

Comparative Sociology

First Semester, 2026-2027

Undergraduate degrees in...

International Studies (Groups 55 and 56)

International Studies and Law (Groups 18 and 118)

International Studies and Business Administration (Groups 58)

International Studies and Political Science (Groups 45)

“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 explains the relationship between persistent aspects of collective life 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 to 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 45, 55 & 56: Tuesday 9:00-10:30 (9.2.2) – Juan J. Fernández

Groups 18, 58 & 118: Wednesday 16:15-17:45 (10.2.8) – Juan J. Fernández

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

Group 18: Friday 18:00-19:30 (5.1.01) – Íñigo Ruiz

Group 45: Friday 12:30-14:00 (5.1.03) – Lucía Fernández

Group 55: Friday 09:00-10:30 (15.0.04) – Costan Sequeiros

Group 56: Friday 10:45-12:15 (4.1.01) – Miguel Marfil

Group 58: Friday 19:45-21:15 (4.1.06) – Aloe Cubero

Group 118: Friday 16:15-17:45 (5.01.01 BIS) – Íñigo Ruiz

Office hours: Students are highly encouraged to attend office hours. For all Groups, the office hours of Prof. Fernández will be held on Friday 9:30-13:00 (18.2.A.24). You can sign up for an office hour slot on this [link](#). The schedule of office hours of the instructors of practical classes will be provided by them in class.

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 could be a distraction in class both for those who use them and those around them. In the lectures of Comparative Sociology, the use of phones, laptops and tables is prohibited. Students are expected to take hand-written notes in a notebook.
<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.
5. AI-use general policy. AI agents are useful tools both in research and learning. However, to ensure students benefit the most from the university education, it is essential they avoid "cognitive offloading". Hence, the use of electronic devices will be banned in lectures. The pdf presentations of Prof. Fernández will not be uploaded to Aula Global. For each assignment, students have to document whether they used an AI agent and provide details about that use.
UC3M regulations regarding the use of AI can be found here (<https://e-archivo.uc3m.es/rest/api/core/bitstreams/456229c0-3670-4198-b86d-ff2762a3e1f9/content>).

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 approximately 20 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 as well as on your participation in class.

Presentation: All students are expected to conduct a group project that will include two elements: a presentation and an essay. The group project will include four students. Prof. Fernández and the Teaching Assistant will provide a list of suitable topics on the first weeks of classes. Group projects can be of two sorts: *theoretical* or *empirical*. Theoretical presentations will review a classic book in sociology to be agreed by the instructors. Empirical presentations instead will use a quantitative database to test a prediction or argument in one of the readings. The topic, structure and concrete objective of presentations and essays will be discussed in the practical classes. The order of the presentations will be determined at random by Prof. Fernández and the Teaching Assistant. 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. There will be three sessions for presentations and students will not be informed in advance on the date of the presentation.

The presentation will be 20% of the final grade.

Essay: After having made the presentation, all student groups are expected to write a short essay. The essay will cover the same topic of the presentation but should incorporate the feedback and input received in the class presentations. Like the presentations, the essays can have a *theoretical* or *empirical* orientation. This essay should be between 2.500 and 4.000 words long.

Essays should be submitted to the "Aula Global website" on December 28.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss the content of their paper drafts in office hours either with Prof. Fernández or the Teaching Assistant.

Late submissions (allowed only until 4 January) will have a 3 points deduction.

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

The essay will be 20% of the final grade

TikTok Challenge: Apart from the Project Presentation and the Essay, all student groups are expected to participate in the TikTok Challenge. This involves (i) selecting a concept or theory discussed in class or the readings, (ii) search for TikTok videos that exemplify that situation, and (iii) make a brief (5-10 minutes) presentation in the Practical class discussing the concept, showing the videos and explaining why the videos provide a good representation of the concept/theory.

The grade will be 10% of the final grade

Two In-Class Exams: Students are required to complete two examinations: a midterm and a final. Each examination will assess material from distinct portions of the syllabus. The midterm examination will evaluate topics covered during the first half of the course, whereas the final examination will evaluate topics covered during the second half.

The **mid-term exam** will take place in class in the lecture on these dates:

Groups 45, 55 & 56: Tuesday 27 October, 9:00

Groups 18, 58 & 118: Wednesday 28 October 16:15

The dates of the early final exam are still to be determined

The mid-term exam will represent 20% of the final grade and the final exam will represent another 20% of the final grade

Students must have at least a grade of 5 (out of 10) in both exams to pass the course.

Class participation: Class participation is strongly encouraged. All students are expected to contribute to class discussions.

This element will represent 10% of the final grade.

Absences and justified delays: Only two situations are acceptable reasons for delayed essay submission or for 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: What is Sociology? What is Comparative Sociology?**

Tuesday 8 September/Wednesday 9 September: Syllabus introduction

Lecture: What is Sociology? What is Comparative Sociology?

Compulsory readings:

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

Friday 11 September: Seminar: (1) Review of the syllabus; (2) Self-assessment Topic 1; (3) Moments in comparative sociology. In class we will read and discuss. Teune, Henry. 2014. "Comparing Societies around the World", in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology*, p. 3-11, Brill.

Topic 2 - Week 2: Major Theoretical Approaches in Comparative Sociology

Tuesday 15/Wednesday 16 September: Lecture: Major Theoretical Approaches in Comparative Sociology

Compulsory readings:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2024. *Sociology*. Polity, pp. 9-19.

