



# Concepts and Research in Political Science and Sociology

Dr. Pablo Gracia & Dr. Stefanie Reher

Contacts: [Pablo.Gracia@eui.eu](mailto:Pablo.Gracia@eui.eu) / [Stefanie.Reher@eui.eu](mailto:Stefanie.Reher@eui.eu)

(no credits)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Are you interested in learning more about recent sociological and political science debates? If so, this course will be useful for you! The course is an **Introduction to Political Science and Sociology** for EUI Researchers. It is especially designed for researchers without experience in these fields (Economics, History and Law), yet SPS researchers are also welcome. The course will introduce students to prominent concepts and research themes in current sociological and political research. It will offer basic theoretical and empirical tools that are relevant, not only for political scientists and sociologists, but also for economists, historians, and law scholars.

**Sociology** is a broad discipline that aims at providing a better understanding of the relationship between individuals, communities, and societies. The Sociology sessions will allow participants to analytically and critically assess some major debates and transformations that have occurred in recent decades: (1) Which are the fundamental demographic and social drivers of “new” post-industrial societies?; (2) How has the “gender revolution” evolved in recent decades, and which theoretical and empirical tools can we use to assess gender relations and inequalities today? (3) Which are today’s key sociological debates on social inequalities, and how do institutions contribute to moderate or reinforce them?

**Political science** is a vast discipline that encompasses fields as diverse as political theory, political sociology, and international relations. While maintaining a broad perspective, the political science sessions in this course have a focus on comparative politics in the context of democratic regimes. The sessions build on each other conceptually, starting from the meaning of democracy and countries’ transition to democratic governance, addressing varieties in the institutions and actors that translate public opinion into policy, and ending with a discussion of the explanations of citizens’ electoral choices. The assumptions and conclusions of these topics will be discussed in light of current affairs and developments.

## **GENERAL RULES AND PROCEDURE**

### ***Prerequisites***

No prerequisites or background in Sociology or Political Science is required. The only key prerequisite is being motivated and interested in the subjects!

### ***Learning Goals & Outcomes***

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

### ***Reading List***

The bibliography will be updated in further steps. Ideas or suggestions from PhD researchers are more than welcome!

Participants are expected to cover the basic readings for each session (1-2 articles per session) and participate in class discussions. All readings and materials of interest will be made available to the participants at the beginning of the course (electronically). The first materials will be sent per email in advance.

### **Contact**

Interested students who have not contacted yet the instructors are expected to do it before the Christmas break. Otherwise, please do contact the instructors by one week before the first session will take place (January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

## SESSION STRUCTURE

### **Session 1. Introduction to Political Science and Sociology (Tuesday 17.01.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 2, Badia)**

Both sociology and political science are broad fields of social science that encompass rich research agendas. In the first session, we present the structure and content of the course. In addition, we give 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 the participants to some major topics in Political Science (democratization, electoral institutions and behavior, and political culture) 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, political scientists, and often to other disciplines as well.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 2: Democracy and Democratization (Wednesday 25.01.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 3, Badia)**

One of the main goals pursued by political scientists until today is to explain when, why, and how political regimes shift from authoritarianism to democracy. In this session, we first discuss the concept of 'democracy' and contrast it with different types of authoritarian regimes. We then explore various explanations of the democratization process, with a focus on the effect of economic development.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 3: Voting Behavior (Wednesday 1.02.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 2, Badia)**

The emergence and success of populist radical right politics over the past years represents a major shift in the political landscape in Europe and beyond. We will discuss the concept of populist radical right parties and explore different explanations of their success. These include demand-side factors, such as voters' economic and cultural concerns, and supply-side factors, like charismatic leaders and the strategies of mainstream parties. To illustrate and test these theories we will look at cases of populist radical right parties in Europe and discuss whether Donald Trump fits the model.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 4: Populist Radical Right Politics (Wednesday 8.02.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 2, Badia)**

Why do we turn out and vote, and how do we decide which party or candidate to support? A number of factors influence these choices, which we will explore in this session. We will contrast rational, policy-focused models of electoral behaviour with

sociological models, which emphasise social group membership, and psychological factors, such as party identification and cognitive short-cuts. We will also have a closer look at the changes in the predictors of electoral behaviour that have taken place in recent decades.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 5: Social and Demographic Change in Post-Industrial Societies (Wednesday 15.02.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 2, Badia)**

This session will discuss the role of recent demographic and economic changes in contemporary advanced societies. Post-industrial societies show today a very different architecture than that of the “old” industrial societies from the 1960s and 1970s. Economically, the service sector, technological change, and financial markets have proliferated at unprecedented levels. Demographically, we have witnessed major changes in different indicators, such as delays in pre-marital cohabitation, decreased fertility, postponement of marriage, rising marital instability, and the rise of life expectancy. Which are the implications of these kinds of transformations to understand current sociological problems?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 6: The Gender Revolution: Change or Persistence? (Wednesday 22.02.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 3, Badia)**

This session discusses a phenomenon that has been defined by many as the single most important one of the 20th century: the “gender revolution.” Women’s opportunities for development were very limited during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In recent decades, women have achieved increasing levels of autonomy and power in the world, especially in Western countries. Yet, we witness today clear indicators of a strong persistence of gender inequalities in both the private and public sphere. We will discuss different theoretical and empirical approaches to better understand if, and to what extent, men’s power and autonomy remain dominant today.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Session 7: Social Inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches (Wednesday 1.03.2017; 17:00h-19:00h; Seminar Room 2, Badia)**

This last session will discuss recent debates on social inequalities. Social inequalities persist strongly in Western societies. And, in fact, the recent ‘Great Recession’ of 2008 has revitalized “old” debates on social divisions in our societies. Which theories have sociologists provided to explain social inequalities? Which factors -economic, social, and cultural- explain today the reproduction of social inequalities? How has social inequality changed in recent decades and across capitalist societies? Which are the social and economic risks of having strong unequal societies, and which is the role of institutions in moderating them? These questions will be discussed.