

## **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS II: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY**

**Academic year 2025/2026, Fall Semester**

**University Carlos III of Madrid**

**Tuesday 14:30-17:30, Room 18.1.A.01**

**Course Instructor:** Prof. Juan J. Fernández ([jjfgonza@clio.uc3m.es](mailto:jjfgonza@clio.uc3m.es), 91 624 96 14) Office hours: Friday 9:00-12:00 (18.2.A.24) and online can be booked [here](#)

*“‘Politics’ for us means to share power or arriving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state” (Weber 1994[1920]: 78).*

### **OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE**

Political behavior and political change have been core topics of sociological analysis since the inception of the discipline in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both classic and contemporary sociologists have addressed central questions regarding modern politics like the nature of the modern state, types of political regimes and public policy regimes, inequality in influence of state action, the nature of political cleavages or social outcomes of public policies. This interest of sociologists on power inequality and in state-society relations has not waned in recent decades. Political sociology represents a core subdiscipline in sociology that continues to make substantial contributions to our understanding of the link between social structures, life chances and personal troubles. Following these facts, this course thus provides a general introduction to core questions and debates in political sociology.

The course has been structured to answer two core questions. First, is there a distinctive sociological approach to the analysis of contemporary politics? If so, which is such approach? Given the existence of political science – a ‘sister discipline’ specialized in the analysis of the state and forms of government –, the course will explore the differences between mainstream political science and mainstream political sociology. The course seeks to demonstrate that sociology engages in certain aspects of political relations and from concrete theoretical perspectives largely overlooked by other social sciences. For this purpose, we compare and contrast central claims of sociologists, economists and political scientists to ongoing debates regarding the relationship between social structure and politics. We will also analyze the increasing overlap in approaches, topics of interests and methodology between political science and political sociology.

Class discussions will also address a second question: What are the core theoretical and empirical debates in contemporary political sociology? The topics and readings of the 12 weeks have been chosen to provide a general road map of central controversies in the subdiscipline. Such road map should allow junior scholars make substantial contributions that other social scientist acknowledge as an advancement in our understanding of state-society relations.

## STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The course is divided in four sections. Part I and the first week provides a general introduction to political sociology. It explores dominant accounts of its distinctiveness vis-à-vis political science, the core questions in the subdiscipline and dominant theoretical approaches. Part II of the course offers theoretical building blocks for the rest of the course. Week 2 examines in detail the theories of power of Max Weber – a towering figure in the subdiscipline. His understandings of power still has a profound influence on contemporary political sociology and strong familiarity with his work is critical to contribute to this subdiscipline. In week 3 we will analyze the principles of field theory through the work of Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam. In week 4 we will examine a core contribution to postcolonial thought, which is thriving in political sociology at the time. Parts III and IV of the course introduce students to unresolved debates in political sociology. They are separated by the level of analysis. Part III explores debates regarding micro-level political processes, mostly individual-level political behavior. Part IV, instead, explores debates regarding macrolevel political processes, mostly interactions between collective actors and states.

## CLASS DYNAMICS AND READINGS

The classes will involve a guided discussion of key readings predetermined for each week, complemented with student presentations. The course instructor will guide discussions in two ways. He will guide class discussions through three or four weekly questions on the readings that will be provided in advance. These guiding questions are aimed to facilitate interpretation of the readings and allow identification of differences across authors and topics. He will also contribute to class debates through discussions of the intellectual and socio-political background of the readings and providing core evidence of basic claims and real-world examples of major concepts. All students are expected to do the readings of the course before each session. The readings will be available in PDF format in Aula Global. Prof. Fernández can provide supplementary readings to students upon request.

## ASSESSMENT

The assessment will be made based on three elements. First, individual presentations regarding the following topics will take place throughout the course. Each student is expected to make one presentation. They are expected to be around 20 minutes long. The presentation will determine 30% of the final grade.

Second, students are expected to submit an essay on one of the topics of the course. Essays can have several orientations: they may involve a theoretical discussion, a research project, or an empirical analysis, or a combination of these three. Essays should be 4,000-6,000 words long. The topic for the essay must be discussed and approved by the instructor. The essay will determine 40% of the final grade. Research papers must represent original pieces of academic research.

Third, students are expected to submit a weekly discussion question. To facilitate conversation in debates, you are required to submit online in Aula Global at least one question about each week's readings. They can be questions that seek to clarify an argument in the reading, that ask about this week's reading connects with past week's readings, or that considers how readings enlighten events in your home country. You should do this for 10 of the 12 weeks we will meet.

