Durham University
School of Government and International Affairs

Inspiring the extraordinary

MA/MSc Taught Programmes
Syllabus 2025/26

Introduction

The University has adopted a process of modularisation of its taught Masters degrees which has allocated credits to each module: a single module is worth 30 credits. A minimum of 180 credits are needed to complete each MA/MSc degree. This means that you will take the equivalent of four single modules and write a dissertation (the dissertation is worth 75 or 60 credits depending on which programme you are studying); a research methods module worth 15 credits is associated with the 45 and 75 credit dissertations. You will find the credit value of each module listed in the regulations for each degree at the back of this booklet.

If you find any of this confusing please do not worry. When you start with us in Durham you will be able to discuss your choices with the Programme Convenors. For now you may like to look at some of the preliminary readings listed in this booklet. We suggest that you identify the core modules for your chosen degree listed at the front and consider what preliminary reading would be necessary. We would like to stress that you are not required to read all the items before you arrive. Depending on your previous educational background you should aim to make a start where you feel your need is the most obvious. A handbook and reading lists will be available during the course of the programme

Term dates

Induction Week 29 September 2025 – 5 October 2025

Michaelmas Term 6 October 2025 – 12 December 2025

Epiphany Term 12 January 2026 – 20 March 2026

Easter Term 27 April 2026 – 26 June 2026

Please note that all programmes are subject to change and are provisional

List of modules 2025/26

- Full Stack Research Design
- Causal Inference
- Researching the Global South
- Quantitative Methods and Analysis
- The Politics of Global Europe
- Ideologies and Political Thought
- International Organisations
- International Politics of the Middle East
- International Relations Theory
- The Politics of East Asia
- Contemporary Political Philosophy
- The Non-Arab States in the Middle East
- Global Political Economy
- Researching Political Theory

Please note that this is a provisional list and it is subject to change.

Contemporary Political Philosophy

- This module studies one of several fields in contemporary political philosophy by examining the nature of the key concepts operating in this field, the normative grounds on which they have been defended, the nature of argumentation underpinning justificatory narratives, the reasons why there are diverse normative perspectives and the fashion in which some of these perspectives have evolved.

- The module challenges students to think normatively and critically about the moral dilemmas that impact political argumentation and policy making.

- It introduces students to selected philosophical debates concerning human rights, social in/justice and the ethics of political violence.

- It teaches students how to use normative theory to defend particular public policies objectives, social institutions, norms and political actions

Preliminary reading:

Arendt, H., "'The Rights of Man' What are they?" in Modern Review – NewYork (1949) 3:1, pp 24-36.

Ignatieff, Michael, "Human Rights as Idolatry" in Gutman, Amy, (Ed)Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry (Princeton University Press 2001).

Kymlicka, W., Multicultural Odysseys Navigating the New International politics of Diversity (Oxford University Press 2007), chapter 4.

Jones, P., 'Toleration, Religion and Accommodation' European Journal of Philosophy, 23:3 (2012), pp. 542-63.

Darby, Derrick, Rights, Race and Recognition (Cambridge University Press,2009), chapter 3.

The Politics of Global Europe

Whatever you think about the European Union (EU), it is one of the most important experiments in supranational governance and its policies significantly affect the lives of Europeans and non-Europeans. Yet, the EU – its core nature, functions and operations – is perplexing to many. This module examines the EU in an approachable way by focusing on major contemporary debates relating to the EU's global role, ideas, principles, functions, and evaluating how it has dealt with challenges and crises, both internal and external. It focuses on controversial issues that have divided European political elites and public opinion, causing tensions in the relationship between member states and EU institutions, as well affecting its links with external actors. The main aim of the module is to provide students with advanced knowledge and better understanding of the tensions between the EU's internal priorities and values and its global ambitions and role, in the context of diverse priorities and interests amongst the member states. The module will also help students develop their understanding of how the EU reacts to domestic and international crises and its relations with partners and strategic competitors.

