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**HONOUR SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS & ECONOMICS  
HONOUR SCHOOL OF HISTORY & POLITICS**

**COMMENT SHEET FOR POLITICS THESIS TT 2020**

<b>CANDIDATE NO</b>	1026376
<b>ASSESSOR NAME</b>	
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Thesis in Politics

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Marks</b>
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Initial

70

Agreed

75

\* Cogency of analysis and argument

\* Accuracy and solidity in the backing up of the analysis and argument

\* Clarity of expression and presentation

\* Knowledge of how the topic fits into the existing work in the field

\* Awareness of relevant methodological issues

\* Respect for the scholarly conventions regarding contents pages, introductions, conclusions, chapters, notes, bibliographies, etc.

*Please also note that marks for Politics thesis should be awarded according to the step marking conventions.*

The candidate has put in a great deal of work and effort to understand and expand upon the measurement of district compactness. The thesis showcases impressive analytical skill and a thorough exploration of past works on the topic. It is also clear, and adds to the overall quality of the work, that the candidate is well aware of the shortcomings of much of his analysis. One possible caveat that the candidate does not discuss is the quality and plausibility of the driving distance measure. I am not entirely convinced that this is a suitable instrument to produce valid measurement. Let me add some additional points that I think warrant the attention of the candidate. Granted, compactness should/could a purely mathematical/objective measure. However, given the Kaufman et al recent contribution and the “you know it when you see it” motivation of this study I am not at all sure that we should take objectivity for granted. Especially when gerrymandering and redistricting is a function of the courts. Courts in the US are subjective “know it when you see it” and they can also be partisan. And here is my worry. What is the benchmark if objectivity is not guaranteed? What do we compare a given measure to? The low correlation between the measure and past measures can be indicative of anything. It might well be that the candidate is right, and the measure is capturing something that is uncaptured by other metrics. Still, I am not entirely sure what the “true” measure is to draw the comparisons.

Regarding the multivariate analysis, I was unable to fully grasp the substantive effects of the variables. Standardisation would definitely help, and descriptive statistics of the covariates are more than necessary given the hypothesis to be tested. I was also a bit sceptical about the difference in means analysis. The OLS is sufficient (it is essentially a difference in means type of analysis) and more informative. Also, I was a bit disappointed that much of the empirical analysis can be found in a GitHub account we do not have access to. I trust the candidate did a good job, but I can’t see why an Online appendix was not produced. But, I do have an important concern regarding the suitability of the model specification for testing the trade-off hypothesis. Wouldn’t this be better captured by interactions between human compactness and each of the other measures? If the two variables do not interact (i.e. if the effect of human compactness does not vary by different levels of district compactness) then we can assume that there is no trade-off.

All in all, I thought that this is an impressive piece of work for an undergraduate that with some easy revisions could be a very good postgraduate thesis.