



Key Concepts & Research in Political Science and Sociology

By Diederik Boertien and Zoe Lefkofridi

Please register [here](#).

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Sessions:

Session 1: Tuesday 27th January 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 2: Tuesday 3rd February 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 3: Tuesday 10th February 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 4: Tuesday 17th February 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 5: Tuesday 24th February 15:00-17:00 (Emeroteca)

Session 6: Tuesday 3rd March 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 7: Tuesday 10th March 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 8: *Thursday 12th March 15:00-17:00* (Seminar Room 3)

Session 9: Tuesday 24th March 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

Session 10: Tuesday 31st March 15:00-17:00 (Seminar Room 3)

This course serves as an introduction to the fields of Political Science and Sociology for EUI Researchers. It is especially designed for researchers without experience in the respective fields, but researchers from the SPS department are also welcome to participate. The aim of the course is to introduce EUI Researchers to some of the central concepts and research themes that are prominent in sociological and political research. Each of the sessions of this course will discuss key central themes and introduce EUI researchers to major theoretical concepts and empirical studies that have advanced our understanding of social and political phenomena.

The sessions on political science focus on fundamental principles and institutions of modern democracy (e.g. electoral systems) as well as key political actors (e.g. political parties, social movements).

The sessions on sociology are structured according to three common and related questions asked by sociologists that illustrate their approach. Once presented with a given topic, problem or phenomenon, sociologists are often interested in the following: I) How is the behavior of individuals affected by this phenomenon? II) How are groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, families) affected? III) How is society affected (e.g. levels of trust, social inequality)? Each of the substantive sessions will discuss a topic in the light of these questions to illustrate sociologists' approach, why certain topics are of key interest to them, and which explanations for social behavior recur in their research.

Prerequisites

No prerequisites or background in sociology or political science is required.

Learning Goals & Outcomes

- 1) To promote academic literacy of the EUI community and enhance dialogue between the Researchers of the different departments.
- 2) To gain familiarity with sociological and political research, by getting to know some of its major theoretical concepts and empirical research strands.
- 3) To perceive key questions in one's field (be it economics, history or law) from a sociological and political perspective.

Assessment

Participants are expected to cover the basic readings for each session (1-2 articles per session) and actively participate in class discussion. All readings (basic as well as additional) will be made available to the participants at the beginning of the course (electronically/dropbox). In the last session each participant is expected to give a short presentation applying a political science/sociology perspective to a research question from her/his original field (see session 10)

Session 1. Introduction to Political Science and Sociology (Tuesday 27.01.2015)

Both sociology and political science are broad fields of social science that encompass rich research agendas. In the first session we will present the structure and content of the course and make a broad introduction to the fields of Political Science and Sociology and identify their links to History, Law and Economics. The course will then move on to introducing Researchers to some classic topics in political Science (equality, electoral and party systems and political behavior) and Sociology (gender equality, inequality of opportunity and social class). Each of the eight substantive sessions will be devoted to

the discussion of key trends and observations in today's societies and politics that are of great interest to sociologists and political scientists.

Topics.

- **General introduction** to the field of Political Science and Sociology: the discipline, its fields of specialization and relationship to other disciplines. What do political science and sociology study? How are they related and how do they differ? What kind of questions do we aim to answer in each field? How are they related to economics, law and history?
- **Political Science Case:** Democracy in Europe
- **Sociology Case:** The impact of unemployment on people's lives, groups, and society

Reading Political Science:

Hay, C. (2002). *Political analysis: a critical introduction* (Vol. 45). Basingstoke: Palgrave (Chapter 2: What's Political about Political Science?)

Reading Sociology:

Wilson, W.J. (1987). *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. (Chapter 2: Social Change and Social Dislocations in the Inner City)

Session 2: Equality (Tuesday 03.02.2015)

This session examines equality, a key concept political theory, and its relationship to justice and (re-) distribution. It discusses it from the perspective of utilitarianism and libertarianism, and examines the role of equality in modern democratic government. What is the relationship between equality & democracy? How does this relationship fit to the modern reality of representative government? Why should we care about inequality in democratic societies?