Discussion Questions must be submitted to the Discussion Forum in Aula Global by the end of the day on Sunday. These questions will represent 10% of the final grade.

Fourth, given that this is a graduate and professionally-oriented course, class participation is strongly encouraged. All students are expected to contribute to the debate with their interpretation and critiques of the readings. Class participation will represent 20% of the final grade.

Late Assignments. If you cannot meet a deadline due to medical or family emergency or religious observance, please contact the instructor as soon as possible so that we may work out an alternative schedule of due dates and times. If you have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), please share what accommodations would be helpful to you so that we can plan together for how you can be successful. Making a good plan will not require you to share your private health information with me. If you are in quarantine or isolation due to Covid-19, please inform me of the situation using the university form. If you are under other travel restrictions, please contact me.

All the Rules of the Masters in Social Sciences distributed by the Director of the IC3JM apply to this course. This applies to attendance and punctuality. Having more than two non-justifiable absences will imply failing the course. Absences are only justifiable under conditions of a doctor's appointment or a serious family emergency. A delay of longer than 15 minutes counts as missing a session.

## **PART I – WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION**

This section of the course reviews the nature of the sociological enterprise and addresses recent discussions of its specificity as a subdiscipline. To situate firmly the main foci analyzed by major political sociologists and dominant theoretical approaches, this part also examines recent reviews.

### **Week 1: What Is Political Sociology? How Does It Differ from Political Science?**

**Tuesday September 9**

#### *Key Readings*

Clemens, Elisabeth. 2016. *What is Political Sociology?* Cambridge: Polity Press. Introduction and chapter 1.

Janoski, Thomas, Cedric de Leon, Joya Misra and Isaac William Martin. 2020. "Introduction: New Directions in Political Sociology." Pp 1-33 in *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by Cedric de Leon, Isaac William Martin, Joya Misra and Thomas Janowski, Cambridge University Press.

#### *Optional Readings*

Robert M. Fishman and Suzanne M. Coshov. 2017 "Political Sociology: A Broad and 'Polycentric' Field." Pp. 314-325 *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology*, Kathleen Korgen, Ed., Cambridge University Press.

Martin, John Levi and Nick Judd. 2020. "Tasks for the Political Sociology of the Next Ten Years." Pp 243-267 in *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by Cedric de Leon, Isaac William Martin, Joya Misra and Thomas Janowski, Cambridge University Press.

## **PART II – WEEKS 2-4: CLASSIC APPROACHES IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY – SOCIAL MECHANISMS**

In Part II, we analyze and compare recent major theoretical models in political sociology: (i) the political sociology in Max Weber; (ii) Fligstein and McAdam's theory of social fields and (iii) recent decolonization thought. Although these three models have different motivations to study political processes, draw on different premises and reach different conclusions, they address several common themes: What is power? What is the state? What is the relationship between politically organized social groups and state action? This Part of the course examines the main principles in these three political theories and identify commonalities and differences among them.

### **Week 2: Political sociology of Max Weber**

**Tuesday September 16**

The notion of power undergirds every conceptualization of political struggles and their consequences. A systematic examination of the relationship between power, politics and society, thus requires a careful consideration of the different dimensions and understandings of power. Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault have made critical contributions to our conceptualizations of power.

#### *Key Readings*

Weber, Max. 2013[1920]. *Economy and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Two sections: (a) Vol. 1, part I, pp. 210-254, 262-283.

Weber, Max. 1994[1919]. "The Profession and Vocation of Politics." Pp. 309-369 in *Weber: Political Writings*, edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

#### *Optional Readings*

Giddens, Antony. 2013. *Capitalism & Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swedberg, Richard and Ola Agevall. 2016. *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

### **Week 3: Field Theory in Political Sociology**

**Tuesday September 23**

Max Weber was passionate about politics during his whole life and produced many texts regarding the nature of politics in contemporary societies. His conception of power, the state, the sources of legitimacy and types of conflicts in the political area continue to influence empirical and theoretical research in political sociology.

#### *Key Readings*

Fligstein, Neil and Doug McAdam. 2012. *A Theory of Fields*. Oxford University Press, pp. 823, ch. 2, 67-74, chapter 4.

### *Optional Readings*

Martin, John Levi. 2003. "What is Field Theory?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 1-49.

Sapiro, Gisèle. 2018. "Field Theory from a Transnational Perspective", in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, edited by Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz, pp. 161-183.

Scoville, Caleb and Neil Fligstein. 2020. "The Promise of Field Theory for the Study of Political Institutions", in *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by Cedric de Leon, Isaac William Martin, Joya Misra and Thomas Janowski, Cambridge University Press.

### **Week 4: Colonialism and Postcolonialism in Political Sociology    Tuesday September 30**

Postcolonial thought and postcolonial critiques of classic social theories have gained lots of attention in contemporary sociology and political sociology in particular. This week we will examine a core contribution to this rising paradigm with a highly-cited volume of Julian Go.

### *Key Readings*

Go, Julian. 2016. *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1 & 4.

### *Optional Readings*

Go, Julian. 2020. "Political Sociology and the Postcolonial Perspective." Pp 132-152 in *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*, edited by Cedric de Leon, Isaac William Martin, Joya Misra and Thomas Janowski, Cambridge University Press.

Favell, Adrian. 2022. "The (Postcolonial) Return of Grand Theory in American Sociology: Julian Go on Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory", *British Journal of Sociology*, 74, 3, 302-309.

## **PART III – WEEKS 5-8: SUBSTANTIVE DEBATES IN MICRO-LEVEL POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY**

In this Part of the course we will engage four ongoing debates in individual- or micro-level political sociology. First, we will examine recent work on class alignment. Second, we will engage the emerging debate on the gender gap in left voting in post-industrial societies. Third, in response to the increasing ethnic diversity and immigration in advanced democracies, we will examine studies on the political mobilization of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Fourth, we will assess recent research on the role of the individual residential situation and its influence on political participation.

### **Week 5: Class Voting and Class-based Political Preferences    Tuesday October 7**

Since the notion of social class is a quintessential conceptual contribution of sociology to the analysis of social and political action, the relationship between social class location and political preferences and choices has also been at the heart of political sociological debates in recent decades. We approach this debate from a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective.

### *Key Readings*

Rennwald, Line, and Jonas Pontusson. 2022. "Class gaps in perceptions of political voice: liberal democracies 1974–2016." *West European Politics* 45, no. 6, 1334-1360.

Oesch, Daniel and L. Rennwald. 2018. "Electoral Competition in Europe's New Tripolar Political Space: Class Voting for the Left, Center-right and Radical Right", *European Journal of Political Research*, 57, 783-807.

#### *Optional Readings*

- Lipset, Seymour and Stein Rokkan. 1967. "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction." Pp. 1-26 in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: CrossNational Perspectives*. Free Press.
- Langsaether, Petter Egge, Geoffrey Evans and Tom O'Grady. 2022. "Explaining the Relationship between Class Position and Political Preferences: A Long-term Panel Analysis of Intra-generational Class Mobility", *British Journal of Political Science*, 52, 2, 958-967.
- Langsaether, Petter Egge and Geoffrey Evans. 2020. "More than Self-interest: Why Different Classess Have Different Attitudes towards Income Inequality", *British Journal of Sociology*, 71, 4, 594-607.

### **Week 6: Religiosity**

**Tuesday October 14**

A vexing issue regarding gender and politics concerns changes in the role of religiosity in voting and policy preferences. Recent work suggests a rapid change in the direction of gaps in political participation across religious groups. This week we analyze the empirical debate concerning the extent and causes of this shift.

#### *Key Readings*

- Huber, John, and Ahmed Ezzeldin Mohamed. 2023. "The decline of religion and its rise in electoral politics: Religious belief, religious practice, and the strength of religious voting cleavages." *Comparative Political Studies* 56.14: 2201-2230.
- Schnabel, Landon. "Opiate of the masses? Inequality, religion, and political ideology in the United States." *Social Forces* 99.3 (2021): 979-1012.

### **Week 7: Is Education the New Main Cleavage?**

**Tuesday October 21**

In light of weakening class voting, students of political attitudes and political behavior have turned their attention to other sources of politically-consequential social divides. One that is capturing increasing attention is the education divide.

#### *Key Readings*

- Abou-Chadi, Tarik, and Simon Hix. 2021. "Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right? Education, class, multiparty competition, and redistribution in Western Europe." *The British Journal of Sociology* 72, 1, 79-92.
- van Noord, Jochem, Bram Spruyt, Toon Kuppens, and Russell Spears. 2023. "Classified out of society? How educational classification induces political alienation through feelings of misrecognition." *The British Journal of Sociology*.

#### *Optional Readings*

- Spruyt, B., & Kuppens, T. 2015. "Education-based thinking and acting? Towards an identity perspective for studying education differentials in public opinion and political participation." *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 2(3-4), 291-312
- Stubager, Rune. 2013. "The changing basis of party competition: Education, authoritarian-libertarian values and voting." *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 3: 372-397.

