

Research Topics & Ideas: Political Science

About this document

This PDF contains 50 **political science research topics** for dissertations and theses, organized into 10 areas of political science, from conflict, democracy and authoritarian rule to public policy, governance and the state. Each topic is written as a researchable question and linked to a completed dissertation (2022–2026, 22 universities), so you can see how it was studied in practice. Use it to shortlist political science dissertation topics and thesis ideas, then narrow one down to your own population, setting and timeframe.

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Conflict, democracy and authoritarian rule

1. Which elite bargains struck during a democratic transition make the old regime easier to restore?

See it in a real dissertation: [Devil's Bargain: How Elite Deals Undermined Sudan's Democratic Transition](#) · Walker Joseph Gunning · University of Chicago · 2025

2. When does an armed group try to capture an elected institution rather than attack it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Coercion and Capture in Democratic Politics](#) · Andres Davies Uribe · University of Chicago · 2023

3. Are secular elites a bigger barrier to Arab democracy than religion or oil revenue?

See it in a real dissertation: [Barriers to Democracy in the Arab World](#) · Mohammad Huweih · Georgia State University · 2022

4. What legitimacy do smugglers acquire where the state has withdrawn, and what do they do with it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Your border is not mine: smugglers, the legitimization of authoritarian states and ecosystems of discontent](#) · R Nimkar · University of Oxford · 2026

5. Which forms of state communication turn public resistance into compliance?

See it in a real dissertation: [Turning Resistance into Compliance: Strategic Communication Under Public Distrust](#) · Weiye Deng · Washington University in St. Louis · 2026

Elections, voting and turnout

6. Do the criteria a county uses to site ballot drop boxes put them where the least-served voters actually are?

See it in a real dissertation: [Whose Vote Is It Anyway? A Geospatial Analysis of the California Voter's Choice Act Ballot Drop Box Criteria in Santa Cruz County](#) · Judith Heher · San Jose State University · 2024

7. Which barriers to voting do disabled voters actually hit, and which has any state removed?

See it in a real dissertation: [Lowering Barriers to Voting for Individuals with Disabilities](#) · Cynthia Weyerman · Boise State University · 2025

8. Does a voter ID requirement cut women's turnout more than men's, and what would explain the gap?

See it in a real dissertation: [Voter ID Laws and Gendered Impacts on Voter Turnout](#) · Jacqueline D. Franolich · Boise State University · 2023

9. Why do rural counties keep registering with a party they have stopped voting for?

See it in a real dissertation: [Southern Lag Voting Trends in Florida U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial Elections](#) · Marie Frederickson · Georgia State University · 2022

10. What does a state-level realignment look like decade by decade, rather than as one critical election?

See it in a real dissertation: [From Purple to Blue: The Political Realignment of Colorado from 1992 to 2023](#) · Collins, Christopher Curtis · Harvard University · 2024

Environmental and climate politics

11. Does narrative climate coverage move a reader to act, or only to feel informed?

See it in a real dissertation: [Narrative Solutions to Climate Change](#) · Katherine Keller Pezzulli · University of North Texas · 2022

12. What stops local journalists from covering sea level rise as a local story?

See it in a real dissertation: [Covering the Coast: Local News Frames and Journalist Perspectives on Sea Level Rise in Rhode Island](#) · Mackensie Crowley · University of Rhode Island · 2026

13. Who breathes the pollution that a national logistics corridor leaves behind?

See it in a real dissertation: [Toxic ecologies and uneven exposure: logistics-related pollution and wildfire smoke in the Inland Empire region of Southern California](#) · José Ramón Becerra · Purdue University · 2026

14. On what grounds do neighbors oppose a sustainable farm in public waters?

See it in a real dissertation: [Opinions on the Halfshell: Examining Public Perceptions of Southern New England Aquaculture Development](#) · Callan Yanoff · University of Rhode Island · 2022

15. What can an environmental NGO actually do with a social media account in China?

See it in a real dissertation: [Internet Mediated NGO Activity: How Environmental NGOs use Weibo in China](#) · Matthew Collins · Swansea University · 2023

Gender, race and political representation

16. What can a small bloc of women MPs actually change in a male-dominated parliament?

See it in a real dissertation: [Defying the odds: the role of female policymakers in advancing greater women's rights in post-revolutionary Tunisia \(2011-19\) and Ukraine \(2014-19\)](#) · Kateryna Marina · University of Oxford · 2025