Session 3: The Rules of the Game - Electoral Systems (Tuesday 10.02.2015)

This session concerns itself with a classic topic in political science: electoral systems. Electoral systems constitute a key example of how institutional design can influence the development and functioning of a polity: it matters for government formation and citizen representation: electoral systems. This session briefly introduces different types electoral systems, e.g. beyond the crude majoritarian versus proportional representation

dichotomy, there is a great variation within the PR category as well (Open list versus Closed list). The session also discusses research regarding electoral rules' effects on party systems (e.g. dispersion, fragmentation, polarization), government formation (multiparty coalition government versus single party cabinets), and minority representation (gender, ethnic minorities).

Topics:

- Electoral Systems: Aims & Effects
- The Relationship between Electoral & Party Systems
- Two types of Democracy?
- Electoral Rules & Inequality – Gender Representation

Session 4: Political Organizations & Social Movements (Tuesday 17.02.2014)

This session looks at what happens when groups organize to claim power by competing in elections, or to put pressure on the ruling elites: on the one hand, we examine party systems and political parties, and on the other hand we examine social movements. We will discuss organizations' and movements' continuity/change, as well as questions of power within them. The aim of this session is to connect our knowledge from classic works with the contemporary reality of (declining) political parties and social movements (e.g. Occupy).

Topics:

- Party Organizations: Continuity & Change
- Intra-party democracy & the Iron Law of Oligarchy
- Leadership
- Occupy Movement

Session 5: On the Relevance of Social Cleavages (Tuesday 24.02.2015)

In session 3 we saw that institutions, such as electoral rules, matter greatly for how decisions (and ultimately policies) are made. But what about the behavior of citizens? What are the determinants of their political behavior? While in the 1950s social cleavages (race, religion, class, and familial pressures) and partisan attachment had been theorized as the key factors influencing vote choices, more recent research gives credit to alternative models of political behavior spatial and issue voting. The session will review works focusing on Europe and link this knowledge to contemporary debates about political behavior in national and European elections.

This session connects to the session of social class by Diederik Boertien and shows whether and to what extent social cleavages matter in the way people behave politically.

Session 6: Demographic Change (Tuesday 03.03.2015)

Demographers have documented dramatic changes in people's life courses in the post-war period: an increased prevalence of pre-marital cohabitation, postponement of marriage, decreased fertility, and rising divorce rates. In this session we discuss the impact these changes have on people's lives, groups and society in general. Sociologists have concentrated on how these patterns have developed unequally across social groups. In addition, there seem to be remarkable differences across Western countries that have created many ideas about the determinants of levels of fertility and divorce in society.

Session 7: The Gender Revolution (Tuesday 10.03.2015)

In this section we will discuss one of the most impacting changes in Western societies of the last decades: the gender revolution. While possibilities for personal development were very limited for women at the beginning of the last century, women now attain higher levels of education than men and are increasingly able to pursue professional careers. At the same time, scholars have noted trends towards a slowing down or even stopping of the trend toward more gender egalitarianism since the 1990s. We discuss the evidence for this hypothesis regarding a 'stalled' revolution by looking at how people's lives have changed over the last decades in domains such as the division of domestic work within families and sex segregation in the workplace.

Session 8: Educational Systems and Inequality of Opportunity (Tuesday 12.03.2015)

Education is a key feature of modern societies and is often seen as the main channel through which inequality of opportunity can be reduced. Given that inequality of opportunity is an outcome that is central to sociologists' interest in systematic differences in life outcomes, this field of study has produced some of its central and most widely used concepts such as, for instance, cultural and social capital. In this session we look at how features of educational systems are related to life chances of individuals from disadvantaged groups and how families with more socioeconomic resources often manage to prevent their offspring from performing badly in educational systems. In addition, attention is paid to how educational systems are related to other societal characteristics such as the structure of the labor market.

Session 9: The rise and fall of a concept? Social Class (Tuesday 24.03.2015)

This week we will discuss the concept most closely associated to sociological research: social class. The concept is normally used to describe different groups of people that share similar roles within a capitalist economy. In its most classical conception it was used to distinguish between employers and employees. It has been argued that membership of such a class is a crucial trait that has an important influence on people's opportunities, living conditions, or even taste for music or food. In the last decades many sociologists have been involved in a discussion whether the concept of social class is still relevant for people's lives, or whether other traits such as income are more defining for people's lives. This session serves to illustrate the weaknesses and strengths of the sociological analysis of phenomena.

Session 10: Conclusion and student reflection (Tuesday 31.03.2015)

For this session participants are expected to prepare a small presentation of 5 minutes. Each participant will pick one of the further readings from the syllabus, discuss shortly its content and reflect on it. A special focus is put on how the reading could inform one's own field or research.