Toulouse School of Economics

IAST

Toulouse Summer School in Quantitative Social Sciences

May 26 - June 19, 2026 - TOULOUSE

May 26/June 5 - Part 1

The evolution of human sociality

June 8/June 19 - Part 2

Understanding borders: immigration, religion, and autocratization

Economics + Social Sciences

Toulouse School of Economics

IAST

A program in the social and behavioral sciences

In pursuit of the common good

The Toulouse Summer School in Quantitative Social Sciences at the Toulouse School of Economics (TSE) and the Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse (IAST) offer an interdisciplinary program in the social and behavioral sciences. The summer school is open to PhD students in economics and other disciplines.

Applicants should provide a CV, a copy of their most advanced degree, proof of student status, and a short cover letter including motivation for applying on the online application form. Applicants should specify if they plan to attend part 1 or part 2. Students must apply to each part separately if the want to attend both parts.

Fees: 950€ for the whole program.

Accommodation: All students will be provided with on-site accommodation at the Toulouse Social Hub.

Funding: A limited number of grants are available. If you would like to apply for a grant (covering totally or partially the registration fees), please specify this on the application form and upload a letter from your doctoral school or main advisor in support of your application to a grant.

Application deadline: December 15, 2025

Location: Classes will be in-presence only and located in the TSE building at 1 Esplanade de l'Université, 31000, Toulouse, France. Students are expected to attend the program full time.

Program

PART 1 - May 26 ➤ June 5 - **The evolution of human sociality**

PART 2 - June 8 ➤ June 19 - **Understanding borders: immigration, religion, and autocratization**

Online application platform: www.tse-fr.eu/toulouse-summer-school-quantitative-social-sciences

Contact: summerschool@tse-fr.eu

Organizers: Jorge Peña

Part 1 *(May 26 ➤ June 5, 2026)*

The evolution of human sociality

Overview

Evolutionary theory provides a powerful conceptual framework for understanding human social behavior that spans academic disciplines (anthropology, biology, economics, and psychology), levels of explanation (proximate, ultimate, developmental, and phylogenetic) and levels of social organization (dyads, families, communities, and beyond). In doing so, this framework helps explain variation in human sociality across space and time. The first part of the summer school will provide an overview of evolutionary approaches to understanding human sociality from an interdisciplinary perspective, incorporating recent theoretical and empirical advances.

The first week comprises the first part of a four-day course by **Jorge Peña** on mathematical models of social evolution, followed by lectures by **Maxime Derex** on cultural evolution, **Olympia Campbell** on the evolution of marriage systems, and a one-day course by **Catherine Molho** on the psychology of cooperation and social norm enforcement. The second week comprises the second part of the four-day course by **Jorge Peña** on mathematical models of social evolution and a one-day course by **Léo Fitouchi** on the evolution of moral cognition.

During the second week, students will also attend the **13th Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop** held on Monday, June 1, and Tuesday, June 2 (theme: "Social influence and its macro-consequences" *https://www.iast.fr/conferences/2026-13th-toulouse-economics-and-biology-workshop*).

For both weeks of part one, the daily format will consist of morning lectures and afternoon exercises or presentations of the students' own Ph.D work. In addition, interested students will have the opportunity to present their work during the poster session of the Economics and Biology Workshop.

Instructors

Olympia Campbell is a Research Fellow at IAST. She holds a PhD in Evolutionary Anthropology from University College London. Her research examines cross-cultural variation in women's status, exploring how demographic factors and marriage practices shape female autonomy—for example, how post-marital residence patterns affect women's risk of violence. Her current work seeks to explain why marriage and family structures vary so widely across societies, with a particular focus on cousin marriage. Why do some cultures use kin marriage to create societies structured by particularly dense networks of kin, while others favor unions between unrelated individuals? To address these questions, she draws on theory and methods from evolutionary anthropology, public health, demography, and economics.