The module will address issues such as:

- The EU as a global actor and its normative power.
- The EU's response to international crises – the cases of Russia and Ukraine, Syria, and Libya.
- The experience and implications of EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy.
- EU-transatlantic relations, European security and NATO.
- EU-UK relations after Brexit.
- EU-China relations.
- The impact of recent crises, such as the Eurozone, migration, Brexit, Covid, and energy.
- The EU's global image and the shadow of Euroscepticism.
- Political representation in the EU and the preferences of political elites and citizens in elections and referendums.
- The relationship between the EU and the member states.
- The implications of differentiated integration.

Preliminary reading:

Dinan, D., Nugent, N. and Patterson, W. E. (2017), The European Union in Crisis. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hill, C., Smith, M. and Vanhoonacker, S. (2017), International Relations and the European Union. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keukeleire, S. and Delreux, T. (2022), The Foreign Policy of the European Union. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lelieveldt, H. and Princen, S. (2015), The Politics of the European Union. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmermann H. and Dür, A. (2021), Key Controversies in European Integration. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Global Political Economy

The primary aim of this module is to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the scope and dynamics of global political economy, focusing on the institutions, frameworks, and power relations that shape the global capitalist system. Along the way, students will acquire the analytical tools needed to examine the institutional and geopolitical arrangements structuring global economic policies.

The module will address the historical foundations of the global political economy, examining key theoretical frameworks that explain the evolution of today's economic system and its impact on global power relations. Students will explore diverse perspectives on how economic, political, and social forces interact to shape the structure of the global economy. This includes: the interplay of state and market forces, patterns of economic influence, global trade and finance dynamics, as well as the geopolitical drivers that underpin global economic policies. By engaging with these themes, students will gain a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the shape and direction of the global economic landscape, as well as the present and future challenges confronting the system.

Preliminary reading:

Schwartz, H.M. (2018). States versus Markets: Understanding the Global Economy, London: Bloomsbury.

Mazzucato, M. (2018). The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy, London: Allen Lane.

Tooze, A. (2018). Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World, London: Penguin.

Piketty, T. (2017). Capital in the 21st Century, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Causal Inference

This module aims to prepare students to use the causal inference toolbox to advance knowledge and inform decisions in business, policy, and academic settings. The module supplements core techniques with cutting-edge advances, to build a comprehensive and future-proofed toolkit.

The module covers topic such as:
• Matching
• Difference-in-Differences
• Synthetic Control
• Double Machine Learning
• Partial Identification

The module focuses equally on theoretical understanding and hands-on application. This aids the development of efficient and efficacious problem solving skills and ability to navigate trade-offs stemming from data limitations, resource constraints, and audience backgrounds and interests.

Preliminary reading:

Grimmer, J. (2015). We are all social scientists now: How big data, machine learning, and causal inference work together. PS: Political Science & Politics, 48(1): 80-83.

Brand, J. E., Zhou, X., & Xie, Y. (2023). Recent Developments in Causal Inference and Machine Learning. Annual Review of Sociology, 49.

Cinelli, C., Forney, A., & Pearl, J. (2022). A crash course in good and bad controls. Sociological Methods & Research.

Huntington-Klein, N. (2021). The effect: An introduction to research design and causality. CRC Press.

Cunningham, S. (2021). Causal inference: The mixtape. Yale University Press.

Ideologies and Political Thought

This module acquaints students with some of the major developments in the history of political thought since the nineteenth century. It does so at two levels: the study of ideologies, on the one hand, and political ideas in Britain on the other.

The module explores topics in these two areas through close study of primary texts and advanced secondary sources. We focus on the central role that political argument has played in the self-understanding of different groups and political actors within society. The module seeks to both contextualise and analyse the ideals and beliefs that political thinkers have defended. In doing so, it locates their work within wider discourses and practices as well as scholarly debates.

In Michaelmas term, the tutor will deliver themes in 'Political Ideology, past and present'. Topics studied under this theme -with a substantive lecture and two-hour seminar on each- are; the nature of Ideology, Anarchism, Fascism and Feminism.