Friday 18 September: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 2. Q/A. (2) Watching and discuss this video: <https://youtu.be/VnF9lei8BTM?si=A4d3IXV8meH9ZD8C>. (3) Roleplaying on social media influencers and major theoretical approaches in sociology. In-class reading and roleplay: Matheson, Eleanor and Donna Segwick. 2021. "Influencers and 21st Century Consumption", *Contexts*, 20, 2.

Topic 3 - Week 3: Analytical Strategies in Comparative Sociology

Tuesday 22/Wednesday 23 September: Lecture: Analytical Strategies in Sociology

Compulsory readings:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2024. *Sociology*. Polity, Chapter 2.

Friday 25 September: Seminar: (1) Introduction to Empirical Research, Presentations and Essays – Research Question, Hypothesis, Structure of studies, Content; (2) Basic types of comparisons in sociology. In-class reading and debate: Landman, Todd. 2003.

Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction. Net Library. Pp. 22-33;
(3) Self-assessment Topic 3. Q/A.

PART II: BASIC SOCIAL PROCESSES

Topic 4 – Week 4: Culture and Society

Tuesday 29 September/Wednesday 30 September: Lecture: Culture and Social Values

Compulsory readings:

Brym, Robert et al. 2019. *Sociology: Compass for a new social world*. Nelson College Indigenous, chapter 3.

Friday 2 October: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 4. Q/A; (2) Debate about taboos and cultural change. We will use the platform Kialo.edu for this debate. The text will be Hu. “Talking about Race in a Race-taboo Land”, *Contexts*. (3) Introduction of the logic of the TikTok Challenge. Discussion regarding the topics/concepts to be addressed, set presentation date for each group.

Topic 5 - Weeks 5: Socialization and the Life Course

Tuesday 6 October/Wednesday 7 October: Lecture: Socialization

Compulsory readings:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2017. *Sociology*. Polity, p. 74-93.

Friday 9 October: (1) Self-assessment Topic 5. Q/A; (2) Seminar: Introduction to online databases and basic statistical analysis.

Topic 6 - Week 6: Social Networks

Tuesday 13 October/Wednesday 14 October: Lecture: Social Networks

Compulsory readings:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, chapter 7.

Friday 16 October: (1) Self-assessment Topic 6. Q/A; (2) Seminar: TikTok Challenge Session 1

PART III: INEQUALITIES

Topic 7 - Week 7: Stratification and Mobility

Tuesday 20 October/Wednesday 21 October: Stratification and Mobility

Compulsory reading:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, chapter 9.

Friday 23 October: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 7, Q/A; (2) Mid-term review (with crossword)

Week 8:

Tuesday 27 October/Wednesday 28 October: Mid-term exam

Friday 30 October: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 8, Q/A; (2) TikTok Challenge Session 2

Topic 8 - Week 9: Race and Ethnicity

Tuesday 3 November/Wednesday 4 November: Lecture: Race and Ethnicity.

Compulsory reading:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2024. *Sociology*. Polity, chapter 10.

Friday 6 November: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 8, Q/A; (2) Debate about social class, race and support for the radical right. In class we will read Cherlin, Andrew. 2021. "White Working-Class Support for Trump", *Contexts*. We will use the platform Kialo.edu for these purposes.

Topic 9 - Week 10: Gender

Tuesday 10 November/Wednesday 11 November: Lecture Gender

Compulsory readings:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2024. *Sociology*. Polity, chapter 10.

Friday 13 November: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 9, Q/A; (2) Q/A regarding Presentations and Essays. (3) Analysis of data regarding gender inequalities based on data provided in class.

PART IV: SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Topic 10 - Week 11: Families

Tuesday 17 November/Wednesday 18 November: Lecture: Families

Compulsory reading:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2024. *Sociology*. Polity, chapter 15.

Friday 20 November: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 10, Q/A; (2) Presentations Session 1 (3 presentations); Debate regarding the article Burn-Murdoch, John. 2026. "Why birth rates are falling everywhere all at once", *Financial Times* (<https://www.ft.com/content/fba35eca-df3a-4ad6-b42d-eb08eb7c9ad3?shareType=nongift>)

Topic 11 - Week 12: Religion

Tuesday 24 November/Wednesday 25 November: Lecture: Religiosity and Secularization in Comparative Perspective

Compulsory reading:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, chapter 13.

Friday 27 November: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 11, Q/A; (2) Presentations Session 2 (5 presentations)

Topic 12 - Week 13: Education

Tuesday 1 December/Wednesday 2 December: Lecture: Education Comparative Perspective

Compulsory reading:

Giddens, Anthony and Philip W. Sutton. 2018. *Sociology*. Polity, chapter 16.

Friday 4 December: Seminar: (1) Self-assessment Topic 12, Q/A; (2) Presentations Session 3 (5 presentations)

Topic 13 - Week 14: Immigration

Tuesday 8 December: Holiday

Wednesday 9 December: Lecture: Immigration

Compulsory reading:

Van Tubergen, Frank. 2020. *Introduction to Sociology*. London: Routledge, chapter 11.

Friday 11 December: Seminar: Lecture: Immigration (Groups 45, 55 & 56)

Review final exam (Groups 18, 58 & 118)

Extra Review final Exam Groups 45, 55 & 56 TBA

Final exam Groups 18, 45, 55, and 56: 22 December 9:00-12:00 (Classrooms TBA)

Final exam Groups 58: 21 January 18:00-21:00 (Classrooms TBA)