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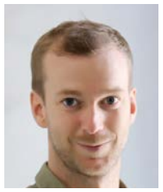

Maxime Derex is a CNRS researcher in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at TSE and a member of IAST. His work lies at the intersection of evolutionary anthropology and psychology and focuses on understanding how culture evolves. His research primarily investigates the psychological and social processes involved in the production and transmission of technology. Some of the questions he currently explores include: How do humans manage to transmit and build upon accumulated cultural information? What types of population structures promote collective exploration and innovation? To what extent do existing solutions constrain the evolution of future technologies?

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Jorge Peña is a Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at TSE and a member of IAST. Previously, he held postdoctoral research positions at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology and at the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Basel. He received his Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lausanne. His research focuses on the evolution of cooperation from a theoretical and interdisciplinary perspective at the intersection of evolutionary theory and game theory.

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Léo Fitouchi is a Research Fellow at IAST. He received his Ph.D. in Cognitive Science from the École Normale Supérieure (ENS). His research investigates the evolved mechanisms of moral cognition and how they shape the cultural evolution of social norms, religious traditions, and punitive institutions across human societies. He answers these questions by integrating insights and methods from cognitive science, anthropology, and evolutionary theory. His current research interests include: What are the cognitive mechanisms of moral judgment? Why do people everywhere believe in gods that reward virtue and punish wrongdoing? How do norms and institutions (including for justice and enforcing cooperation) culturally evolve in human societies?

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Catherine Molho is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at TSE and a member of IAST. Previously, she worked as an assistant professor at the VU Amsterdam, and as a postdoctoral researcher at IAST and at the Amsterdam School of Economics of the University of Amsterdam. She received her Ph.D. in Psychology from the VU Amsterdam. Her work bridges insights and methods from psychology, behavioral economics, and anthropology to address questions about human cooperation and social norm enforcement. Her current research addresses questions including: Which interdependent situations are conducive to cooperation? What are the psychological drivers of people's punitive reactions to norm violations? Which ecological and cultural factors shape cross-societal variation in norm enforcement?

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Course structure, **part 1**

(Tuesday, May 26 – Friday, June 5)

Mathematical models of social evolution *(Jorge Peña)*

Social evolution is concerned with the evolution (be it genetic or cultural) of social behaviors, that is, behaviors having (genetic or cultural) fitness consequences for individuals other than the actor expressing the behavior. Although most evolutionary (human) science research is empirical, predictions and intuitions are often derived from mathematical models combining evolutionary theory and game theory. This course will introduce students to ideas and models used in social evolution theory and apply them to the general question of the evolution of human cooperation.

Cultural evolution: On the shoulders of dummies? *(Maxime Derex)*

Humans have successfully adapted to nearly every terrestrial habitat on Earth by developing complex and diverse material technologies. These technologies are often so exquisitely tuned to their functions that they are commonly taken as evidence of sophisticated cognitive abilities. However, an emerging body of work suggests that humans' problem-solving success depends critically on a cumulative cultural process through which small improvements are gradually accumulated over generations. Recent research shows that this process can occur even when individuals don't understand what they are doing, opening the possibility that humans colonized the world by standing on the shoulders of dummies. This course introduces students to recent advances in our understanding of the socio-cognitive mechanisms underlying humans' ability to solve complex problems and explores their implications for understanding human evolution.

The evolution of marriage systems *(Olympia Campbell)*

Across time and place, marriage has looked wildly different. In some places it is casual and fluid, while in others it is rigid and rule bound. For some it is chosen, while for others it is coerced. Some societies prize monogamy, others polygamy, yet neither is a clear predictor of fidelity. But underneath that variety, it serves the same basic purpose: managing resources. But if the goal is often the same, why do the strategies vary so much? This lecture will introduce students to some of the evolutionary anthropology and economics literature to explore under what conditions different marriage and inheritance systems emerge and how these can be explained with inclusive fitness theory.

