

Syllabus: The Politics of Inequality

Seminar — Institute of Political Science (IPZ)

FALL SEMESTER 2019

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Office hours: Thursdays, 15:00–17:00 (or by appointment).

Level and credits: Master's Level (graduate); 6 ECTS.

Language of instruction: English

Frequency: Weekly (Fridays, 12:15–13:45) **Room:** AFL-E-020 (Check for updates)

Please note, this is a provisional version of the Syllabus. An updated copy will be distributed on the first day of class.

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This course offers a broad overview of the causes and consequences of growing economic inequality in European democracies and in the US. Virtually all affluent countries experienced a rise in economic inequalities. We will discuss inequality trends in various countries, mostly OECD members. Beyond theoretical considerations, we will also explore existing data sources for empirical research. While our discussion on the politics of inequality will concentrate on income and wage inequalities; at the start of this course we will also discuss other forms of inequality, such as disparities in wealth, social status, education, and health. The core of this course will however analyze (1) (some of) the phenomena that caused the increase in (economic) inequality, concentrating on the political roots of advantage and disadvantage; and (2) the consequences that these disparities have for our democracies. Our last classes will finally discuss some policy instruments that can ameliorate existing inequalities. In particular, if time allows, we will discuss recent experiments and political discussions on basic income.

By the end of the course, you should expect to have:

- Knowledge of the basic concepts, theories, and debates on the political economy of inequality;
- Understanding of current trends in inequality and redistributive policies;
- Knowledge of data sources on inequality;
- The ability to formulate a clear thesis statement and to gather and analyze information to examine that thesis;
- The ability to write clearly and effectively for academic purposes.

ASSESSMENT

70% original essay (max 5000 words); 20% class presentation; 10% take-home assignment.

Please, note: this is a graduate seminar. I expect you to actively participate in class, even without grading incentives! You will be (too soon) tired of hearing my voice if you don't participate!

Original essay: the essay should be the result of independent research work. I will provide some titles, but you are also encouraged to explore topics/titles of your own choice. This work should, yes, show your competence over the topics (and literature) we discuss in class. It should however be an opportunity to demonstrate your critical thinking skills as well. You are expected to develop your independent arguments, and not to merely summarize existing research. I also expect you to develop some form of empirical discussion. Materials to help your academic writing will be provided. Remember that you are always welcome to discuss the title/topics/ideas with me during office hours. I will not respond to queries on the essay in the 5 days preceding the deadline. The word limit ($\pm 10\%$) is binding. The word limit includes the main text, footnotes, title. It excludes the references. More details will be discussed in class. The deadline for the submission is December 23, 2019, at 4.00pm.

Class presentation: you will be asked (1) to present inequality trends in a country of your choice; (2) to make some research about the redistributive policies in the country; and (3) to look for some relevant literature on the politics of inequality. You should show competences on the topics we discuss in class, and apply them to a concrete case. This is an analytical presentation. You should pretend this is a presentation that you would deliver to an audience of international policy-makers. This means that the presentation should give your audience an idea of what is happening within the country of your choice (trends in income, wage, and other types of inequality; existence of welfare institutions; political phenomena that you (think) you can connect to inequality trends; results of existing research on the politics of inequality in the country or region...). For obvious reasons given the content of the class, you may choose any country but the United States of America. You are also welcome to choose non-OECD countries. In this case you should however discuss the different terms in which we can think about the politics of inequality (particularly if the country is not a democracy). Depending on student numbers, this assignment will either be an individual or group assignment.

Take home assignment: the take-home assignment will ask you both closed- and open-ended questions on the materials we discuss in class. I will ask you to explore some existing data sources on your own; and to answer to some questions based on that data. I will also ask you to critically reflect on the required materials and class notes. You will work on the assignment on the computer. More details will be given in class. You will be given one week to work on this assignment. The questions will only include the materials discussed so far (i.e. will exclude the readings of weeks 9 and above). More details will be given in class. The deadline for the assignment is November 15, 2019 (Week 9) at 11am.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism in this class is unacceptable. Accidental or willful use of someone else's words, ideas, or evidence without attribution will be penalized according to the departmental and university policies.

