Political Scientists

Summary

Political scientists often analyze government policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quick Facts: Political Scientists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012 Median Pay</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$102,000 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$49.04 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry-Level Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Experience in a Related Occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On-the-job Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Jobs, 2012</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6,600</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Job Outlook, 2012-22</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>21% (Faster than average)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Change, 2012-22</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1,400</td>
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What Political Scientists Do

Political scientists study the origin, development, and operation of political systems. They research political ideas and analyze governments, policies, political trends, and related issues.

Work Environment

Political scientists work full time in an office. They sometimes work overtime to finish reports and meet deadlines. About half worked in the federal government in 2012.

How to Become a Political Scientist

Political scientists need a master’s degree or Ph.D. in political science, public administration, or a related field.

Pay

The median annual wage for political scientists was $102,000 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of political scientists is projected to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. However, because it is a small occupation, the fast growth will result in only about 1,400 new jobs over the 10-year period. Political scientists should face strong competition for jobs as the number of candidates is expected to exceed the number of available positions.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of political scientists with similar occupations.
What Political Scientists Do

Political scientists advise governments, businesses, or organizations on political issues. They study the origin, development, and operation of political systems. They research political ideas and analyze governments, policies, political trends, and related issues.

Duties

Political scientists typically do the following:

- Research political subjects, such as the U.S. political system, relations between the United States and foreign countries, and political ideologies
- Collect and analyze data from sources such as public opinion surveys and election results
- Use qualitative sources, such as historical documents, to develop theories
- Use quantitative methods, such as statistical analysis, to test theories
- Evaluate the effects of policies and laws on government, businesses, and people
- Monitor current events, policy decisions, and other issues relevant to their work
- Forecast political, economic, and social trends
- Present research results by writing reports, giving presentations, and publishing articles

Political scientists usually conduct research within one of four primary subfields: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, or political theory.

Often, political scientists use qualitative methods in their research, gathering information from numerous sources. For example, they may use historical documents to analyze past government structures and policies.

Political scientists also rely heavily on quantitative methods to develop and research theories. For example, they may analyze data to see whether a relationship exists between a certain political system and a particular outcome. In so doing, political scientists can study topics such as U.S. political parties, how political structures differ among countries, globalization, and the history of political thought.

Political scientists also work as policy analysts. In this position, they may work for a variety of organizations that have a stake in policy, such as government, labor, and political organizations. They also evaluate current policies and events using public opinion surveys, economic data, and election results. From these sources, they can learn the expected impact of new policies.

Political scientists often research the specific effects of government policies on a particular region or population, both domestically and internationally. In doing so, they can examine how a particular policy affects a social group, economy, or environment. They provide information and analysis that help in planning, developing, or carrying out policies.

Many people with a political science background become postsecondary teachers and high school teachers.
Work Environment

Political scientists often present their findings.

Political scientists held about 6,600 jobs in 2012. About half worked for the federal government. Others worked for think tanks, nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, political lobbying groups, and labor organizations.

Work Schedules

Political scientists work full time in an office. They may work overtime to finish reports and meet deadlines.

How to Become a Political Scientist

Political scientists often work alone, collecting information, analyzing data, and writing reports.

Political scientists need a master’s degree or Ph.D. in political science, public administration, or a related field.

Education

Jobseekers with a bachelor’s degree in political science usually qualify for entry-level positions in many related fields. Some qualify for entry-level positions as research assistants for research organizations, political campaigns, nonprofit organizations, or government agencies. Many go into fields outside of politics and policymaking, such as business or law.

Most political scientists need to complete either a master’s or Ph.D. program. To be admitted to a graduate program, applicants should complete undergraduate courses in political science, writing, and statistics. Applicants also benefit from having related work or internship experience. Working in an internship on a congressional staff or for a research organization will help applicants gain experience writing, researching, analyzing data, or working with policy issues.

Political scientists often complete a master of public administration (MPA), master of public policy (MPP), or master of public affairs
These programs usually combine several disciplines, and students can choose to concentrate in a specific area of interest. Most offer core courses in research methods, policy formation, program evaluation, and statistics. Some colleges and universities also offer master's degrees in political science, international relations, or other applied political science specialties.

Political scientists can also complete a Ph.D. program, which requires several years of coursework followed by independent research for a dissertation. Most Ph.D. candidates choose to specialize in one of four primary subfields of political science: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, or political theory.

Political scientists who teach at colleges and universities need a Ph.D. Graduates with a master's degree in political science sometimes become postsecondary teachers and high school teachers.

Other Experience

Jobseekers who have earned a bachelor’s degree can benefit from internships or volunteer work when looking for entry-level positions in political science or a related field. They give students a chance to apply their academic knowledge in a professional setting and develop skills needed for the field.

Important Qualities

**Analytical skills.** Political scientists often use qualitative and quantitative research methods. They rely on their analytical skills when they collect, evaluate, and interpret data.

**Critical-thinking skills.** Political scientists must be able to examine and process available information and draw logical conclusions from their findings.

**Intellectual curiosity.** Political scientists must continually explore new ideas and information to produce original papers and research. They must stay current on political subjects and come up with new ways to think about and address issues.

**Writing skills.** Writing skills are essential for those who write papers on political issues. They must be able to convey their research results clearly.

Pay

The median annual wage for political scientists was $102,000 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $49,290, and the top 10 percent earned more than $155,490.

In May 2012, the median annual wages for political scientists in the top three industries employing political scientists were as follows:

- Federal government, excluding postal service: $115,740
- Scientific research and development services: $99,500

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
Political scientists work full time in an office. They may work overtime to finish reports and meet deadlines.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of political scientists is projected to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. However, because it is a small occupation, the fast growth will result in only about 1,400 new jobs over the 10-year period.

Employment will increase in response to a growing interest in public policy and political issues. There will be demand for jobseekers with extensive knowledge of political systems, institutions, and policies.

Political organizations, lobbying firms, and many nonprofit, labor, and social organizations will rely on the knowledge of political scientists to manage complicated legal and regulatory issues and policies. Political scientists will also be needed at think tanks to focus specifically on politics and political theory. Organizations that research or advocate for specific causes, such as immigration, healthcare, or the environment, will also need political scientists to analyze policies relating to their field.

The federal government employs about half of all political scientists, and political scientists will continue to be needed in the government to assess the impact of government policies, such as the efficiencies of public services, effects of departmental cuts, and advantages of proposed improvements.

**Job Prospects**

Political scientists should face strong competition for most jobs. The small number of positions, combined with the popularity of political science programs in colleges and universities, means that there will likely be many qualified candidates for relatively few positions.

Candidates with a graduate degree, strong writing and analytical skills, and experience researching or performing policy analysis should have the best job prospects. Candidates who have specialized knowledge or experience in their field of interest will also have better job opportunities.

Some candidates with a bachelor’s degree in political science may find entry-level jobs as assistants and research assistants. Many will also find positions outside of politics and policy in fields such as business and law.

**Employment projections data for Political Scientists, 2012-22**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political scientists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social scientists and related workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, all occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of political scientists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anthropologists and Archeologists</strong></td>
<td>Anthropologists and archeologists study the origin, development, and behavior of humans. They examine the cultures, languages, archeological remains, and physical characteristics of people in various parts of the world.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$57,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economists</strong></td>
<td>Economists study the production and distribution of resources, goods, and services by collecting and analyzing data, researching trends, and evaluating economic issues.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$91,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market Research Analysts</strong></td>
<td>Market research analysts study market conditions to examine potential sales of a product or service. They help companies understand what products people want, who will buy them, and at what price.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$60,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postsecondary Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Postsecondary teachers instruct students in a wide variety of academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level. They also conduct research and publish scholarly papers and books.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$68,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociologists</strong></td>
<td>Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups, cultures, organizations, social institutions, and processes that people develop.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$74,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Researchers</strong></td>
<td>Survey researchers design surveys and analyze data. Surveys are used to collect factual data, such as employment and salary information, or to ask questions in order to understand people's opinions, preferences, beliefs, or desires.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$45,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban and Regional Planners</strong></td>
<td>Urban and regional planners develop plans and programs for the use of land. Their plans help create communities, accommodate population growth, and revitalize physical facilities in towns, cities, counties, and metropolitan areas.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$65,230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contacts for More Information

For more information about political scientists, visit

American Political Science Association

For more information about college programs in public affairs and administration, visit