



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Political Sociology

2526-3-E4001N134

Learning objectives

**Knowledge and understanding:*

This course provides an introduction to the perspectives and theoretical interpretations of political and social transformations in contemporary societies, focusing on the configuration and redistribution of power and agency at the national, supranational, international and transnational levels. The course also aims to develop critical and reflective skills for analysing socio-political phenomena, as well as the ability to understand the complexity and contradictions of transformative processes unfolding at local, national, European and global levels.

Applying knowledge and understanding:

The course equips students with the skills needed to understand the dynamics of the transformations under consideration, while training them for concrete civic and political engagement in both the professional field and civil society.

Autonomy of judgement

Ability to collect, analyse and critically interpret, independently, theoretical approaches relating to the specific field of the course and different types of empirical data concerning political and social phenomena and their transformation through time.

Communicational skills:

The active and continuous participation of the students is one of the prerogatives of the course. Seminar activities and group work are an integral part of the educational project.

Ability to learn

Ability to continue one's education independently, developing specific learning methods that facilitate the

acquisition of and access to further knowledge and skills related to the field of study of the Political Sociology and other related disciplines.

Contents

The course aims to explain the fundamental principles that set political sociology apart from other social science disciplines, particularly with regard to its approach to the intricate relationship between politics and society. It considers the political sphere as being in a state of constant interaction with other social institutions, and explores how different social agencies and actors challenge, co-construct, produce and reproduce social structures, as well as specific forms of action, events and movements. Traditionally, political sociology has studied power relations within the framework of the nation-state. Today, however, it is essential to rethink these processes in a globalised world, considering them in their supra- and transnational dimensions beyond the borders of a single state. European integration is therefore emerging as a privileged new field of sociological analysis, capable of illuminating the formation and competition of new political and social interests in the political arena. This involves new actors attributing alternative meanings to individual and collective action, institutions, and political and social structures. Consequently, new questions have emerged that challenge the prevailing interpretations of political action and society in a post-national context. The course will provide an opportunity to observe and participate in discussions about selected aspects of these processes.

Detailed program

The lectures will proceed along two parallel and intertwined paths. The first will be an interactive frontal lecture covering the basic concepts of political sociology. The second will offer various forms of participation on selected topics proposed by the teacher and agreed with the students. Both approaches aim to facilitate discussion and the exchange of ideas, and both require active participation.

The course aims to explain and discuss fundamental theoretical approaches to understanding socio-political phenomena, with continuous reference to contemporary transformations in European and global societies. The concepts of the state, political systems and civil society will be problematised as spaces of conflict between different social group interests and between ideological and cultural worldviews. The participatory dimension in the political community will be interpreted in terms of specific political cultures that create collective identities and forms of association that are reproduced through socialisation processes and, at the same time, challenged by reinterpretations proposed by new social and political actors. The constitution and legitimisation of both political parties and social movements in this sense are crucial for understanding the dynamics between the political sphere in the strictest sense and the social sphere in the transition from the “short century” to the new millennium. Specific attention will be paid to the tension surrounding the configuration of European and Western liberal democracies today, in relation, on the one hand, to the global dominance of neoliberalism and, on the other, to emerging illiberal and authoritarian tendencies, both of which are factors of democratic erosion. Finally, the subject of analysis will be structural political violence, typical of 20th-century totalitarian and post-totalitarian regimes and intrinsic to the modern nation state, which is re-emerging in the most visible discourses and practices of the radical right, and less transparently in the new ways in which contemporary nation states exercise power.

The seminars form an integral part of the course, involving invited guest lecturers and the reading, presentation and discussion of selected texts by enrolled students. The themes of nationalism, populism, citizenship and social inequalities will be examined from an intersectional perspective, considering class, gender, religion and ethno-national identification. A critical approach to methodological nationalism will be adopted for all topics.

Prerequisites

No specific prerequisite is required. A basic knowledge of English is desirable, but not essential.

Teaching methods

The course will combine lectures and participatory activities – students will be invited to present and discuss several selected texts. We will host experts in the field during our seminars. Italian is the official language of the course.

The lectures will be proposed in presence; the online participation will be possible only in case of the external guests of the seminars.

The course does not distinguish between attending and non-attending students, but rewards participation. A certain number of afternoon online meetings with working students may be arranged; Erasmus students may ask for short seminars in English, both in remote synchronous mode.

I will receive students in presence and via Webex – the appointment should be agreed by mail a few days in advance.

Assessment methods

The oral examination consists in an interview concerning the topics and argumentation treated by the relevant literature and during the lectures and seminars. Beside the textbook, each student must choose **four** scientific articles / book chapters that were proposed for the seminars on citizenship, nationalism, populism and totalitarianism. There will be no mid-term exams.

All students are invited to write a paper (max 2500-3000 words including references), on a selected topic proposed by and agreed with the teacher; the paper must be delivered at least 7 days before the first session of oral examination in June 2026; each paper will be evaluated by assessment of points (min 0 - max 2). Students can write their papers in English, Slovenian, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language. **Writing a paper is not compulsory.** Active role in seminar presentations will be taken into consideration.

Evaluation criteria:

The oral exam test:

/- Understanding of the specific concepts related to the course topics;

/- Ability to present the topic in a coherent way;

/- Ability of critical and reflective thinking.

The paper evaluation (not compulsory):

/- Ability to grasp the fundamental conceptual elements proposed by the course;

/- Ability to unfold synthetically a subject chosen for the paper in an original and autonomous way;

/- Ability to develop a critical and reflective discourse in written form.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

The main textbook for the oral exam is:

Fabio de Nardis (2023), *Sociologia politica. Per comprendere i fenomeni politici contemporanei*, Milano: McGraw Hill Education.

The Erasmus+ incoming students may use in alternative:

Nash K. (2010), “Contemporary Political Sociology”, Wiley-Blackwell.

Additional literature for the oral exam:

Four articles/book chapters of your choice among the proposed texts for seminars: two on citizenship + two on populism, nationalism, totalitarianism. The list of the article will be published by November 2025.

All texts will be available in the university library and, where possible, in electronic format. Other selected materials will be uploaded to the course website. Students may compile their own selection of references on the specific topic of their paper, but this is not compulsory.

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