ADDITIONAL RULES FOR THIS CLASS

For this class, I expect you to comply with the following rules:

1. This class is an open environment. Everyone is welcome and diversity (in any form) is appreciated. Any form of discrimination will not be tolerated.
2. Questions are always welcome. Discussion is what will make for the quality of the seminar.
3. You cannot record the classes unless you have justified reasons. The use of mobile phones in class is strongly discouraged unless for important and pressing issues or emergencies.
4. Deadlines are not suggestive. If you need to submit your work after the deadline for documentable reasons, remember to let me know as in advance as possible.
5. If you are unhappy with anything happening in this class, let me know as soon as possible. It's impossible for me to solve any issues if I am not made aware of the issue itself.

MAIN TEXTS

Although no textbook covers all the topics we discuss in this course, we will primarily read the following books:

- Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press. You can find it here on [Amazon UK](#).*

- Piston, S. (2018). *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. New York: Cambridge University Press. You can find it here on [Amazon UK](#).**
- Alesina, A., Glaeser, E., and Glaeser, E. L. (2006). *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference*. New York: Oxford University Press. You can find it here on [Amazon UK](#).***

* Also available in Kindle format. The book is very inexpensive, and I recommend it as a quick reference on income inequality.

** This is a fantastic piece of scholarship. I particularly like it for the (innovative) methodological approach to the study of public opinion. It is however a book on American politics... This is something you need to consider when evaluating a possible purchase.

*** We will only read selected chapters. This is however one of the most cited books on the topic of inequality (and in general, in comparative political economy). If you are considering a PhD in political economy, you may want to purchase a copy of this book—even if it is more expensive than the others.

We will also read a chunk of the following book:

- Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

There are many resources over the web to help you develop your writing skills. Some documents will also be distributed in class. However, if you are considering purchasing books on academic/professional writing, I strongly recommend the followings (books that are inexpensive and very useful):

- Strunk, W. J. and White, E. (2007). *The Elements of Style*. Penguin;
- Swales, J. M. and Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press;
- Clark, R. P. (2008). *Writing Tools: 55 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. Little, Brown.

For those who think may need a different approach, the following book might prove useful:

- Wallbank, A. J. (2018). *Academic Writing and Dyslexia: A Visual Guide to Writing at University*. London: Routledge.

All these books are available on Amazon UK. If you purchase the Kindle book, you will save a lot of money.

Course Weekly Break-down with Required Readings

Please note, the following break-down might change in due course. If that's the case, you will be promptly notified in class.

◇◇◇ Introduction to the course and to the field ◇◇◇ (September 20, 2019)

Main topics:

- House-keeping information;
- Overview of theoretical (or philosophical) foundations (utilitarianism, total utility equality, Rawlsian approaches, Sen's approach);
- Overview on trends: the rise of a global middle class and global plutocrats.

Suggested readings from news outlets:

◇ [Where do you fit on the global income spectrum?](#) From *The Washington Post*.

◇ A six minutes [Youtube video by the CNBC](#) on the rise of inequality.

Required readings :

Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press. [Chapter 1]

Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Chapter 1]

◇◇◇ **Contemporary Inequality** ◇◇◇ (September 27, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview on trends: economic inequality in OECD countries;
- Discussion of trends in between-countries vs. within-countries inequalities;
- We will read in class [The American Economy Is Rigged](#) (by Stiglitz, Joseph).

Required readings :

Cingano, F. (2014). Trends in income inequality and its impact on economic growth. *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 163. Paris: OECD Publishing [pages 8—13]

Piketty, T. and Saez, E. (2014). Inequality in the long run. *Science*, 344(6186):838–843

Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 2, pp. 12–31]

In class, we will also explore the website [GapMinder](#).

Additional readings:

Alderson, A. S. and Nielsen, F. (2002). Globalization and the great u-turn: Income inequality trends in 16 oecd countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(5):1244–1299

Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Chapters 2 & 3]

Piketty, T. (2015). About capital in the twenty-first century. *American Economic Review*, 105(5):48–53

Rodrik, D. (2017). Is global equality the enemy of national equality? *Harvard Kennedy School Working Paper*, No. RWP17-003. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. You can find it [here](#).

◇◇◇ **Contemporary Inequality and Its Measurement** ◇◇◇ (October 04, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview on trends: economic inequality in OECD countries;
- Overview on trends: economic inequality beyond OECD countries;
- How to measure inequality and discussion of existing data sources.

