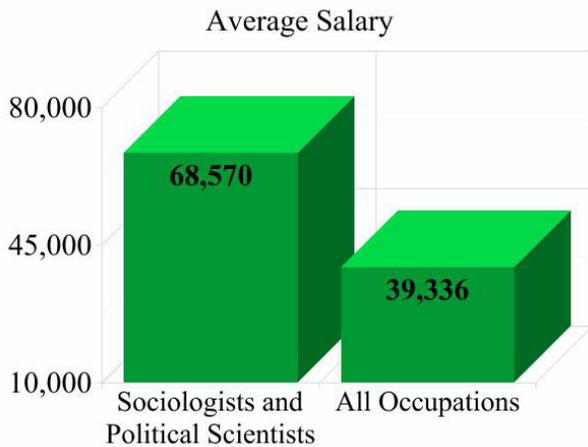


## Sociologists and Political Scientists

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### WHAT THEY DO

Sociologists and political scientists study all aspects of human society and political systems—from social behavior and the origin of social groups to the origin, development, and operation of political systems. Their research provides insights into different ways individuals, groups, and governments make decisions, exercise power, and respond to change. Through their studies and analyses, sociologists and political scientists suggest solutions to social, business, personal, and governmental problems. In fact, many work as public policy analysts for government or private organizations.



Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups, cultures, organizations, and social institutions people form. They also study the activities in which people participate, including activities conducted in social, religious, political, economic, and business organizations. They study the behavior of, and interaction among, groups, organizations, institutions, and nations, and how they react to phenomena such as the spread of technology, crime, social movements, and epidemics of illness.

They also trace the origin and growth of these groups and interactions. Sociologists analyze how social influences affect different individuals and groups, and the ways organizations and institutions affect the daily lives of those same people. To analyze these social patterns, sociologists usually begin by designing research projects that incorporate a variety of methods, including historical analysis, comparative analysis, and quantitative and qualitative techniques. Through this process of applied research, they construct theories and produce information that attempts to explain certain social trends or that will enable people to make better decisions or manage their affairs more effectively.

The results of sociological research aid educators, lawmakers, administrators, and others who are interested in resolving social problems and formulating public policy.

Most sociologists work in one or more specialties, such as social organization, stratification, and mobility; racial and ethnic relations; education; the family; social psychology; urban, rural, political, and comparative sociology; gender relations; demography; gerontology; criminology; and sociological practice.

Political scientists conduct research on a wide range of subjects, such as relations between the United States and other countries, the institutions and political life of nations, the politics of small towns or major metropolises, and the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Studying and evaluating topics such as public opinion, political decisionmaking, ideology, and public policy, they analyze the structure and operation of governments, as well as various other entities.

Depending on the topic, a political scientist might analyze a public-opinion survey, study election results or public documents, or interview public officials. Occasionally, they may collaborate with government economists to assess the effects of specific changes in legislation or public policy, such as the effects of the deregulation of industries or of changes in Social Security.

Through academic publications, written reports, or public presentations, political scientists present their research reports and often identify new issues for research and analysis. Many political scientists forecast political, social, and economic trends.

### EDUCATION REQUIRED

Whether working in government, industry, research organizations, or consulting firms, sociologists and political scientists with a bachelor's degree usually qualify for entry-level positions as a market analyst, research assistant, writer, or policy analyst. Graduates with master's degrees in applied specialties usually qualify for most administrative and research positions, while a Ph.D. degree is typically required for college and university teaching positions.

Training in statistics and mathematics is essential for many political scientists, who increasingly are using mathematical and quantitative research methods. The ability to use computers for research purposes is mandatory in most disciplines.

Many sociology and political science students can benefit greatly from internships. Numerous government agencies, as well as nonprofit and other organizations, offer internships or volunteer research opportunities. Also, the vast majority of colleges and universities have student organizations devoted to specific public policy issues, and many provide opportunities for debates, often hosted by the political science department.