## **Week 8: Political Polarization**

**Wednesday October 28**

A lively debate has emerged in the social sciences over the possibility of increasing ideological and partisan polarization in affluent democracies. This potential change could have major consequences for the evolution and stability of democratic institutions and social cohesion. This week we tackle the issue through recent quantitative work in sociology.

### **Key Readings**

- DellaPosta, Daniel. 2020. "Pluralistic collapse: The "oil spill" model of mass opinion polarization." *American Sociological Review* 85, 3, 507-536.
- Fernández, Juan J., Plamen Akalyiski and Wolfgang Messner. 2025. "National Attitudinal Heterogeneity across 110 Countries", unpublished manuscript.

### **Optional readings**

- Park, Barum. 2018. "How Are We Apart? Continuity and Change in the Structure of Ideological Disagreement in the American Public, 1980–2012", *Social Forces*, 96(4), 1757-1784.
- McVeigh, Rory, David Cunningham, and Justin Farrell. 2014. "Political polarization as a social movement outcome: 1960s Klan activism and its enduring impact on political realignment in southern counties, 1960 to 2000." *American Sociological Review* 79, no. 6: 1144-1171.
- Balsassarri, Deli and Peter Bearman. 2007. "Dynamics of Political Polarization", *American Sociological Review*, 72, 784-811.

## **PART IV – WEEKS 9-12: SUBSTANTIVE DEBATES IN MACRO-LEVEL POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY**

In this Part of the course we engage four ongoing debates in macro-level political sociology. First, we address changes in nationalism. Second, we examine the process of democratization. Third, we take part with the discussion regarding neoliberalism. We finish the course by considering the causes and consequences of ongoing the conservative backlash in high-income democracies.

## **Week 9: Nationalism**

**Tuesday November 4**

Nationalism and the consideration that the world is divided into modern states grounded on the sovereignty of its people is central to the current global political order. Research on nationalism has resurfaced in recent years with important empirical and theoretical contributions.

### **Key Readings**

- Wimmer, Andreas. 2018. *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together and others Fall Apart*. Princeton University Press, chapters 1, 5, 6 and 7.

## **Week 10: Democratization**

**Tuesday November 11**

Together with the global diffusion of the nation-state, modern politics have a distinctive feature in the emergence of democratic orders. This week we consider two articles addressing the causes of these radical transformation of domestic polities.

### **Key Readings**

- Fishman, Robert. 2018. "What made the Third Wave Possible? Historical Contingency and Meta-Politics in the Genesis of Worldwide Democratization", *Comparative Politics*, July, 607-626.

Ali Kadivar, Mohammad. 2018. "Mass Mobilization and the Durability of New Democracies", *American Sociological Review*, 83, 2, 390-417.

### **Week 11: Neoliberalism**

**Tuesday November 18**

To many social scientists neoliberalism is a consistent ideological and political movement with decisive consequences in contemporary politics and policy-making. Yet the presumption that the movement is a consistent movement has been put into question. This week we examine studies considering the complex relation between intellectual discourses, policy-making designs and implementation in US economic policy fields.

#### *Key Readings*

Kus, Basak. 2024. *Disembedded: Regulation, Crisis, and Democracy in the Age of Finance*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 2, 3 and 4.

### **Week 12: The Conservative Backlash**

**Tuesday November 25**

A long wave of liberal or progressive politics in Western countries spanning from the 1960s to the 2000s led to relevant cultural and policy changes in the form of expanding commitment to post-materialist and self-expressive values and increasing social and civil rights for women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ communities. Yet in the last two decades a conservative backlash has emerged in these established democracies. This week we assess the contours of this countermovement through a qualitative study on the US.

#### *Key Readings*

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2025. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. The New Press.

#### *Optional readings*

Bonikowski, Bart, Yuval Feinstein, and Sean Bock. 2021. "The partisan sorting of "America": How nationalist cleavages shaped the 2016 US presidential election." *American Journal of Sociology* 127.2: 492-561.

Lukk, Martin. 2024. "Politics of Boundary Consolidation: Income Inequality, Ethnonationalism and Radical-Right Voting", *Socius*.

Corredor, Elizabeth S. 2019. "Unpacking 'Gender Ideology' and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44 (3): 613–38

Gonsalves, Tara. 2021. "Transnational Diffusion and Regional Resistance: Domestic LGBT1 Association Founding, 1979–2009." *Social Forces* 99 (4): 1601–30.