Required readings :

Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapters 3, 4, and 5; i.e. pp: 32–70]

Additional readings:

Allison, P. D. (1978). Measures of inequality. *American Sociological Review*, 43(6):865–880

De Maio, F. G. (2007). Income inequality measures. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 61(10):849–852

◇◇◇ **It's not Just about the Economy [...]** ◇◇◇ (October 11, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview of inequality in health outcomes and health inequity measures;

- Discussion of social mobility.

Required readings:

Mackenbach, J. P., Kulhánová, I., Menvielle, G., Bopp, M., Borrell, C., Costa, G., Deboosere, P., Esnaola, S., Kale-
diene, R., Kovacs, K., et al. (2015). Trends in inequalities in premature mortality: A study of 3.2 million deaths in
13 european countries. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 69(3):207–217

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., Saez, E., and Turner, N. (2014). Is the united states still a land of opportu-
nity? recent trends in intergenerational mobility. *American Economic Review*, 104(5):141–47

Additional readings:

Hu, Y., van Lenthe, F. J., Borsboom, G. J., Looman, C. W., Bopp, M., Burström, B., Dzúrová, D., Ekholm, O.,
Klumbiene, J., Lahelma, E., et al. (2016). Trends in socioeconomic inequalities in self-assessed health in 17 european
countries between 1990 and 2010. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 70(7):644–652

Kjellsson, G., Gerdtham, U.-G., and Petrie, D. (2015). Lies, damned lies, and health inequality measurements:
Understanding the value judgments. *Epidemiology*, 26(5):673

Breen, R. and Jonsson, J. O. (2005). Inequality of opportunity in comparative perspective: Recent research on
educational attainment and social mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31:223–243

Beller, E. and Hout, M. (2006). Intergenerational social mobility: The united states in comparative perspective.
The Future of Children, pages 19–36

◇◇◇ **Causes of Inequality in Europe and the US** ◇◇◇ (October 18, 2019)

Main topics:

- Discussion of the relationship between redistribution and inequality;
- Discussion of some models of welfare systems.

Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 7]

Alesina, A., Glaeser, E., and Glaeser, E. L. (2006). *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Differ-
ence*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapters 2 and 5]

◇◇◇ **Inequality and Voting over Redistribution [...]** ◇◇◇ (October 25, 2019)

Main topics:

- Introduction to the (Romer-)Meltzer-Richard model;
- Discussion of some empirical limitations of the model.

Required readings:

Meltzer, A. H. and Richard, S. F. (1981). A rational theory of the size of government. *Journal of political Economy*,
89(5):914–927

Solt, F. (2008). Economic inequality and democratic political engagement. *American Journal of Political Science*,
52(1):48–60

Larcinese, V. (2007). Voting over redistribution and the size of the welfare state: The tole of turnout. *Political
Studies*, 55(3):568–585

Additional readings:

Solt, F. (2010). Does economic inequality depress electoral participation? testing the schattschneider hypothesis.

Political Behavior, 32(2):285–301

Solt, F. (2015). Economic inequality and nonviolent protest. *Social Science Quarterly*, 96(5):1314–1327

Gallego, A. (2016). Inequality and the erosion of trust among the poor: Experimental evidence. *Socio-Economic Review*, 14(3):443–460

◇ ◇ ◇ (Political) Consequences of Inequality ◇ ◇ ◇ (November 01, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview of implications of the limits of the Melter-Richard model;
- Discussion of the topic of polarization (and its relationship with inequality);
- Introduction to the relationship between public opinion and inequality; and between inequality and democratic responsiveness.

