

SO241-15 Political Sociology

21/22

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

David Turner

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

n/a.

Module aims

Political sociology is a core area of sociology, addressing some of its fundamental questions. Through this module students will not only learn to think sociologically and critically about current political questions and modern power relations, they will also develop an advanced understanding of social and political theory both classic and contemporary. Political sociology is a crucial area of interdisciplinary social science, significant for disciplines such as politics and international studies, law (or socio-legal studies), philosophy, history, and philosophy. This module will cover key theoretical perspectives and advanced topics in political sociology.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

In political science you can, just about, study voting patterns, constitutions, systems of government, parties, leadership, and so on, without having to link them to something outside

politics proper. Sociology always ventured beyond those boundaries. At its most basic, political sociology is the study, not of political phenomena per se, but of the interaction of politics and society. That we can do this at all is one of the paradoxes of modern politics itself (a bit like the one where Durkheim says that ours is the most individualistic age in history, yet also one in which for the first time we can understand the social forces that transcend our individual strivings and beliefs). It is the modern state that achieves what Bendix called 'a substantial separation between the social structure and the exercise of judicial and administrative functions'. For instance, in principle, in a modern state anyone from any background can pass exams and become a civil servant, a lawyer, or become a member of parliament; and the political system operates according a logic that is not reducible to that of society (class division, inequality etc). That is why we have both modern specialist political science, and a sociology that need have no interest in politics. So how we think about the relationship between politics and society is tricky. If political science sometimes fails to take account of 'non-political' matters, sociology is often tempted to go too far the other way. The classics of political sociology, people such as Montesquieu, de Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, or Durkheim, generally avoided both extremes. All broadened our understanding of key political terms, like democracy or monarchy. For example, whereas Aristotle saw monarchy, aristocracy and democracy as forms of government, Montesquieu distinguished between republic (both aristocracy and democracy), monarchy and despotism in terms of 'the spirit of the laws' and the social structure that underpinned them: republics were distinguished by the spirit of 'virtue' and this could flourish only in small city states where citizens were socially equal; monarchies were distinguished by the spirit of honour, and this flourished in large societies with clear class hierarchies; Montesquieu would have called most large modern states – whether their system of government were republican or not – monarchies. You can get a similar thing from Barrington Moore, who defined 'democracy' and 'dictatorship' not simply as forms of government, but as relationships between forms of government and elements of society.

In this module we will use this sensibility to think both about some hard core political questions - the nature of political power, the state, democracy, and leadership – and some of those that have troubled political sociologists throughout the 20th and 21st century – totalitarianism, nationalism, populism.

Week-by-week Outline

1. Politics and Political Power
2. The modern state: politics from above
3. Civil and political associations: politics from below
4. Totalitarianism and Democracy
5. Nationalism
6. Reading Week
7. Parliamentarianism and Democracy
8. Populism
9. Religion and Politics
10. Political Leadership

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- To develop sociological understanding of the nature of political power.
- To develop a sensitivity to the concepts and theories available to students of political life
- to develop an ability to make use of analytical tools in the study of contemporary political problems

Indicative reading list

- Anderson, B. 1991 [1983]. 'The origins of national consciousness', in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, second edition. London: Verso, pp.37-46.
- Arendt, H 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Berlin: Schocken Books.
- Baehr, P. 2010. *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism and the Social Sciences*, Stanford.
- Baehr, P. and Gordon, D. 2013. 'From the headscarf to the burqa: the role of social theorists in shaping laws against the veil', *Economy and Society* 42 (2): 249-80.
- Finlayson, A. 2017. 'Brexitism', *London Review of Books* 39 (10), 18th May.
- Gellner, E. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism: Perspectives on the Past* Cambridge: Blackwell, chapters 1 and 5.
- Offe, C. and Preuss, U. 1991. 'Democratic Institutions and Moral Resources', in D. Held, D. (ed.) *Political Theory Today*. Polity Press.
- Orwell, G. 1994. 'The Lion and the Unicorn', in *Essays*. London: Penguin
- Muller, J.-W. 2016. *What is Populism?*
- Poggi, G. 2003. *Forms of Power*. Cambridge: Polity
- de Tocqueville, A. 1945. *Democracy in America*, New York: Everyman books.
- Todorov, Tzvetan 2014. 'Populism and Xenophobia', *The Inner Enemies of Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity
- Todd, E. 2015. *Who is Charlie?*
- Weber, M. 1994. *Political Writings*. Cambridge: CUP.

Interdisciplinary

Includes elements of philosophy, political science, and history

International

British and European politics

Subject specific skills

Applied knowledge of post-classical sociology

Transferable skills

Essay writing, construction of an argument.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (8%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (8%)
Private study	102 hours (85%)
Total	120 hours

Private study description

Reading for seminars.
Preparation for seminars
Preparation of presentations
Preparation and writing of formative work
Preparation and writing of summative work

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A1

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Written Assignment (3000 words) 100% 3 hour exam	100%	30 hours	Yes (extension)

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback will be provided on all assessments.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
 - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
 - Year 2 of L304 Sociology with Specialism in Research Methods
- Year 2 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Unusual option for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology
 - Year 2 of ML33 Law and Sociology
 - Year 4 of ML33 Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
 - Year 2 of L305 Sociology with Specialism in Cultural Studies
 - Year 2 of L303 Sociology with Specialism in Gender Studies

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology

This module is Option list G for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics