

Comparative Sociology

First Semester, 2020-2021

Undergraduate degrees in International Studies (I.S.) and Economics (groups 68 & 69) and I.S. and Law (groups 18)

“Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts”
(Durkheim [1890]1949: 139)

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Introduction

Sociology is a scientific discipline that describes and explains the relationship between social structures and human behavior. Having a century-long history, it has addressed central questions of general interests: What is the nature of modernity? What are the main sources of inequality in modern society? Can we identify substantial differences in beliefs across the population? To what extent and why have class, ethnic and gender inequalities diminished in the last decades? Many sociologists have, furthermore, addressed these questions from a comparative perspective. We thus now have compelling and sophisticated sociological accounts of cross-national differences in multiple social dimensions like behaviors, ideas, values and formal institutions. All these aspects are highly consequential for the lives and opportunities of individuals across the world.

In comparison to other scientific disciplines, contemporary sociology is characterized by a deep theoretical, methodological and thematic diversity. In the last century, sociologists have designed and relied on rather different sociological theories that stress the role of cultural norms, economic interests or population composition. Sociologists have used these approaches to study topics as diverse as political transitions, demographic changes, gender inequalities or changes in social values. These various theories and approaches have furthermore been utilized by scholars relying on qualitative and quantitative methodological techniques, which commonly draw on different assumptions and logics of inquiry. Although this theoretical and methodological diversity could be seen as a drawback or a source of confusion, for most sociologists it's an important intellectual asset. It provides a wide array of intellectual tools to better understand the increasing complexity and multidimensionality of social life.

This course embraces and seeks to reflect this rich diversity in contemporary comparative sociology. Part I of the course (weeks 1-4) provides a conceptual and methodological apparatus for the rest of the course. Part II-IV (weeks 5-14) addresses ten central areas of inquiry in sociological research. The topics and readings have been selected to provide a general overview to central interests in the discipline, prevalent theoretical approaches and some of the most representative research techniques employed by contemporary sociologists.

Skills to be Learned in this Course

General skills

- The capacity to understand and utilize abstract concepts and social theories
- The capacity to summarize and formulate theoretical and social problems
- Initial familiarity with empirical research
- Teamwork capacities
- The capacity to conduct a critical analysis of arguments and theories
- An improved oral and written communication

Specific skills

- Initial familiarity with central methods and approaches in comparative social sciences
- The ability to identify a sociological theory and a sociological approach
- The capacity to identify the main dimensions of contemporary societies
- The capacity to distinguish structural, economic, cultural and political approaches in comparative sociology
- The capacity identify cross-national differences based on descriptive evidence
- The capacity to link theoretical approaches to socioeconomic and political indicators

Class Schedule & Office Hours

Lecture: Professor Fernández will explain the main theoretical approaches and empirical findings regarding each particular topic.

Groups 68, 69, 18 and 118: Tuesday 12:30-14:00 (online)

Seminars: Seminars will be devoted to discuss readings, conduct debates, student presentations and discuss the content of essays.

Group 68: Friday 18:0-19:30 (5.1.4)

Group 69: Friday 19:45-21:15 (9.1.7)

Group 18: Thursday 10:45-12:15 (6.1.04)

Group 118: Thursday 8:30-10:00 (6.1.05)

Office hours: Students are highly encouraged to attend office hours. For all Groups (68, 69, 18 & 118), they will be held on Friday 9:30-13:00 (18.2.D.12). You can sign up for an office hour slot on this [link](#).

Emailing policy: Prof. Fernández will only respond emails during office hours and if no student is present at the time. Face to face conversations in office hours are commonly more effective than email correspondence.

Basic Behavioral Rules

1. Class attendance. Scientific research shows that persistent class attendance is a necessary condition to succeed in higher education courses. Although class attendance is not compulsory in this course, it is thus highly recommended.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0034654310362998>
2. Active and non-disruptive participation. Active participation means doing the readings, paying attention in class, thinking about the content of the course, and sharing your thoughts and opinions in public. In this course (especially in seminars) you're expected to speak. Expressing abstract ideas in public is an important skill to

develop. Although some students may speak more than others, remaining silent is highly detrimental for the student's learning.

All class participants must, moreover, behave with civility with their fellow students and the main instructors. No parallel conversations should take place. The main instructor and fellow students should be listened carefully, respectfully and without interruptions. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.

3. Mobile phones, tables and laptops. The use of technological devices is a common distraction in class both for those who use them and those around them. Use of tables or laptops should be restricted to notes taking.
<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/691462>
<http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/5/1/2158244015573169>
4. Plagiarism. If plagiarism is identified, the student will have a 0 in the continuous assessment part of the final grade.

Course Materials

Comparative approaches and techniques are well established in sociology, although most of this work is classified by its substantive area of interest (e.g. stratification, gender, sociology of culture) rather than as studies of comparative or non-comparative sociology. As a result, we have very few textbooks with a concrete focus on comparative sociology. Recent textbooks in the area of comparative sociology tend to be of variable quality. Key comparative work in sociology is moreover commonly published as single contributions in academic journals and edited volumes, rather than in issues or volumes specifically devoted to comparative sociology. For these reasons we simply can't rely on a single textbook.

Seeking to reflect the theoretical, methodological and substantive diversity of comparative sociology, Professor Fernández selected a broad range of articles and book chapters to be read by throughout the course. From time to time, reading materials will be supplemented with contemporary videos. Students will be expected to read between 20 and 40 pages per week. All the course materials will be available in the Aula Global website (<https://aulaglobal.uc3m.es/>). Having access to Aula Global is critical to succeed in this course. If you don't have access to this platform, please inquire at the "Punto de Información de Campus" (PIC).

Course Requirements and Grading

The final grade in this course will be based on two in-class exams, one compulsory essays, a presentation, a series of in-class quizzes, discussion questions as well as on your participation in class.

Discussion Question: To facilitate conversation in the seminar, all students must submit one question for discussion about each week's readings. Questions may seek to clarify an argument in the reading, ask about links between readings or explore how readings enlighten events in your own environment. You will get full credit for turning in any question that shows evidence that you have done the reading. Your Discussion Question grade will be deducted for every question you fail to submit. Discussion Questions must be submitted to the Discussion Forum in Aula Global by the end of Monday or the day before lecture. Keep all your own discussion questions in a separate text document. This element will represent 5% of the final grade.

In-class quizzes: Several lectures will devote a few minutes to online quizzes. These quizzes must be answered in class and online through the Google Docs, Wooclap or

Aula Global platform and using the students' UC3M email account. Students may use a cellphone, laptop or tablet for this purpose. Each quiz will include 2-3 questions aimed to assess students' comprehension of major points mentioned in the readings or lecture. This element will represent 10% of the final grade.

Presentation: Students are expected to make a group presentation regarding one of the substantive topics covered in the course. Each group has to include three students. Prof. Fernández will provide a list of suitable topics on the first three weeks of classes. Each presentation should test a hypothesis, have a strong empirical and comparative focus and draw on the compulsory and optional readings. The order of the presentations will be determined at random by Prof. Fernández. The presentations will be given in the last weeks of classes. All groups are expected to discuss the content of their drafts in office hours.

The presentation will be 22.5% of the final grade.

Essay: Students are expected to write a short, empirical essay regarding one of the substantive topics covered in the course. Each student can only participate in one essay and each essay has to be coauthored by two students. Prof. Fernández will provide a list of suitable topics on the first three weeks of classes. Essays should test a hypothesis, have a strong empirical and comparative focus and draw on the compulsory and optional readings. This essay should be between 2.500 and 4.000 words long.

Essays should be submitted to the "Aula Global website" on December 18.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss the content of their drafts in office hours.

Late submissions (allowed only until December 22) will have a 3 points deduction.

More details about the nature of these essays are provided in the memo "Instructions for Essays" available in the Aula Global website.

The essay will be 22.5% of the final grade.

Two In-Class Exams: Students will conduct two exams. One exam will be a mid-term and the other exam a final exam. Each exam will cover a part of the syllabus. The mid-term exam will cover topics addressed on the first half of the course and the final exam only topics addressed on the second half.

Students must have at least a grade of 4 (out of 10) in both exams to pass the course.

The mid-term exam will take place in class on Wednesday November 3.

The final, official exam is set for Wednesday January 15.

Each of the exams will represent 20% of the final grade.

Absences and justified delays: Only two situations are acceptable reasons for delayed essay submission or not attending an exam: serious illness of the student and serious illness of a close relative. Both should be documented with a doctors' note. A regular or temporary job, vacations or similar activities do not justify these absences. If the student is expected to take an exam that day and is absent, the grade will be 0.

COURSE TIMELINE AND WEEKLY READINGS

PART I: CONCEPTUAL INTRODUCTION

Topic 1 - Week 1:

Tuesday September 15: Syllabus Introduction

Thursday/Friday September 17/18: Lecture: What is Sociology? What is Comparative Sociology?

Compulsory readings:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, pp. 3-21.

Wright Mills, C. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 8-11.

Teune, Henry. 2014. "Comparing Societies around the World", in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology*, p. 3-5, Brill.

Topic 2 - Week 2:

Tuesday September 22: Lecture: Social Networks

Compulsory readings:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, pp. 219-244.

Sapin, Marlène et al. 2020. "The ISSP 2017 Survey on Social Networks and Social Resources Module", *International Journal of Sociology*, 50, 2, 9-17.