While in college, aspiring sociologists and political scientists should gain experience gathering and analyzing data, conducting interviews or surveys, and writing reports on their findings. This experience can prove invaluable later in obtaining a full-time position in the field, because much of the work, especially in the beginning, may center on these duties.

## Sociologists and Political Scientists - Continued

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### OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

Sociologists and political scientists need excellent written and oral communication skills to report research findings and to collaborate on research. Successful workers also need intellectual curiosity and creativity because they constantly are seeking new information about people, things, and ideas.

The ability to think logically and methodically also is essential in analyzing complicated issues, such as the relative merits of various forms of government.

### HOW TO ADVANCE

Many sociologists and political scientists choose to teach in their field, often while pursuing their own research. These workers are usually classified as postsecondary teachers.

The minimum requirement for most positions in colleges and universities is a Ph.D. degree. Graduates with a master's degree in sociology or political science may qualify for teaching positions in community colleges.

### WORK ENVIRONMENT

Most sociologists and political scientists have regular hours. Generally working behind a desk, either alone or in collaboration with other social scientists, they read and write research articles or reports. Many experience the pressures of writing and publishing, as well as those associated with deadlines and tight schedules. Some sociologists may be required to attend meetings. Political scientists on foreign assignment must adjust to unfamiliar cultures, climates, and languages.

Sociologists and political scientists employed by colleges and universities usually have flexible work schedules, often dividing their time among teaching, research, writing, consulting, and administrative responsibilities. Those who teach in these settings are classified as postsecondary teachers.

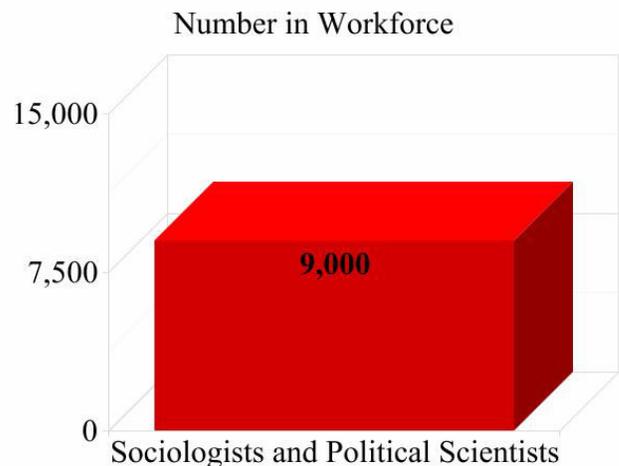
Political scientists frequently work as policy analysts for government or in labor, political, or professional organizations, some of which are nonprofit.

Most political scientists—about 63 percent—work for the Federal Government. Some find work in research and development firms performing work for the Federal Government on a contract basis. The relatively few who work in the Foreign Service may help formulate and implement foreign policy.

### JOB GROWTH

Overall employment of sociologists and political scientists is expected to grow 21 percent from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations. Sociologists will experience much faster than average job growth because the incorporation of sociology into research in other fields continues to increase. Sociologists possess broad training and education in analytical, methodological, conceptual, and quantitative and qualitative analysis and research, so their skills can be applied to many different occupations. As a result, many workers with sociology backgrounds will find work in niche areas with specialized titles, such as market analyst, research assistant, writer, and policy analyst.

Some sociologists may find work conducting policy research for consulting firms, and their knowledge of society and social behavior may be used as well by a variety of companies in product development, marketing, and advertising. Demand for sociologists also will stem from growth in the number of social, political, and business associations and organizations, including many nonprofit organizations, to conduct various evaluations and statistical work.



Employment of political scientists is projected to grow faster than average, reflecting the growing importance of public policy and research. Demand for political science research is growing because of increasing interest in politics, foreign affairs, and public policy, including social and environmental policy issues, healthcare, and immigration.

Political scientists will use their knowledge of political institutions to further the interests of nonprofit, political lobbying, and social and civic organizations. Job growth also may be driven by the budget constraints of public resources. As a growing population exerts excess demand on certain public services, political scientists will be needed to analyze the effects and efficiencies of those services, as well as to offer solutions.