

Research Topics & Ideas: Sociology

About this document

This PDF contains 50 **sociology research topics** for dissertations and theses, organized into 10 areas of sociology, from crime, punishment and reentry to work, class and social mobility. Each topic is written as a researchable question and linked to a completed dissertation (2022–2026, 20 universities), so you can see how it was studied in practice. Use it to shortlist sociology dissertation topics and thesis ideas, then narrow one down to your own population, setting and timeframe.

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Online version: gradcoach.com/research-topics-sociology/

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Contents

Crime, punishment and reentry · 5 topics	2
Family, care and intimate life · 5 topics	2
Gender, sexuality and inequality · 5 topics	3
Health, wellbeing and social determinants · 5 topics	3
Migration, diaspora and belonging · 5 topics	4
Race, ethnicity and identity · 5 topics	4
Religion, culture and community · 5 topics	5
Social movements and collective action · 5 topics	5
Urban life, neighborhoods and housing · 5 topics	6
Work, class and social mobility · 5 topics	6
How to turn a topic into your research question	7

Crime, punishment and reentry

1. What happens to plea bargaining when a police union slows its officers down?

See it in a real dissertation: [Hidden Forces: Police Union Influence, Slowdowns, and Racial Inequities in Plea Bargaining](#) · Bianca DiGiovanni · University of Chicago · 2024

2. Which community resources decide whether reentry works, and at what scale do they matter?

See it in a real dissertation: [Collective Resources and Reentry Success: Disentangling Variation Across Units of Analysis](#) · Elizabeth Brault · Louisiana State University · 2022

3. How do people serving a sentence describe prison life, and what does research miss without them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Adapting to Incarceration: Inmate Perceptions of Prison Life and Adjustment](#) · Beverly R. Crank · Georgia State University · 2022

4. Why do two districts under one pretrial law release people at different rates?

See it in a real dissertation: [Justice by Geography: District-Level Variation in Pretrial Release Outcomes Across Oregon](#) · Ethan Patrick Loomis · Portland State University · 2026

5. Which definition of fairness does a pretrial risk tool actually satisfy?

See it in a real dissertation: [Encoding Inequality: A Pluralistic Fairness Evaluation of Pretrial Risk Assessment in the U.S. Criminal Justice System](#) · Renee Perpignan · Harvard University · 2026

Family, care and intimate life

6. Who does a mother tell when the violence in her home comes from her own child?

See it in a real dissertation: [Black motherhood and child to parent violence and abuse: exploring experiences and perceptions](#) · Oladapo-Adebogun, Anuoluwapo · University of Oxford · 2025

7. What kind of housing and neighborhood do people move into after a marriage ends?

See it in a real dissertation: [Marital Dissolution and Residential Reconfiguration: A Longitudinal Analysis of Changes in Housing and Neighborhood Characteristics in the U.S.](#) · Meiyi Li · University of Wisconsin-Madison · 2026

8. What does mothering look like from inside a jail, and what does release change?

See it in a real dissertation: [Mothering Experiences of Women in Jail](#) · Bothwell Piason · Illinois State University · 2023

9. Why does parenting look so different between two households on the same street?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Origins of Parenting](#) · Lillian Clare Rusk · University of Chicago · 2024

10. How do queer young people read a parent who neither accepts nor rejects them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Perception of LGBTQ+ Chinese and Taiwanese-American Youth Regarding Parental Attitudes](#) · Yutong Yang · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill · 2024

Gender, sexuality and inequality

11. What does being the only Black employee in a workgroup cost, beyond the obvious?

See it in a real dissertation: [Successful but Exhausted: The effect of tokenism on Black employees](#) · Sydney Green · Louisiana State University · 2023

12. How does a transgender person get through a criminal justice system built around a binary?

See it in a real dissertation: [Experiences of Transgender People Who Navigate the Criminal Justice System](#) · Allyson Cruz Galan · San Jose State University · 2022

13. Which identity comes first in a high-risk profession, the racial one or the occupational one?

See it in a real dissertation: [Identity Salience of Organizational Culture: The Intersection of Racial and Occupational Identities in High-Risk Professions](#) · Sarah Espinosa · Old Dominion University · 2026

14. What do women who did reach the top of a male industry say got them there?

See it in a real dissertation: [How Female Leaders Perceive the Influence of Gender on Career Advancement in the Indonesian Construction Industry](#) · Jadevput Suwanarat · Walden University · 2026

15. Who cares for a queer elder when the usual family assumptions do not apply?

See it in a real dissertation: [What We Become Together: Identity, Eldercare, and Generational Reworlding in San Francisco's Queer Communities](#) · Graham Steffen · University of Chicago · 2025