The psychology of cooperation and social norm enforcement *(Catherine Molho)*

Cooperation is a hallmark of our species. Humans cooperate with each other in diverse interdependent situations, use various punishment tactics to enforce cooperation, and develop norms and institutions to regulate their social interactions. This course will introduce students to recent empirical advances in psychology, behavioral economics, and anthropology that shed light on the mechanisms underlying social decision-making. We will review experiments, experience sampling, and field studies that together help explain universal features of and cross-cultural variation in cooperation and social norm enforcement.

The evolution of moral cognition *(Léo Fitouchi)*

Humans have evolved cognitive systems for navigating social life adaptively. These range from prosocial instincts (e.g., empathy, kin-altruism) to status-seeking tendencies (e.g., pride, shame) to moralistic intuitions about right and wrong (e.g., justice, fairness). This course explains how to think about the human mind in evolutionary terms, how the adaptive challenges of social life explain the design-features of our moral cognition, and how these cognitive mechanisms shape universal features of human culture, such as moral norms and religious beliefs.

Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop

During the second week students will have the opportunity to attend the 13th Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop (theme: "Social influence and its macro-consequences") on Monday, June 1 and Tuesday, June 2. A poster session will be held during the workshop, and students will have the opportunity to present their work. Presenting a poster is not a requirement for participation in the summer school. The deadline for poster submission will be in late winter or early spring (likely February or March 2026). Students submitting a poster title/abstract will subsequently be notified whether the submission was accepted by the workshop co-organizers.

Program

week 1

	Monday, May 25 **Vacation**	Tuesday, May 26 **Peña**	Wednesday, May 27 **Peña**	Thursday, May 28 **Derex & Campbell**	Friday, May 29 **Molho**
9:00 - 10:30		Mathematical models of social evolution	Mathematical models of social evolution	Cultural evolution: On the shoulders of dummies?	The psychology of cooperation and social norm enforcement
11:00 - 12:30		Mathematical models of social evolution	Mathematical models of social evolution	The evolution of marriage systems	The psychology of cooperation and social norm enforcement
14:00 - 17:00		Exercises	Exercises	Student presentations	Student presentations

week 2

	Monday, June 1 **Workshop**	Tuesday, June 2 **Workshop**	Wednesday, June 3 **Peña**	Thursday, June 4 **Peña**	Friday, June 5 **Fitouchi**
9:00 - 10:30	Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop	Toulouse Economics and Biology Workshop	Mathematical models of social evolution	Mathematical models of social evolution	The evolution of social cognition
11:00 - 12:30			Mathematical models of social evolution	Mathematical models of social evolution	The evolution of social cognition
14:00 - 17:00			Exercises	Exercises	Student presentations

Part 2 *(June 8 ➤ June 19, 2026)*

Understanding borders: immigration, religion, and autocratization

Overview

Current events in the US are giving political scientists much to think about. Doing research under the impulse of the news cycle can be highly motivational—"studying history as it's being made"—but it can also be hard to find perspective. A good compromise is to revisit currently topical questions in the light of perspectives and assumptions that would have appeared more natural to researchers at a different time in history or at different places in the world. **The second part of the summer school will explore three themes in political science** that are dominating research and media attention in the US and Europe in the 2020s, but from a broader temporal and geographical perspective. These are **anti-immigration backlash**, the **influence of religion on politics**, and the **growth of authoritarianism inside and outside government**. Together, they reflect an intensifying politics of borders—between nations, between denominations and ideologies, and between citizens and their rulers. We will cross disciplinary boundaries to study how these lines are made, policed, and contested. Applications are invited from PhD students in political science, economics or other social science disciplines who are interested either in doing research on these topics or in expanding their general understanding of the frontiers of interdisciplinary research in social science.

We will discuss how research on immigration is affected when shifting from liberal humanitarian norms to communitarian norms, we will study religion and politics using the tools of economics and evolutionary anthropology, and we will explore democratic backsliding by focusing on the development of existing autocratic regimes.

