomène appelant une action soutenue et persévérante. (...) Pour être soutenable sur le long terme, voire un avenir indéfini, l’action contre le terrorisme doit être conforme dès son début aux principes et aux valeurs constitutionnelles des pays attaqués. Ce n’est assurément pas une bonne méthode de compter sur la fin d’un phénomène, si cette fin est incertaine et difficile à discerner.”
Bernard Manin on fighting terrorism

“… le paradigme de l’exception est inadapté à un phénomène appelant une action soutenue et persévérante. (…) Pour être soutenable sur le long terme, voire un avenir indéfini, l’action contre le terrorisme doit être conforme dès son début aux principes et aux valeurs constitutionnelles des pays attaqués. Ce n’est assurément pas une bonne méthode de compter sur la fin d’un phénomène, si cette fin est incertaine et difficile à discerner.”

3. Knowledge opportunities
Political science will teach you a core set of methods that are either common to all social sciences, or specific to the study of politics.
If you have never heard of political science before today, imagine it as a mix of history, geography, sociology, philosophy and law.
Political science methods include

- historical analysis
- philosophical explorations
- qualitative methods
- quantitative methods
Related **skills** include

- **arts** and humanities
- **language** courses
- **media** training
- **Web** technology
4. Professional opportunities
Les diplomates en formation : agents tous risques

Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Développement...
Hello chap :)
Jobs political scientists like

- **Domestic affairs:** governmental, parliamentary, local jobs (both public and private)
- **European affairs:** Commission, Parliament, industrial or civil-society lobbying
- **Foreign affairs:** diplomacy, international organizations, NGOs
Jobs political scientists also like

- **Arts** and ‘cultural management’
- **Business** and marketing
- **Economics** (and ‘development’ especially)
- **Journalism** in all its forms
- **Research** (i.e. academic jobs)
Thank you for your attention. **Questions?**

Website: espol-lille.eu
Recommended

Josep Colomer
*The Science of Politics*
Oxford University Press, 2011

Jean-Yves Dormagen, Daniel Mouchard
*Introduction à la sociologie politique*
De Boeck, 4th ed., 2015