Thursday/Friday September 24/25: Debate on the strength of weak ties

Compulsory readings:

Gee, Laura et al. 2017. "The Paradox of Weak Ties in 55 Countries". *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 133, 362-372

Topic 3 - Week 3:

Tuesday September 29: Lecture: Major Theoretical Approaches in Comparative Sociology (part I)

Compulsory readings:

Jones, Pip. 2003. "An Introduction to Sociological Theories," in *Introducing Social Theory*. London: Polity, chapter 1.

Thursday/Friday October 1/2: Seminar: Major Theoretical Approaches in Comparative Sociology (part II).

Topic 4 - Week 4:

Tuesday October 6: Lecture: Analytical Strategies in Sociology

Compulsory readings:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, chapter 3.

Thursday/Friday October 8/9: Seminar: Types of Comparisons in Comparative Sociology. Debate on examples of comparisons.

Compulsory readings:

Przeworski, Adam and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. Wiley-Interscience, pp. 31-39.

PART II: DEMOGRAPHY AND MIGRATION

Topic 5 – Week 5:

Tuesday October 13: Lecture: Comparative Demography

Compulsory readings:

Poston, Dudley and Leon F. Bouvier. 2010. *Population and Society: An Introduction to Demography*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 265-281.

Fahey, Tony. 2011. "Population". Pp. 418-432 in *Handbook of European Societies: Social Transformations in the 21st Century*, edited by Stefan Imerfall and Göran Therborn. Springer.

Thursday/Friday October 15/16: Seminar: Introduction to academic writing. Essays
Topics

Topic 6 - Weeks 6:

Tuesday October 20: Lecture: Comparative Migration

Compulsory readings:

Poston, Dudley and Leon F. Bouvier. 2010. *Population and Society: An Introduction to Demography*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 166-177.

Mau, Steffe and Roland Verwiebe. 2010. *European Societies: Mapping Structure and Change*. Bristol: Policy Press. Pp. 115-131.

Thursday/Friday October 22/23: Seminar: Online Computer Lab Session. Data Sources for Essays and Presentations

PART III: CORE SOCIAL CLEAVAGES

Topic 7 - Week 7:

Tuesday October 27: Lecture: Social Class Structure in Comparative Perspective

Compulsory readings:

Rose, David and Eric Harrison. 2007. "The European Socio-Economic Classification: A New Social Class Schema for Comparative European Research", *European Societies*, 9, 459-490.

Thursday/Friday October 29/30: Seminar: Online Computer Lab Session. Basic Data Analysis for Essays and Presentations

Topic 8 - Week 8:

Tuesday November 3: Midterm Exam

Thursday/Friday November 5/6: Race and Ethnicity

Compulsory reading:

Desmond, Matthew and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2009. "What is Racial Domination?" *Du Bois Review*, 6, 335-355.

Giddens, Anthony, Mitchel Duneier, Richard Appelbaum and Deborah Carr. 2018. *Introduction to Sociology*. Norton & Company. Pp. 277-278, 285-288.

Topic 9 - Week 9:

Tuesday November 10: Lecture: Gender Inequalities

Compulsory reading:

Platt, Lucinda. 2019. *Understanding Inequalities*. Polity, chapter 3.

Thursday/Friday November 12/13: Seminar: Debate on the influence of Class, Race and Gender

PART IV: INTEGRATIVE STRUCTURES, CULTURE AND SYMBOLS

Topic 10 - Week 10:

Tuesday November 17: Lecture: Comparative Sociology of the Family

Compulsory readings:

Giddens, Anthony. 2018. *Sociology*. Polity Press. Pp. 388-410.

Thursday/Friday November 19/20: Seminar: Debate on Parenting Happiness & Parenting Styles

Topic 11 - Week 11:

Tuesday November 25: Lecture: Social Values in Comparative Perspective

Compulsory reading:

Welzel, Christian. 2013. *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-6, 37-41, 44-47, 52-56.

Thursday/Friday November 26/27: Seminar: Presentations Session 1

Topic 12 - Week 12:

Tuesday December 1: Lecture: Religiosity and Secularization in Comparative Perspective

Compulsory reading:

Norris, Pipa and Ronald Inglehart. 2005. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-9, 13-17.

Van Ingen, Erik and Nienke Moor. 2015. "Explanations of Changes in Church Attendance between 1970 and 2009", *Social Research Indicators*, 52, 558-569.

Thursday/Friday December 3/4: Seminar: Presentations Session 2

Topic 13 - Week 13:

Tuesday December 8: Holiday

Thursday/Friday December 10/11: Seminar: Education Expansion in Comparative Perspective

Compulsory reading:

Müller, Walter and Irena Kogan. 2010. "Education". Pp. 246-282 in *Handbook of European Societies*, edited by Stefan Immerfall and Göran Therborn. Springer.

Topic 14 - Week 14:

Tuesday December 15: Lecture: Health and Illness

Compulsory reading:

Giddens, Anthony. 2009. *Sociology*. Polity. Chapter 6.

Thursday/Friday, December 17/18: Review

Date of the final official exam TBA