The program will feature (1) **interactive seminars** led by leading scholars (2) **hands-on workshops** where students present and discuss their own projects, and (3) **roundtable discussions** with faculty exploring research methods, fieldwork challenges, and how these relate to students' individual interests.

Readings and in-class exercises will also focus on developing research and professional skills. Depending on the group's needs, these may include: (1) identifying mismatches between theory, testable empirical predictions, and research design; (2) making the most of a pre-analysis plan; (3) planning and learning from fieldwork; (4) delivering effective research presentations; (5) deciding when and how to invest in social media and new technologies for career and research development; and (6) using AI tools for research and communication.

Course structure, **part 2**
(Monday, June 8 – Friday, June 19)

Instructors

Charlotte Cavaille is a Political Science Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at TSE and a member of IAST. She received her Ph.D. from Harvard University in Political Science and Social Policy. Her research examines the dynamics of popular attitudes towards redistributive social policies at a time of rising inequality, high fiscal stress, and high levels of immigration. She is the author of *Fair Enough? Support for Redistribution in the Age of Inequality* (CUP, Comparative Politics series, 2023). Her second book project is *Borders of Solidarity, Immigration and the Welfare State Revisited*. She has also published work on the measurement of mass public opinion. Ongoing lines of research include the study of people's perceptions of free riding among net beneficiaries of social spending, and the politics of debt management in post-industrial democracies.

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Ahmed Ezzeldin Mohamed is an Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at TSE and a member of IAST. Previously, he held fellowships at Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law and at the Harvard Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University. His research focuses on the role of religion in the political and economic development of less democratic societies, with a special focus on the Middle East and the Muslim World. His book project examines how religious norms influence distributive politics in the Muslim World, to better understand how policy responsiveness and political accountability might be attained in non-democratic settings. His work integrates insights from different social science disciplines and utilizes multiple quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection and analysis.

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Paul Seabright is Professor of Economics in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences Department at TSE and a member of IAST. He was Director of IAST from 2012 to 2021. He received his Ph.D. from Oxford University where he was a Fellow of All Souls College. He then taught at the University of Cambridge before moving to Toulouse in the year 2000. Among other publications, he is author of The Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life (Princeton, 2010) and The Divine Economy: How Religions Compete for Wealth, Power and People (Princeton, 2024). His latest book project is Leaders Who Lose It: What Can We Do? (with Guido Friebel).

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Immigration politics *(Charlotte Cavaille)*

It is common to talk of immigration as "a challenge" for rich democracies, but what exactly is meant by that? First, in a world still dominated by nation states, we can distinguish—somewhat artificially as the two are linked—between 1) the challenges tied to managing cross-border population flows, and 2) the challenges tied to the unavoidable redefinition of the mainstream as a result of these cross-border flows.

None of the two types of challenges are of the existential kind (unlike climate change). Indeed, redefining and managing physical and symbolic boundaries is the bread and butter of politics. Yet, these challenges are often described as "existential" for political and economic liberal institutions: more immigration threatens the former in the form of an illiberal populist backlash, while less immigration risks threatening the latter given low fertility and population aging. This raises at least two questions: 1) When it comes to immigration, what is different for affluent democracies in the 21st century relative to previous historical periods? 2) How does empirical research find its place in such a charged environment?

This course will offer some answers to these questions with an emphasis on opening new avenues of research. Lectures will thus sit at the intersection of normative and positive research, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches to the study of morality, group boundaries, and institutions.

Autocratic rule *(Ahmed Ezzeldin Mohamed)*

The world is tilting more autocratic, with more countries drifting toward authoritarian rule than reversing course. These lectures examine how contemporary autocracies operate to shed light on how autocratizing regimes may evolve—and what that implies for society and politics.