17. Does a redistricting cycle help or hurt women running for Congress?

See it in a real dissertation: [Gerrymandering or "Gloria"-mandering? An examination of redistricting effects on women candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives](#) · Zhou, Amy X · Harvard University · 2023

18. When does a party run women whose identity cuts against its own electoral base?

See it in a real dissertation: [Do Men Strategically Leverage Women's Intersecting Identities? Intersectional Symbolic Inclusion as an Electoral Competition Strategy in Polarized Turkey](#) · Elif Genc · Portland State University · 2023

19. Once elected, do women raise different issues in government from the men beside them?

See it in a real dissertation: [From the Periphery to Power: The Impact of Underrepresented Groups in the Indian Governmen](#) · Bhate, Arpit Baranwal · Harvard University · 2024

20. What draws a Latine voter to a party whose immigration rhetoric targets them?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Social and Political Identities of Latine Republicans in the U.S.](#) · Gabriella Mota · Portland State University · 2025

International relations and foreign policy

- 21. How much of an uprising is explained by conditions inside the country, and how much by the region around it?**

See it in a real dissertation: [The Arab Spring Uprisings in Geopolitical Context](#) · Jake Rutledge · Portland State University · 2024

- 22. Why does public opinion constrain a leader on one foreign policy decision and not an equivalent one?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Foreign State Images and Popular Foreign Policy Constraints](#) · Cana Kim · Louisiana State University · 2023

- 23. Do women and men in office communicate differently in wartime, and does anyone respond differently?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Women and the war of words: a social data science analysis of gendered political communication strategies during Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine](#) · Alexandra Melania Pavliuc · University of Oxford · 2025

- 24. How much does public opinion shape national security policy on a technology nobody understands yet?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Public opinion and national security: an emerging technology perspective in the age of AI](#) · Scott Singer · University of Oxford · 2024

- 25. What explains a trade war that no calculation of material interest predicts?**

See it in a real dissertation: [How States Feel: The Power of Affective Dynamics in the U.S.-China Trade War, 2018-2025](#) · Malaika I. Robinson · SOAS University of London · 2026

Migration, borders and citizenship

- 26. What turns arriving on a small boat into a criminal offense, step by institutional step?**

See it in a real dissertation: [No ifs, no buts, no boats!: asylum policy, border policing, and the criminalisation of people arriving to the UK on 'small boats', 2018-2023](#) · Victoria Taylor · University of Oxford · 2025

- 27. Does how recently your family migrated predict what you think immigration policy should be?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Immigration Identity and Policy Choices: Exploring How Immigration Status Shapes Public Attitudes Toward Immigration Policy](#) · Ali Ahmad · Illinois State University · 2025

- 28. How does an authoritarian government run a refugee policy the world calls progressive?**

See it in a real dissertation: [The Politics of Uganda's Refugee Policy: Authoritarian Governance and the Limits of "Progressive" Refugee Hosting](#) · Michael Mutyaba · SOAS University of London · 2026

- 29. When did each piece of a hostile immigration regime arrive, and what was happening at the time?**

See it in a real dissertation: [The Construction of the Hostile Environment: A Temporal Analysis of the UK's Asylum and Immigration Legislation from 1900 to 2023](#) · WHITFIELD, AMANDA, BELL · Durham University · 2025

30. Why has the EU failed for over a decade to agree a common immigration policy?

See it in a real dissertation: [Agenda Setting and Europe's Common Immigration Policy](#) · Jamie Surface · Portland State University · 2022

Parties, legislatures and representation**31. What happens to a legislator's workload once reelection stops being possible?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Essays on Elections and Legislators](#) · Kisoo Kim · University of Chicago · 2025

32. Are electorally safe members of Congress more reliable partisan votes than vulnerable ones?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Effect of Electoral Security on Partisan Support](#) · Brian Webb · Georgia State University · 2022

33. Would a nonpartisan election commission enforce campaign finance law that a bipartisan one cannot?

See it in a real dissertation: [Reframing the Federal Election Commission: A Nonpartisan Solution](#) · Andrew Evans · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2023

34. Why does conflict inside a governing party turn violent in some cases and not others?

See it in a real dissertation: [Conflict and Coercion within African Political Parties](#) · Jonathan R. DePoyster · University of Chicago · 2022

35. When do politicians build an impartial state, and when do they strip it for their party?

See it in a real dissertation: [Intrastate Politics: How Political Parties and the State Shape Each Other](#) · Murtaza, Natasha · Harvard University · 2023

