

Introduction to Social Science

Fall 2024

Instructor	Dr. Brett Bessen
Email	brettbessen@tec.mx
Time	Tues/Fri from 9:10 to 10:50
Class Location	Aulas 1, Room 417
Office	Aulas 2, Room 273
Office Hours	Tues/Fri 11:30 to 12:30

Course Description

Welcome to *Introduction to Social Science*! In this course, we'll delve into the study of social behavior. We'll explore how individuals and collectives make their most important decisions – from who individuals decide to vote for to whether countries enter into the Paris Agreement. Along the way, we'll explore some underappreciated factors – culture and institutions – that can be decisive for individual actions and for the direction of entire societies. By the end of this course, you should be familiar with social science research methods and some major debates in the social sciences. Even more importantly, I hope you'll leave wanting to know and do more social science.

Course Objectives

- Engage in lively social science debates
- Apply social science theories to contemporary issues
- Describe social science research methods
- Understand methods used in the social sciences
- Write clearly about social issues
- Evaluate social science claims

Grades and Assignments

Participation (20%)

Participation includes taking part in **class discussions, in-class activities, and showing up prepared for class**. This means completing the assigned readings and being prepared to discuss. As a rule, you should have at least one **discussion question** and a **standout quotation** that you'd like to discuss for each assigned reading.

Reading Responses (30%)

Reading responses are intended for you to reflect on the readings and hone your writing skills. You will need to **complete three** reading responses, **each worth 10% of your total grade**, over the course of the semester. In your response, you should briefly summarize the assigned readings and, more

importantly, **make an argument** about it. You may respond to one or all the readings assigned for a week (and you are of course welcome to cite additional material). Written responses should be **one page single spaced and must be turned in via Canvas on the day of the assigned readings**. You may only submit one response per week. Note: Your first response is due on or before **October 11th**, your second response on or before **November 1st**, and your third on or before **November 22th**.

Exams (50%)

The midterm and final exams are designed to evaluate your understanding of key concepts in the social sciences. Each **exam is worth 25% of your final grade** and will consist of short answer and multiple-choice components. The first exam will cover the first half of the course, while the final exam will be comprehensive. Both exams will be completed in class: the **midterm is on October 18th** and the **final is on November 29th**. Make sure to bring a laptop to class on exam days; let me know at least one week ahead of time should you not have one available and I can make accommodations.

Course Policies

Class Norms: We will engage in critical debate—sometimes about contentious topics—in this course. Students will engage in respectful dialogue and must not disparage their classmates. I encourage you to practice taking academic criticism as a way to develop your ideas rather than as an attack on your values.

Attendance: Regular attendance is critical for you to keep up with the material and for your participation grade. Please email me if you cannot attend a given class and I can help you get caught up.

Late Work: Late assignments will lose 10 percentage points per day. Assignments turned in more than 15 minutes past the deadline will be considered late; assignments not turned in after three days will receive a zero. The reading responses are considered late when submitted more than 15 minutes past the beginning of class on the day of the assigned readings.

Office Hours: My office hours are Mon/Tues from 2 to 3 pm in Aulas 2, Office 273. I am happy to meet via Zoom during those hours as well. If you would like to meet with me but are unavailable during my office hours, please email me at least 24 hours in advance and we'll set up another time.

Email Policy: Feel free to email me with any questions or comments. I will typically respond within one business day. Please do not expect a response on weekends or after 5 pm. Please send me a follow-up in the unlikely case that I don't respond within three business days. My email is brettbessen@tec.mx.

Flexibility: I am happy to work with you to help you succeed in this course. Let me know if extenuating circumstances make it difficult for you to attend class or keep up with the material.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism or cheating – including the use of AI on written assignments – will not be tolerated. All assignments must be original work done for this class. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the office of academic integrity.

Required Texts

You are not required to purchase any texts for this course. I will post readings on Canvas under Files in a folder entitled – surprise – “Assigned Readings.”