Health, wellbeing and social determinants

16. Does social support blunt the effect of childhood adversity, or only postpone it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Examining the Role of Social Support and Neighborhood Deprivation in the Relationship Between Multiple ACEs and Health Risk Behaviors](#) · Marin Henderson-Posther · Portland State University · 2022

17. Which everyday behaviors get judged as unhealthy, and who does the judging?

See it in a real dissertation: [When Health Becomes Stigma: Mapping and Explaining Social Judgments of Everyday Behaviors](#) · Han, Bing · Purdue University · 2025

18. Where do the cannabis shops open once a state legalizes, and who lives there?

See it in a real dissertation: [Making "Weed Maps": Using Mapping to Evaluate \(in\)Equity in Cannabis Retail Outlet Availability in the United States](#) · Kephart, Lindsay · Harvard University · 2024

19. What does a pre-release health program have to get right for it to survive the gate?

See it in a real dissertation: [Effectiveness of a Pre-Release Planning Program for HIV-Positive Offenders Exiting Georgia Prisons: A Qualitative Evaluation Approach](#) · Claire A Willeford · Georgia State University · 2022

20. Who goes online at retirement, and what decides whether they stay?

See it in a real dissertation: [Retiring to Cyberspace: Factors Influencing Older Adults' Ownership of Computer Technology and Internet Usage at the Time of Retirement](#) · Carol S Strother · Georgia State University · 2022

Migration, diaspora and belonging

21. What does gentrification look like in a neighborhood immigrants built themselves?

See it in a real dissertation: [Uncovering the Nuance and Complexity of Gentrification in Asian Immigrant Communities: A Case Study of Koreatown, Los Angeles](#) · Seyoung Sung · Portland State University · 2023

22. Can a group of countries hold to a common asylum standard under real pressure?

See it in a real dissertation: [Regulating asylum: the refugee crisis and the search for common standards](#) · A Moore · University of Oxford · 2025

23. Why does diaspora investment intent so often stop short of an actual business?

See it in a real dissertation: [From Vision to Venture: Strategies of Ethiopian Diaspora Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia's Emerging Economy](#) · Solomon Seyoum · Walden University · 2026

24. What does a resettlement program change for the neighborhood that receives it?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Impact of Refugee Resettlement Programs on Local Communities in America: A Case Study of New York City](#) · Ojeikere Akhadelor · Chapman University · 2024

25. How did a Black family build a business in a market that would not lend to it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Most White People Just Don't Trust a Black Business Very Much: How the Walker Family Overcame Economic and Racial Discrimination to Become Successful Professional Business Owners in Memphis in the Twentieth Century](#) · Leslie Pleasants · Fort Hays State University · 2022

Race, ethnicity and identity

26. How do white residents describe belonging in a neighborhood that is changing around them?

See it in a real dissertation: [White Racial Identities, Racial Ideologies, and Neighborhood Belonging in a Changing Southern City](#) · Madeleine George Straubel · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill · 2025

27. What turns an inherited shame into a source of pride across three generations?

See it in a real dissertation: [Jisonshin: Japanese Americans and Pride](#) · Troy S Kondo · San Francisco State University · 2024

28. Where did Black aspiration find institutional room in a segregated northern city?

See it in a real dissertation: [Cultures of Aspiration: African American Chicago, 1929 to 1959](#) · Julius Langston Jones · University of Chicago · 2022

29. When do future doctors form their beliefs about race, and what shapes them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Pre-med Perspectives: Pre-medical Students' Attitudes Towards Race/racism, Social Inequality, & Medicine](#) · Savannah Salato · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill · 2026

30. Does a generational cohort explain political attitudes once race is accounted for?

See it in a real dissertation: [Concerning Millennials: Exploring Generational Cohort Effects on Racial Linked Fate, Religion and Politics, and Support for American Civil Liberties](#) · Juan Francisco Molinar · University of North Texas · 2022

Religion, culture and community

31. Does religious social capital make a microfinance program work better, or only feel safer?

See it in a real dissertation: [Attaining Empowerment: The Potential of Religious Social Capital in Microfinance Programs](#) · John Wesley Eberhard · Georgia State University · 2022

32. What actually happens in a congregation that sets out to reconcile across race?

See it in a real dissertation: [Broken Rituals: Contending Gods and Sacred Cows in Religious Racial Reconciliation and Race Relations](#) · Ewart Forde · Louisiana State University · 2025

33. Where does a shared faith stop being enough to disrupt racial inequality?

See it in a real dissertation: [Grace Swallows Up Race: An Auspicious Setting for Disrupting Racial Inequalities in a Christian Community and Its Limits](#) · Jiayin Hu · Purdue University · 2026

34. How does an extreme identity get built and maintained in monologue rather than in argument?

See it in a real dissertation: [Far-Right Monologues and Extreme Identity](#) · Benjamin Thigpen · Portland State University · 2024

