

PhD Position in Sociology

Post Title:	PhD Researcher in Sociology
Post Status:	48 Months , Full-time
Starting Date:	September 2026
Department/Faculty	Department of Sociology, School of Social Science and Philosophy
Reports to (supervisor):	Assistant Professor Joonghyun Kwak
Location:	Trinity College Dublin (Dublin, Ireland)
Stipend:	Maintenance stipend of €18,500 per annum, research allowance of €500 per annum, and full tuition fees (EU/non-EU). On top, the department offers teaching assistantship as non-stipend pay.
Closing Date:	1 May 2026 (23:00 GMT)

Post Summary

Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

The Department of Sociology at Trinity College Dublin invites applications for one fully funded doctoral position in the PhD in Sociology programme for a period of 48 months. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to design and carry out an innovative PhD project titled '**Meritocracy as Political Culture: A Comparative Analysis of Structures, Attitudes, and Meanings,**' which examines meritocracy as a dynamic political culture that responds to structural transformations and shapes political attitudes in systematic ways.

Meritocracy is widely regarded as a core principle of a fair society, based on the idea that individuals should be rewarded according to their talent and effort rather than their family background. In principle, this ideal promotes equality of opportunity and intergenerational mobility. However, a growing body of research highlights the paradoxical role of meritocratic beliefs in legitimising existing inequalities. As a dominant cultural framework, meritocratic ideals encourage individuals to interpret wealth and poverty as fair outcomes of ability and effort, thereby normalising unequal social structures and reinforcing liberal notions of individual responsibility.

Recent political developments in the United States and Europe suggest that the public legitimacy of meritocratic ideals may be increasingly fragile. Despite expanding access to education, the promise of upward mobility through individual effort appears less attainable for many. This widening gap between meritocratic ideals and lived experience may undermine trust in liberal institutions and contribute to political discontent, including resentment toward elites as well as hostility toward immigrants and minority groups. In this context, the project



explores how meritocratic culture is formed, how it shapes exclusionary political attitudes, and why its political consequences vary across national contexts.

The PhD project will combine multiple methodological approaches. Cross-national macro-level data will be used to examine the structural conditions under which meritocratic culture emerges and intensifies, while cross-national survey data will analyse the relationship between meritocratic climate and individuals' exclusionary attitudes, including anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments. In addition, the project will draw on qualitative interviews conducted in **Ireland** and **South Korea** to explore how individuals interpret the meaning of merit and meritocracy in different national contexts.

Applicant Profile

Applicants should have a strong interest in the project topic and be highly motivated to pursue independent research. A solid background in **quantitative and statistical methods** is essential, including experience with statistical software such as Stata, R, or Python.

Applicants should be comfortable working with formal analytical frameworks and conducting cross-national research using survey and macro-level data. Experience with panel and/or multilevel modelling is particularly desirable. While the project is primarily quantitative in orientation, it also incorporates qualitative components; applicants with **an interest in mixed-methods approaches** to substantive sociological questions are therefore especially encouraged to apply.

Major research activities conducted by the candidate will involve (1) collaborating closely with your research supervisor; (2) becoming familiar with the main theoretical debates in the field by engaging in a systematic reading of the literature and writing a state-of-the-art literature review for your project; (3) becoming proficient in working with cross-national survey and macro-level panel data; (4) conducting advanced statistical analyses to test alternative theory-derived hypotheses; (5) summarizing and interpreting your findings for a social science audience and developing policy implications; (6) presenting work at international academics conferences or networks in the field; (7) preparing research papers and submitting them to pertinent academic journals.

We are looking for enthusiastic PhD candidates who would like to acquire high-level training in sociology and in writing a cutting-edge PhD dissertation at TCD Sociology.

Qualifications

- MA, MSc or MPhil degree in Sociology, Social Research, Social Policy or in any cognate fields.

Essential research skills

- Excellent analytical skills;
- Knowledge of quantitative methods in the social sciences;
- Familiarity with the literature on social stratification and meritocracy;
- Experience in the management and analysis of cross-national quantitative data;
- Technical skills in *Stata* or a comparable statistical package (like R);
- Solid statistical training or knowledge of advanced multivariate statistical methods.



Other essential knowledge and skills

- Strong interpersonal and relational skills;
- An interdisciplinary approach;
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English;
- Ability to structure and pursue an independent research project;
- Strong motivation to publish in academic journals;
- Good organisational skills;
- Ability to work effectively in a team.

Desirable skills

- Basic knowledge of panel and/or multilevel modelling;
- Interest in qualitative research skills, including sampling, interviewing and qualitative data analysis;
- Korean language skills for conducting interviews are an advantage but not required.

The PhD Programme at TCD Sociology

The candidate will join the PhD programme at the Department of Sociology of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland's leading university which is located on a historic campus in the heart of Dublin. The Department will provide all logistic, academic and intellectual support and integrate the successful candidate into a vibrant doctoral programme at TCD, while offering additional economic supports to cover fees and basic expenses related to the PhD programme. PhD students at the department are embedded in the interdisciplinary context of the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy which also includes economics, political science, and philosophy.

PhD students in Sociology enjoy a wide range of training opportunities. For example, students participate in a research training programme in the department and have the opportunity to join masters level courses (including courses on research methods). Moreover, our PhD students are supported to attend high-quality international workshops and summer schools.