Course Schedule

You need to keep up with the assigned readings to be successful in this class. Please ask me if you are unsure what reading to complete. I highly encourage you to print out the readings, annotate them by hand, and bring these copies to class.

Note that the assigned readings are subject to change. Please follow the announcements posted on Canvas to keep up with any such amendments.

Week	Topic	Date	Readings & Assignments
1	<i>Introduction to the Social Sciences</i>	Sep 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gelman, 2021, The social sciences are useless. So why do we study them? – Babbie, Ch. 1, <i>Human Inquiry and Science</i>
		Sep 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Elster, 1989, <i>Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences</i>, Ch. 1 – Eduardo Ruiz-Healy, 2024, Por qué Morena ganó
2	<i>Social Science Theory</i>	Sep 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Babbie, Ch. 2, <i>Paradigms, Theory, and Research</i>
		Sep 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inglehart, 1997, <i>Modernization and Postmodernization</i>, Intro and Ch. 1
3	<i>Research Design and Methods</i>	Oct 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No Class
		Oct 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Babbie, Ch. 4, <i>Research Design</i> – Choose One: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Funk et al, 2021, “Point Break: using machine learning to uncover a critical mass in women's representation” ○ Benton and Philips, 2020, “Does the @realDonaldTrump Really Matter to Financial Markets?”
4	<i>Rationality and Rational Choice</i>	Oct 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Downs 1957, <i>An Economic Theory of Democracy</i>, pgs. 3-6 & Ch. 3 – Kahneman, 2011, <i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i>, selections
		Oct 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Panagopoulos, 2008, “The Calculus of Voting in Compulsory Voting Systems” – Bessen and Connell, 2022, “Another Day, Another Currency” – Gatica-Arreola, 2023, “The Effect of Social Programs on Voting Decisions: Evidence from a List Experiment in Mexico” (recommended) – Reading Response 1 Due

5	<i>Institutions and Institutional Change</i>	Oct 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – North, 1990, <i>Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance</i>, Ch. 1 – Acemoglu and Robinson, <i>Why Nations Fail</i>, Ch. 1 – 3
		Oct 18	– Midterm Exam
6	<i>Semana Tec</i>	Oct 21	No Class
		Oct 25	No Class
7	<i>Groups and Collective Action</i>	Oct 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hardin, 1968, “The Tragedy of the Commons” – Ostrom, 1990, <i>Governing the Commons</i>, Ch. 1 & 3 – Mildenerger, 2019, “The Tragedy of the Tragedy of the Commons” (recommended)
		Nov 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sheriff, 1988, “Experiments in Group Conflict”, Selection – Reading Response 2 Due
8	<i>Nationalism, Culture, and Social Norms</i>	Nov 5	– Benedict Andersen, 1983, <i>Imagined Communities</i> , Ch. 2-4
		Nov 8	– Bursztyn, González, & Drott, 2020, “Misperceived Social Norms: Women Working Outside the Home in Saudi Arabia”
9	<i>Democracy and Development</i>	Nov 12	– Sen, 1999, <i>Development as Freedom</i> , Intro, Ch 1, 6-7
		Nov 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Geddes, 1999, “What Do We Know About Democratization after Twenty Years?” – Boix and Stokes 2003, “Endogenous Democratization” (skim)
10	<i>Citizens and Democratic Survival</i>	Nov 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, <i>How Democracies Die</i>, Ch. 1-3 – Gamboa, 2023, “How Oppositions Fight Back” – Moreno and Lagos, 2024, “La medición del autoritarismo en América Latina” (recommended)
		Nov 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Claassen, 2020, “Does public support help democracy survive?” – Bessen, 2024, “Populist Discourse and Support for Executive Aggrandizement in Latin America” – Reading Response 3 Due
11	<i>Social Science and Public Policy</i>	Nov 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schultz, 2004, “School Subsidies for the Poor: Evaluating the Mexican Progresa Poverty Program” – Zizumbo-Colunga, 2023, “The Unintended Consequences of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs for Violence”
		Nov 29	– Final Exam