Required readings:

Gilens, M. (2009). Preference gaps and inequality in representation. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42(2):335–341

Kelly, N. J. and Enns, P. K. (2010). Inequality and the dynamics of public opinion: The self-reinforcing link between economic inequality and mass preferences. *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(4):855–870

Fenzl, M. (2018). Income inequality and party (de)polarisation. *West European Politics*, 41(6):1262–1281

Additional readings:

Iversen, T. and Soskice, D. (2015). Information, inequality, and mass polarization: Ideology in advanced democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(13):1781–1813

Han, S. M. (2015). Income inequality, electoral systems and party polarisation. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(3):582–600

Pontusson, J. and Rueda, D. (2008). Inequality as a source of political polarization: A comparative analysis of twelve oecd countries. In Beramendi, P. and Anderson, C. J., editors, *Democracy, Inequality, and Representation in Comparative Perspective*, pages 312–353. New York: Russell Sage Foundation

Winkler, H. (2019). The effect of income inequality on political polarization: Evidence from european regions, 2002–2014. *Economics & Politics*

◇ ◇ ◇ Income Inequality and Inequality of Representation ◇ ◇ ◇ (November 08, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview of the impact of inequality on political representation in the US and Europe;
- Discussion of (class-specific) political alienation.

Required readings:

Giger, N., Rosset, J., and Bernauer, J. (2012). The poor political representation of the poor in a comparative perspective. *Representation*, 48(1):47–61

Schraff, D. (2019). Politically alienated through low-wage work? evidence from panel data. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 25(1):19–39

Additional readings:

Flavin, P. (2012). Income inequality and policy representation in the american states. *American Politics Research*, 40(1):29–59

Hacker, J. S. and Pierson, P. (2010). Winner-take-all politics: Public policy, political organization, and the precipitous rise of top incomes in the united states. *Politics & Society*, 38(2):152–204

Carnes, N. (2012). Does the numerical underrepresentation of the working class in congress matter? *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 37(1):5–34

Rigby, E. and Wright, G. C. (2013). Political parties and representation of the poor in the american states. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3):552–565

◇ ◇ ◇ **Are Americans Less Supportive of Redistribution?** ◇ ◇ ◇ (November 15, 2019)

Main topics:

- Overview of theories on the preferences of the American public on redistributive policies;
- Discussion of limitations on classical accounts.

Required readings:

Alesina, A., Glaeser, E., and Glaeser, E. L. (2006). *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 7]

Piston, S. (2018). *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. New York: Cambridge University Press [Chapters 3 and 4]

Additional Readings:

Bartels, L. M. (2005). Homer gets a tax cut: Inequality and public policy in the american mind. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(1):15–31

◇ ◇ ◇ **Are Americans Less Supportive of Redistribution? II** ◇ ◇ ◇ (November 22, 2019)

Main topics:

- Piston’s approach;
- Limits to ‘Homer gets a cut’.

Required readings:

Piston, S. (2018). *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. New York: Cambridge University Press [Chapters 5, 6 and 7]

In class, we will also read [this Washington Post/Monkey Cage piece by McCall and Richeson](#).

Additional readings:

Lupia, A., Levine, A. S., Menning, J. O., and Sin, G. (2007). Were bush tax cut supporters “simply ignorant?” a second look at conservatives and liberals in “homer gets a tax cut”. *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(4):773–784

◇ ◇ ◇ **What Can We Do about Inequality? I** ◇ ◇ ◇ (November 29, 2019)

Main topics:

- Can social policies ameliorate earnings inequality?
- What are some policy instruments to fight inequalities?

Required readings:

Galbraith, J. K. (2016). *Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 10, pp. 135–149]

Moene, K. O. and Wallerstein, M. (2003). Earnings inequality and welfare spending: A disaggregated analysis. *World Politics*, 55(4):485–516

Watch the [TED Talk by Paul Collier: 4 Ways to Help the Bottom Million](#) *before class*.

Additional readings:

Mandel, H. and Semyonov, M. (2005). Family policies, wage structures, and gender gaps: Sources of earnings inequality in 20 countries. *American Sociological Review*, 70(6):949–967

◇◇◇ **What Can We Do about Inequality? II + Start of Class Presentations** ◇◇◇ (December 06, 2019)

Main topics:

- Introduction to the idea of basic income.

Required readings:

Pateman, C. (2004). Democratizing citizenship: Some advantages of a basic income. *Politics & society*, 32(1):89–105

Van Parijs, P. (2004). Basic income: A simple and powerful idea for the twenty-first century. *Politics & Society*, 32(1):7–39

In class, we will also watch the [TED Talk by Rutger Bregman](#).

◇◇◇ **Class Presentations and Discussion** ◇◇◇ (December 13, 2019)

◇◇◇ **Class Presentations and Discussion II** ◇◇◇ (December 20, 2019)