Policing, justice and civil rights**36. When do courts overrule an elected government on national security, and where does that hold?**

See it in a real dissertation: [Judicial Oversight of National Security Policy in Ontologically Contested Democracies](#) · Shih-An Wang · University of Chicago · 2024

37. Do arrest patterns shift as a sheriff's election approaches?

See it in a real dissertation: [Elected Sheriffs' Election Process and How it Affects their Behavior](#) · Brian James Ardoin · Walden University · 2026

38. Does autism-specific training change how a use-of-force policy plays out on the street?

See it in a real dissertation: [Law Enforcement Policies, Training, and Developmental Disability Encounters Involving Autism](#) · Tariya Sanders · Walden University · 2026

39. Does the way prison education is framed change public support for funding it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Do Frameworks Matter? Testing the Framing Effect on Public Support for Prison Pell Grants](#) · Natalie Burke · Portland State University · 2023

40. What shapes a teenager's sense of legal authority before they ever meet an officer?

See it in a real dissertation: [Background justice: the political context of adolescent legal socialization](#) · Eric Rodriguez-Whitney · Northeastern University · 2022

Political communication, media and misinformation

41. When a county loses its local newspaper, what happens to turnout in its municipal elections?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Future of Democracy is at Risk as Declining Local Media Erodes Voter Turnout](#) · Melissa Libert · Illinois State University · 2025

42. What does a campaign gain from a false claim that persuades nobody?

See it in a real dissertation: [Unveiling the Strategic Game: Incentives to Share False Information in Electoral Campaigns](#) · Christina Pearl Walker · Purdue University · 2026

43. Can a foreign influence operation be separated from the domestic polarization it feeds on?

See it in a real dissertation: [Making Russia Great Again: The Influence of Russian Social Media Cyber Operations on American Opinions and Attitudes](#) · Gordon McKenzie · Harvard University · 2025

44. Do women move to safer corners of a platform to talk politics, and what does that cost the debate?

See it in a real dissertation: [Navigating Political Discussions Online: The Role Safe Spaces Play in Women's Political Participation on Twitter](#) · Ayla Oden · Louisiana State University · 2023

45. How does media visibility come to substitute for credentials on a scientific advisory body?

See it in a real dissertation: [Weaponized Legitimacy: How Alternative Experts Exploit Media Attention To Claim Scientific Authority](#) · Samantha Nichols · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill · 2026

Public policy, governance and the state

46. Which social problems are created by the policies meant to solve a different one?

See it in a real dissertation: [Policy side effects : how do policies become a source of social problems?](#) · Yoon-Jung Choi · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2022

47. What does a White House actually do with the polling it commissions?

See it in a real dissertation: [Poll use and policy-making in the White House : 1993-2000.](#) · Jeanne Zaino · University of Massachusetts Amherst · 2022

48. Do shareholder resolutions and strikes change how policymakers treat a company lobbying them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Policymaker Receptivity to Corporate Political Activity as Influenced by Activists](#) · Mark Bateman · Old Dominion University · 2026

49. What is a government buying by taxing big tech alone while a global deal is still being negotiated?

See it in a real dissertation: [Salience and sovereignty: the politics of taxing big tech in France and the United Kingdom](#) · Clemence Hautefort · University of Oxford · 2025

50. How do housing policies written for equity end up reproducing exclusion anyway?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Paradox of Progressivism: How Chapel Hill's Housing Policies Reinforce Exclusion](#) · Corey Brandon · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill · 2026

How to turn a topic into your research question

A topic is a starting point, not something you can research yet. These four steps take you from a topic on this list to a focused question you can actually answer.

- 1. Shortlist three, not one.** Pick three topics from this list that genuinely interest you and fit the access you have to people and data.

Recommended reading: [How to find and choose a dissertation topic](#)

- 2. Read the dissertation behind each one.** Its literature review and its "recommendations for future research" section show you what is already known and what is still open.

Recommended reading: [How to find a research gap](#)

- 3. Narrow it to your setting.** Name one population, one setting and one thing you will measure or explore. That turns a broad topic into a question you can finish.

Recommended reading: [How to write a research question](#)

- 4. Line up your aims, objectives and questions.** Your committee will check that they agree.

Recommended reading: [Research aims, objectives and questions](#)

Work through these once and you will have a focused question rather than a broad topic, which is what the rest of your proposal is built on.