



## What Can You Do With a Political Science Degree?

Political science is the study of politics, governance and power. A degree in this area can lead to a range of careers.

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Earning a degree in political science opens doors to jobs in both the public and private sectors, allowing graduates to use their knowledge, research abilities, and analytical and communication skills to collect and make sense of data in a range of jobs, from working with political campaigns to examining local, regional, national and global policies.

“One of the benefits of a political science degree is that it prepares students for a wide range of career paths. It’s not just one industry or sector,” says Michelle Allendoerfer, senior director of teaching and learning at the American Political Science Association in Washington, D.C. “The skills that are fostered in political science classes are transferable and reflect many of the skills that employers value, such as the ability to analyze an argument, evaluate claims, analyze data, communicate, problem-solve and work collaboratively.”

Allendoerfer and other experts in the field of political science say that data analysis – evaluating data, looking at its source and evaluating a claim based on the data – is emphasized in political science classes and is valuable to many types of employers.

Political science “has become more driven by data and it’s become more important for students of political science to know something about data analysis,” says Robert Williams, a political science professor and dean of the social science division at Pepperdine University in California. “We have so much information these days that can

be quantified, and so much of that is being used in political science. It's become important for students to at least be able to read the studies based on quantitative analysis."

### **Advantages of a Political Science Degree**

Those who have studied political science have found that it helps them better understand events that happen in the world, experts say.

"If you care about those things," Williams says, "political science is a good major and it won't steer you into something you don't like because it's taking this important stuff in the world and at the same time giving you research, analysis, writing and public speaking skills that are transferrable to anything you want to go into afterwards. It's just a good all-purpose degree, particularly for those people who want to understand the world they live in."

Political science majors, especially those who focused on U.S. politics, may pursue public-sector careers in politics or government agencies at all levels.

"Advocacy organizations, nonprofits, foundations and nongovernmental organizations offer opportunities for students interested in working on a specific issue or cause," Allendoerfer says.

In the private sector, she adds, political science graduates can apply their skills in fields like consulting, data analytics, business and finance.

Careers in journalism, communications or opinion polling are also good fits for political science majors because of an emphasis on communication and writing in political science classes, says Donald P. Green, the Burgess professor of political science at Columbia University in New York.

"Students who focus on comparative politics or international relations might pursue careers in international affairs, either through the foreign service, international nongovernmental organizations or working abroad in a variety of ways," Green says. "It gives undergraduates a broad-based exposure to world events and current issues."

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science, some students go on to law school or graduate school to get an advanced degree. "Students that are particularly excited about research and are interested in a career in academia would go on to get a Ph.D.," Allendoerfer says.

Many political science graduates, Green says, "go back to school to get master's degrees in public administration or something that involves teaching people how to run things."

### **Potential Career Fields With a Political Science Degree**

Here are some career sectors that people with a political science degree often choose.

### **Law**

Career opportunities in the legal profession are numerous. Although a number of majors can prepare someone for a legal career, political science is an especially appropriate background since law is an aspect of governments and the governing process.

### **Government Service and Politics**

There are many career possibilities in government service, including elective office at local, state and national levels; positions on the staffs of elected officials; and staff positions with a political party.

### **Civil Service**

There are many career possibilities in the civil service systems of national, state and local governments. Many political science majors who secure a civil service job do so in an executive or management training position. Such positions are often broad policy-making roles. Although an advanced degree isn't required for some of them, it's often beneficial to go to graduate school and obtain a master's degree in public administration.

### **Secondary Education**

Some political science graduates obtain a secondary teaching credential and go on to careers teaching government or civics to junior high, high school or college students.

### **Political Science Research and Academia**

An undergraduate major in political science can serve as a foundation to pursue graduate studies in political science leading to a Ph.D., which equips someone for a career as a professional political scientist. This could mean teaching and doing research at the college or university level, or obtaining a full-time research position with government or private agencies.

### **International Organizations**

Opportunities for qualified employees with an interest in international organizations is growing, experts say. A political science degree is often a steppingstone to these positions, which are often in overseas charities and other private volunteer agencies, multinational businesses, international governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations and other international agencies.

### **Interest Groups and Associations**

Lobbying by specific interest groups has grown significantly at both state and national levels in the U.S. since the 1960s. These groups range from traditional economic interest groups such as organized labor and business associations to groups centered around a commonality such as ethnicity, gender or sexual identity. A political science major is a natural for a position with such groups, experts say.

## **Journalism**

Covering community and political stories is a major part of a journalist's task, and political science can be an excellent background for a role in print or broadcast journalism, experts say. Those contemplating such a career should either double major in journalism or a related field, or plan to obtain a master's degree in journalism after completing a non-journalism major.

## **Business**

A large number of political science graduates find work in the business sector in fields such as marketing, personnel, advertising and public or community relations. Others win management training positions with public and private corporations.

U.S. workers who majored in political science earn an average annual salary of \$52,859, with those in the top 10% making more than \$115,000 yearly and those in the bottom 10% coming in at below \$24,000 a year, according to Zippia, a California-based job search service. Type of job, geographic location and years of experience are among the factors that cause wage differences.

Graduates working as political scientists earned an average median salary of about \$128,000 in 2022, with the best-paid 25% making about \$163,300 and the lowest-paid 25% earning just over \$89,800, according to the U.S. News Best Jobs rankings.

For college students considering a political science major, Green says it's a broad program that includes international relations, political philosophy, comparative politics and American politics. "Very often," he says, "students will be asked to take courses in statistics and expected to be a broad-ranging intellect who is interested in history."

Green tells his students to try to embrace the intellectual breadth of political science and find courses in history, economics and psychology – some of the main fields that political science touches on – to fulfill the vision of a liberal arts education.

"I think there is a tendency to specialize, and I think that's a mistake," he says. "In the world of careers, one could imagine working either in government or groups connected to

government such as think tanks, interest groups and policy institutes. One can also imagine going into corporate or clearly delineated private sector roles, and law is often among them.”

Here are some common jobs where experts say a political science degree is a plus:

- Lawyer
- Lobbyist
- Legislator
- Diplomat or foreign service officer
- Urban or regional planner
- Historian
- Legislative assistant
- Political scientist
- Political science professor
- Political consultant
- Policy analyst
- Business executive
- Politics or government journalist
- Communications/public relations professional
- Public opinion researcher or pollster
- Nonprofit executive
- Nongovernmental organization executive

Although law remains a popular field for political science majors, Williams says, “law schools have become less concerned about admitting political science majors.”

“Overall, I think there has been a lot of growth in the kind of careers that are open to political science majors,” Williams says. “I’ve had students who have gone into banking and investing and done very well because their political insights gave them something that the economics and finance majors they were working with just didn’t have.”

A political science degree opens the doors to many careers beyond politics, Williams adds.

“Whatever career path we choose, political science is going to prepare us for one of our central roles in life. It’s important for us to understand our rights and obligations within a political system because you can’t go anywhere without escaping duties as a citizen.”