We first examine two pillars of authoritarian rule: distributive strategies and indoctrination strategies. We delve into how autocracies control and allocate resources to build coalitions, manage opposition, and sustain power, and how these logics shape policy-making relative to democracies. We then analyze how regimes regulate the flow of ideas—through institutions, media, and education—and how contemporary forms of indoctrination operate. Throughout, we consider why some autocracies outperform others and what these strategies reveal about the durability and limits of authoritarian governance.

In the subsequent lecture, we explore the main forms and functions of repression and resistance in today's autocracies. We analyze how regimes decide when and how to repress, focusing on the information, incentives, and institutions that structure those choices. We then consider how citizens resist—leveraging both formal and informal pathways—and what shapes the effectiveness and risks of different tactics. Finally, we address the methodological challenges that changing patterns of repression and resistance create for researchers, including issues of measurement, inference, ethics, and data access.

In our last lecture of the sequence, we look into historical and contemporary claims on the prospects of women in (modernizing) autocracies in the developing world. We examine when autocratic regimes expand women's rights and when they exclude or constrain them, and why. We analyze why women participate in autocratic politics, the roles they occupy, and the extent to which they can advance their agendas within authoritarian constraints. We then assess whether women's engagement under autocracy ultimately promotes or undermines their broader cause, tracing the conditions that shape these outcomes. We draw on both observational and experimental evidence to ground these debates in comparative, cross-regional research.

Religion and politics *(Paul Seabright)*

Religion in the 21st century is flourishing in many parts of the world, even as observers in parts of Western Europe and North America are convinced it is on its last legs. Paradoxically, in these two regions there is also a link between religion and resurgent right-wing populist movements. This part of the summer school will explore the economic roots of both phenomena. We will be interested in studying the demand for religious activity—what makes individuals want to undertake the activities that religion provides? This is the main subject of the first lecture. In the second lecture, we will look at the supply side. How do such religious organizations as churches, mosques, synagogues and temples (but also madrassas, convents, monasteries and many other institutions) meet the demand of individuals for religious activity? We will explore the idea that religious organizations can be analyzed as platforms that put different groups of members in touch with each other. In the third lecture, we will examine the interaction of religious movements and political institutions, and consider the impact of such interactions on the degree of population support for both political and religious leaders. We will see how this longer-term perspective can help us understand the role of religion in the politics of the current moment, especially in North America and Western Europe.

Course structure, **part 2**

(Monday, June 8 – Friday, June 19)

Program

week 1

	Monday, June 8 **Cavaille**	Tuesday, June 9 **Mohamed**	Wed, June 10 **Seabright**	Thursday, June 11 **Cavaille**	Friday, June 12 **Mohamed**
9:00 - 10:30	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule	Religion and politics	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule
11:00 - 12:30	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule	Religion and politics	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule
14:00 - 17:00	Student presentations and applied activities	Student presentations and applied activities	Student presentations and applied activities	Student presentations and applied activities	Student presentations and applied activities

week 2

	Monday, June 15 **Seabright**	Tuesday, June 16 **Cavaille, Mohamed and Seabright**	Wed, June 17 **Cavaille**	Thursday, June 18 **Mohamed**	Friday, June 19 **Seabright**
9:00 - 10:30	Religion and politics	Mixed group presentations and roundtables	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule	Religion and politics
11:00 - 12:30	Religion and politics	Mixed group presentations and roundtables	Immigration politics	Autocratic rule	Religion and politics
14:00 - 17:00	Student presentations and applied activities	Mixed group presentations and roundtables	Student presentations & applied activities	Student presentations & applied activities	Student presentations and applied activities

New housing offer!

TSE partnered with The Social Hub in Toulouse, just 15 minutes away from the TSE building (which is itself in the core of Toulouse's city center).

You will be provided a studio apartment for your whole stay, with private bathroom, kitchenette, air conditioning, high-speed Wi-Fi and a large desk. You can access the gym or the seasonal pool on the rooftop, or a free bike-sharing service... All you need to enjoy your stay in Toulouse and study in great conditions!

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