In Epiphany term, the tutor will deliver themes in 'British political thought, from J.S. Mill to R.H.Tawney'. Topics studied under this theme, with a substantive lecture and two-hour seminar on each are; J.S. Mill, James Fitzjames Stephen, Millicent Fawcett,and R.H. Tawney.

Preliminary reading:

Political Ideology, past and present

Festenstein, M. and M. Kenny (eds.) Political Ideologies:A Reader and Guide (2005)

Freeden, M., Ideology: A Very Short Introduction(2003)

Vincent, A., Modern Political Ideologies (2010)British political thought from J.S. Mill to R.H. Tawney

Barker, R. Political Ideas in Modern Britain: in and after the 20th Century (1997), esp. Ch. 5.

Conti, G., 'James Fitzjames Stephen, John Stuart Mill, and the Victorian Theory of Toleration', History of European Ideas, 42:3 (2016), 364-98.

Jones, H.S., 'The Idea of the National in Victorian Political Thought', European Journal of Political Theory,5:1 (2006), 12-21.

Rogan, T., The Moral Economists: R.H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E.P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism(2017), esp. chapter on Tawney.

International Organisations

The module aims to lay the foundations for a systematic understanding of the increasingly complex network of IOs in the contemporary global environment.

- It will familiarise students with the key theoretical approaches and debates for analysing IOs and their role in international relations.
- It will also familiarise students with the internal structural dynamics of these organisations through the analysis of key actors and decision-making processes.
- The analysis of the institutional framework will be placed in the context of past and present political, economic, social and environmental global challenges.
- The March Model UN days will introduce students to the structures and processes of the United Nations; how a Model United Nations works; assignment of roles, introduce committees and subjects under debate; and how to prepare position papers.
- The June Model UN Days will be the running of the simulation. Where possible, students will be assigned roles which are specifically relevant to their chosen programme of study (e.g.: students studying an MA International Relations (Middle East) might be assigned to play a Middle East state).

Preliminary reading:

Karns, Margaret P., Karen Mingst, and Kendall Stiles(2015) International Organizations: The Politics andProcess of Global Governance. 3rd Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore (2004) Rules of the World: International Organizations in Global Politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Larner, Wendy and William Walters eds. (2004) Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces. Abingdon: Routledge.

Weiss, Thomas G and Ramesh Thakur (2010) Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

International Relations Theory

This module provides an advanced overview of the main theoretical debates and traditions that characterise the field of International Relations. The module will also address some of the contexts in which to understand these theories, their significance, strengths and weaknesses.
Indicative content may include some of the following:

Different theoretical approaches within International Relations:

- Realism
- Idealism
- Liberalism
- Marxism
- Critical Theory
- Feminism
- Post-colonialism
- Post-structuralism
- The "English School"

Key areas of debate within International Relations:

- Security
- Ethics and War
- Democratic Peace
- The Environment
- Justice
- Power
- Sovereignty

Preliminary reading:

Vitalis, Robert. "White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American IR". Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015

Booth, Ken; Erskine, Toni (Eds.). "International Relations Theory Today." Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

International Politics in the Middle East

This module offers an in-depth theoretical and empirical understanding of the international relations of the Middle East. The module situates the region in analytical, conceptual and theoretical debates of International Relations and Comparative Politics. On the one hand, the module enables students to engage with broader disciplinary debates about the region. On the other hand, the module enables students to reflect on how regional particularities contribute to wider theoretical debates in International Relations and Comparative Politics. Furthermore, the module provides students with empirical knowledge of the main historical events, processes and actors that have shaped and continue to shape the international dynamics of the region.

Indicative themes that the module will address may include war, peace, alliances, threat perception, great power interventions, and the determinants of foreign policies.

Preliminary reading:

Fawcett, Louise, ed. 2019. International Relations of the Middle East. Fifth Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2015. The International Politics of the Middle East. Second Edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Anoushiravan Ehteshami,eds. 2014. The Foreign Policies of Middle East States. Second Edition. London: Lynne Rienner

Lynch, Marc. 2016. The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East. New York: Public Affairs.