35. What political work does homophobia do inside a sectarian system?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Queer Enemy: Homophobia, Religion, and Stalemate in Lebanon](#) · Omar Safadi · University of Chicago · 2025

Social movements and collective action

36. How did consumers come to see shopping as a form of political action?

See it in a real dissertation: [Mobilizing Consumers: The American Consumer Movement in the 1960s-70s as a Social Movement](#) · Yaniv Ron-El · University of Chicago · 2022

37. Which slogans of a protest wave survive contact with mainstream political speech?

See it in a real dissertation: [Tweeting the Past, Present, and Future of Social Welfare: Public Political Speech, Cultural Resonance, and Debates about Defunding the Police](#) · Kevin M. Cherry · Portland State University · 2025

38. What did the women who ran a movement program say they were actually doing?

See it in a real dissertation: [Personal Perspectives of Political Action: A Case Study of How Women Discuss the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program](#) · Peterson, Megs · University of South Florida · 2025

39. Why does a community that supports wind power still protest the turbine next door?

See it in a real dissertation: [Wind, Power, and Protest](#) · Marshiela M. Banner · Boise State University · 2025

40. How does art carry resistance in a country where organizing openly is dangerous?

See it in a real dissertation: [Art Education as a Tool of Feminist Resistance in Iran \(1979-2022\)](#) · Sedigheh Fathollahzadeh Dizaji · Illinois State University · 2023

Urban life, neighborhoods and housing

41. What does a homeless sweep do to the volunteers who were already serving that camp?

See it in a real dissertation: [A Qualitative Study Into the Impact of Sweeps on Homeless-Serving Mutual Aid Groups in Portland, OR](#) · Clover Javurek-Humig · Portland State University · 2026

42. Who in a neighborhood sees investment as a promise, and who sees it as a warning?

See it in a real dissertation: [Stakeholders' Perceptions of Risk for Gentrification in Atlanta's Pittsburgh Neighborhood](#) · David C Holmes · Georgia State University · 2022

43. Does a disadvantaged neighborhood affect every child in it the same way?

See it in a real dissertation: [Heterogeneity in Neighborhood Effects on Educational Outcomes in the United States, 2010-2016](#) · Xia Zheng · University of Chicago · 2025

44. How do relocated public housing residents decide whether to know their new neighbors?

See it in a real dissertation: ["I Stay to Myself": Relocated Public Housing Residents' Neighboring Strategy](#) · Renée Skeete Alston · Georgia State University · 2022

45. Why does an urban district end up with fewer shops than its residents would use?

See it in a real dissertation: [Essays in Urban Economics and Industrial Organization](#) · Moszkowski, Erica · Harvard University · 2023

Work, class and social mobility

46. Does a mentor or a sponsor move a career further, and are they available equally?

See it in a real dissertation: [Career mobility and networking strategies in the insurance industry: insights for Black professionals](#) · James Jabir Areago · Temple University · 2026

47. How do working-class Black men narrate a life story the wider culture keeps writing for them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Owning the Narrative: Black Working-Class Males' Social Identity and Resistance](#) · T. E. Hall · Chapman University · 2025

48. Do the same social inequalities in mental health show up across very different countries?

See it in a real dissertation: [Social inequalities in mental health: evidence on global patterns, life-course dynamics, and policy solutions](#) · Henking, Christoph · University of Oxford · 2025

49. Who benefits when an occupation draws a moral line around who may practice it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Moralized Licensing Laws: Accumulating Advantage Through Fuzzy Boundaries](#) · Hitha Alex · University of Chicago · 2025

50. What does a student at a lower-ranked institution think a degree is going to do for them?

See it in a real dissertation: [An ordinary journey: student self-formation at lower-tier higher education institutions in China](#) · Yushan Xie · University of Oxford · 2025

How to turn a topic into your research question

A topic is a starting point, not something you can research yet. These four steps take you from a topic on this list to a focused question you can actually answer.

- 1. Shortlist three, not one.** Pick three topics from this list that genuinely interest you and fit the access you have to people and data.

Recommended reading: [How to find and choose a dissertation topic](#)

- 2. Read the dissertation behind each one.** Its literature review and its "recommendations for future research" section show you what is already known and what is still open.

Recommended reading: [How to find a research gap](#)

- 3. Narrow it to your setting.** Name one population, one setting and one thing you will measure or explore. That turns a broad topic into a question you can finish.

Recommended reading: [How to write a research question](#)

- 4. Line up your aims, objectives and questions.** Your committee will check that they agree.

Recommended reading: [Research aims, objectives and questions](#)

Work through these once and you will have a focused question rather than a broad topic, which is what the rest of your proposal is built on.