PhD students are expected to collaborate closely with their supervisors and will produce a PhD based on four papers of a publishable standard. PhD students also acquire teaching experience by providing teaching support in our undergraduate programme (4 hours per week during term times).

Standard expectations of the post

- Critical, systematic and analytical review of relevant literature for the project.
- Writing academic output (working papers, chapters, journal articles) in excellent English.
- Conducting empirical research using quantitative-statistical methods.
- Actively writing and submitting research papers for publication and contributing to joint projects or related submissions with the PhD supervisor.
- Attending meetings, workshops, and conferences.
- Disseminating academic work to specialised and general audiences.
- 4 hours of teaching a week during the statutory term (facilitating undergraduate tutorials).



Application Procedure

Informal enquiries are very welcome and can be made directly to **Dr Joonghyun Kwak** (joonghyun.kwak@tcd.ie), Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology.

To apply, candidates should submit:

1. **A motivation letter (maximum 1 page)** outlining the applicant's motivation for pursuing a PhD, their interest in the project and the PhD programme, and how their background and skills match the requirements of the position;
2. **A full curriculum vitae;**
3. **A concise research statement (maximum 1,500 words, excluding references)** describing how the applicant's academic background, research interests, and methodological skills align with the project and outlining potential directions for doctoral research within its scope;
4. **The names and contact details (including email addresses) of two referees;**
5. **At least one example of written work in English** (including some data analysis) demonstrating the applicant's analytical and writing skills in a social science discipline;
6. **Official transcripts of records** from all completed higher education degrees (e.g., Bachelor's and Master's).

via email to

- Dr Joonghyun Kwak (joonghyun.kwak@tcd.ie), Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology.

before the **closing date of 1 May 2026 (23:00 GMT)**.

Applications must indicate exactly "PhD Application in Sociology" in the subject line.

Institutional background information

The Department of Sociology

Sociology is a member of the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy, one of 24 Schools within Trinity College. The Department's principal research clusters are: Migration, Identities and Diversity; Comparative Inequalities, Education and Families; Power, Conflict and Resistance; Digitalisation and Social Networks.

Department staff are highly international and our research combines advanced quantitative methods applied to real-world data with the use of sophisticated and diverse qualitative methodologies. Our research links to several College priority research themes: 'International Integration' centred within Trinity Research in Social Science (TRISS), 'Identities in Transformation' and 'Inclusive Society' within the Trinity Long Room Hub (TLRH) and 'Ageing' within the Longitudinal Study of Ageing (TILDA). The Department has a long-standing collaboration with Ireland's premier research institute, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and has strong links with other disciplines such as Medicine, Psychology, Immunology and Neuroscience.

The Department has an active postgraduate programme. It is home to an MSc in Comparative Social Change delivered jointly with University College Dublin, as well as an MPhil in Race, Ethnicity, Conflict. It has a structured PhD programme combining advanced methodological



training with transferable skills workshops. There are around 15 PhD students and our doctoral graduates have positions in academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and the private sector.

Further information on the Department of Sociology is available at: www.tcd.ie/sociology.

School of Social Sciences and Philosophy

The School of Social Sciences and Philosophy was formed in 2005 and comprises the Departments of Economics, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, together with the Policy Institute. With over 45 full-time academic staff, the School has an international reputation in research and is committed to the dissemination of its knowledge and expertise to the benefit of the wider community, with the Policy Institute providing an important channel for policy analysis and evaluation. The School is home to the unique undergraduate degree in PPES (Philosophy, Political Science, Economics and Sociology). It also contributes to undergraduate degrees in Business, Economic and Social Studies (this includes Political Science and Sociology), Philosophy, History and Political Science, Philosophy and Political Science, Law and Political Science, Geography and Political Science, Sociology and Social Policy, and European Studies. Over 100 graduate students are conducting research across the four disciplines.

Further information on the School is available at: www.tcd.ie/ssp.

Trinity College Dublin

Founded in 1592, Trinity College is at the nexus of tradition and innovation, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across 24 schools and three faculties: arts, humanities, and social sciences; engineering, maths and science; and health sciences. Spread across 47 acres in Dublin's city centre, Trinity's more than 20,000 strong student body comes from all 32 counties of Ireland, and 16% of students come from outside the country. Of those, 40% are from outside the European Union, making Trinity's campus cosmopolitan and bustling, with a focus on diversity.

As Ireland's leading university, the pursuit of academic excellence through research and scholarship is at the heart of the Trinity education. Trinity is known for intellectual rigour, excellence, interdisciplinary approach, and research-led teaching. Home to Nobel prize-winners such as scientist Ernest Walton and writer Samuel Beckett, Trinity draws visitors from across the world to its historic campus each year, including to the Book of Kells and Science Gallery which capture the university's connection to both old and new. Trinity accounts for one-fifth of all spin-out companies from Irish higher education institutions, helping to turn Ireland into an innovation-intensive, high-productivity economy. That culture of innovation and entrepreneurship is a defining characteristic of our campus as we help shape the next generation of job creators.

Equal Opportunities Policy

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to the employment policies, procedures and practices which do not discriminate on grounds such as gender, civil status, family status, age, disability, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or membership of the travelling community.