The Politics of East Asia

This module provides a historical grounding on the region and introduction to the appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks for an analysis of the politics of East Asia. The module will also address specific topics relevant to current and emerging issues in the region. Indicative content may include some of the following:

- The East Asian strategic quadrangle
- The South China Sea Dispute
- Soft power in Southeast and/or East Asia
- Southeast Asian and/or East Asian identities and ethnicities
- The political economy of East Asia
- China's One Belt, One Road policy
- Diaspora and Migration
- Postcolonial nationalism in Southeast Asia
- Nation-State division: Korea and/or Vietnam

Preliminary reading:

Kang, David C. (2017) American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Ba, Alice & Beeson, Mark (eds.) (2017) Contemporary Southeast Asia 3rd ed. London: Palgrave

Wang, Yong (2016) 'Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative and China's New Grand Strategy, Pacific Review, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 455- 463.

Yeung, Henry Wai-chung (2016) Strategic Coupling: East Asian Industrial Transformation in the New Global Political Economy Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Quantitative Methods and Analysis

The aim of this module is to enable students to use common statistical methods to analyse social processes and to appropriately interpret the results of such analyses.

The course will introduce some of the key foundational concepts and methods of statistics, and then illustrate their application to social science data. The approach adopted will not be an overly mathematical one, but rather an applied one aimed at enabling students to do basic quantitative analysis of social data, and in doing this analysis understand what it is they are doing.

Through this module you will learn about foundational statistical methods, and how to apply these appropriately to social data. In doing so, you will develop and improve a number of key skills. By learning how to practically handle and organise large amounts of quantitative data using computer software you will improve your IT skills. By learning how to interrogate that data and articulate appropriate conclusions you will improve your analytical skills, numeracy skills and communication skills. You will also improve your critical thinking, becoming better equipped to evaluate and critique claims made by others based on quantitative data. All of these are skills that are highly valued by employers, especially in a world where quantitative data is becoming increasingly important.

Recommend readings:

Agresti, Alan (2018) Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences (Fifth Edition). Upper
Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
Sections 1.1-2.1.

OR

Agresti, Alan and Barbara Finlay (2009) Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences
(Fourth Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
Sections 1.1-2.1.

OR

Agresti, Alan and Christine Franklin (2014) Statistics: The Art and Science of Learning
from Data (Third Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
Sections 1.1, 2.1.

Researching Political Theory

This module explores trends, controversies and key ideas in the methodologies of political theory research. Students will learn about, apply, and critique the various tools that political theorists use to answer a broad range of questions in contemporary political theory and the history of political thought.

The module challenges two common assumptions about political theory and research methodologies. The first is that methodological questions aren't particularly relevant for political theorists. Research methods in political theory are not always obvious to those who may be more familiar with the qualitative and quantitative methods typically associated with political scientists or sociologists. It may seem as though methodology for the political theorist just means sitting at your computer, reading books and articles, and then writing about what you've read. In fact, political theorists deploy a wide range of methodologies to produce our research, whether we are engaging in abstract conceptual analysis, or working in inter- and trans-disciplinary contexts with colleagues in other disciplines. Appreciating the strengths and weaknesses of these methodologies is vital to the development of one's skills as a researcher in political theory.

The second assumption that this module will challenge is the view that methodological questions are inherently a dry or technical topic in which we abstract away from more interesting issues, learning about tools rather than building something with them. On the contrary, students will have the opportunity to deploy different methodologies across a wide range of issues in political theory, learning about these tools via their application.

The module addresses issues such as:

- The role of intuitions and thought experiments in political theory.
- Methods of interpretation and analysis in the history of political thought.
- The status of marginalised perspectives in both contemporary and historical contexts.
- The relationship between political theory and political policy and practice.
- The relationship between political theorists and political theory.
- The concept, production, and transmission of knowledge in political theory.
- Critical theory and structural injustice.

Preliminary reading:

Blau, A. (Ed.). (2017). Methods in analytical political theory. Cambridge University Press

Cappelen, H., Gendler, T. S., & Hawthorne, J. (Eds.). (2016). The Oxford handbook of philosophical methodology. Oxford University Press

Leopold, D., & Stears, M. (Eds.). (2008). Political theory: Methods and approaches. Oxford University Press.

Walton, A., Abel, W., Kahn, E., & Parr, T. (2021). Introducing political philosophy: A policy-driven approach. Oxford University Press

Wolff, J. (2019). Ethics and public policy: A philosophical inquiry (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Researching the Global South

This module aims to familiarise students with key practical, theoretical, methodological and ethical issues that will support them expanding their research in/on the Global South. The module is designed to provide a broad introduction to social and political sciences research methods that are used to analyse political, social, and economic developments in the Global South. The module is directly interdisciplinary in nature as it draws examples and conceptual understandings from all branches of social sciences including sociology, political science, geography and anthropology.

The module will address issues such as:
- Research methods and design.
- Ethical approaches to knowledge production in/on the region.
- Fieldwork, positionality and reflexivity.
- Challenges and benefits of applying/ combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The students will not only understand the philosophical and epistemological issues underpinning the major research paradigms and their application in research projects on the Global South, but they will also be able to develop a critical approach towards ethical approaches to knowledge production in/on the region. The module will firstly introduce qualitative and quantitative methods that can be applied to research problems concerning social, political and economic developments that are specific to the Global South. The students will be able to identify necessary resources for their study and understand the benefits and challenges of using different research instruments including interviews, surveys, participant observations, process tracing, the use of online media, archival or statistical data.

Preliminary reading:

Baser, B., & Toivanen, M. (2018). Politicized and depoliticized ethnicities, power relations and temporality: Insights to outsider research from comparative and transnational fieldwork. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 41(11), 2067-2084.

Charles, L., Pappé, I., & Ronchi, M. (2021). Researching the Middle East: cultural, conceptual, theoretical and practical issues. Edinburgh University Press.

Glasius, M., De Lange, M., Bartman, J., Dalmasso, E., Lv, A., Del Sordi, A., ... & Ruijgrok, K. (2018). Research, ethics and risk in the authoritarian field. Springer Nature.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). Qualitative research methods. Sage.

Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2022). Thinking with theory in qualitative research. Taylor & Francis.

Leavy, P. (2022). Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches. Guilford Publications.

The Non-Arab States in the Middle East

While the Middle East is synonymous with the Arab world, it is three non-Arab States – Iran, Turkey, Iran (ITI) - that now exercise a disproportionate influence over the political, strategic, and economic trajectories of the region as never before. This module explores conceptually and empirically the political, social, and economic structures of each of these states, and how in turn, these structures impact upon their regional conduct and global standing. Core themes explored in this module include ideology, religious authority, civil-military relations, the role of civil society (including gender-based movements), political economy, and regional alignment.

The module will address such issues as:

- The importance of religious identity in shaping state legitimacy and the very idea of 'stateness.'
- Theories of state-security relations (civil-military discourses) as drivers of regional security and foreign policies.
- The dichotomy between liberal economic reforms and the increasing political centralisation of the state.
- The nature of civil society and its impact on the social and political space.

The module critically examines the sources of power and influence exercised by Iran, Turkey, and Israel, allowing students to reflect on how and why their regional behaviors and the influence they now exercise is either unique or can be captured by any theoretical framework.   By the end of this module, students will have a developed a deep comparative understanding of the sources of state power of these three actors, and how such power now shapes the political, religious, economic, and strategic boundaries of much of the Middle East and North Africa.

Preliminary reading:

U. Aydin, 'Emerging middle powers and the liberal international order,' International Affairs, 97/5 (2021), pp. 1377-1394.

S.Cagaptay, Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East (London: Tauris, 2021).

A. Ehteshami, Iran: Stuck in Transition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

G. Shafir and Y. Peled . Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

M Kutlay and Z Öniş, Z, ' Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?' International Affairs, 97/4 (2021), pp. 1085-1104.

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