

Course Title (Spring 2025)

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The Politics of Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution: Theory, Empirics, and Methods

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Course Description and Objectives

This course focuses on both the substantive and analytical/methodological aspects of the relationship between politics and economic inequality, which I define broadly to include inequality in outcomes (e.g., wages, income, wealth) and in opportunities (e.g., employment, education), as well as between social groups defined by class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc., though the emphasis in this course will be on class and race/ethnic inequalities. Also, as we will discuss, what "inequality" encompasses is not always clear.

Theoretically and substantively, the main objective of the course is to become familiar with the different levels of analysis involved in the study of the politics of inequality, namely, the roles of (1) political institutions and (2) behavioral dynamics. The former includes parties, electoral systems, policy regimes, the media, history and geographical context, and is sometimes referred to as the "supply side" of politics, or what the political structure supplies or constrains in terms of political and policy ideas and options. The latter (behavioral dynamics) includes individual and group beliefs, policy preferences, voting choices, organized interests, social movements and protest, and is sometimes referred to as the "demand side" of politics, or what individuals and groups in a representative democracy demand from their government. Needless to say, the two levels interact in complicated ways, particularly, I would argue, when social and economic realities (e.g., economic inequality) shift in ways that fit uneasily with existing institutional and behavioral logics. How do individuals, groups, and government respond?

Analytically and methodologically, the main objective of the course is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of various methodological approaches to analyzing institutional and behavioral processes -- such as survey, experimental, ethnographic, historical, textual, and political economy methods and frameworks -- as they are applied to the problem of economic inequality, broadly conceived. Just as we will not want to rely on only institutional or only behavioral frameworks to understand the politics of inequality, so too will we want to refrain from drawing conclusions about these issues from only one methodological perspective and/or from only one

study (article or book). Unfortunately, this is all too common in the literature on economic inequality, which is why I have chosen to take an explicitly methodological perspective in this course.

Students therefore will learn both theoretical and methodological skills, and their interdependence, in the study of the politics of inequality, opportunity, and redistribution. As noted above, we will also integrate the research on class inequality with ongoing research on other dimensions of inequality, such as racial/ethnic and gender inequality (though, unfortunately, there's much less on the latter than on the former). While a good deal of the voluminous and longstanding literature on the welfare state includes an analysis of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, this is less the case for the more recent literature on rising economic inequality and its political and policy dimensions. This course will attempt to bring these literatures closer together, something that a growing number of scholars are attempting to do.

To accomplish these substantive and methodological objectives, readings will range widely across disciplines and methodological approaches, though the balance will tilt just a little bit toward quantitative studies in political science, sociology, economics, psychology, and history.

One last, important note. Admittedly, this is a lot of material to cover in a one-semester course. At the same time, I've structured the readings in a somewhat non-linear way, with some repetition in order to aid in constructing and maintaining a larger narrative about the politics of inequality that spans various time periods and topics.

Required Reading

The following books are required reading for this course. They are listed below in the order they appear on the syllabus. All other readings are available electronically through the library or will be made available on Blackboard. For book reserves, visit the reserves section of the library, find our course, and use this password to enter (SOCMcCall).

1. Gabriel Winant. 2021. *The Next Shift* (Harvard University Press).
2. Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2019. *State Capture* (Oxford University Press).
3. Jamila Michener. 2018. *Fragmented Democracy* (Cambridge University Press).
4. Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld. 2024. *The Hollow Parties* (Princeton University Press).
5. Olufemi Taiwo. 2022. *Elite Capture* (Haymarket Books).
6. Marc Lamont Hill. 2021. *Except for Palestine* (The New Press).

Assignments

There are four types of assignments in this course, which will be discussed further in class:

1. **Regular participation in class discussions (20%).**
Demonstrated knowledge of the *reading material* is *required* for credit.

2. **Presentation of class material for two weeks of readings (20%).**
There are twelve weeks of readings for which presenters are needed. Teams of two will lead discussion with short (**15 mins.**) description of subject matter, and discussion questions at the end (not part of 15 mins.).
3. **Six responses to the readings (30%; at least one in each of four sections).**
Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence and methods used to support author claims about some aspect of the politics of inequality. Length should be one single-spaced page (please, no longer), 12 point Times Roman font.
4. **A final research paper (30%).**
Rigorously examine the evidence on some topic related to the subject matter of this course. This could be a literature review or it could entail original data collection and analysis. Length should be approximately 20 double-spaced pages, 12 point Times Roman font.

Course and Reading Schedule

Note: Full citations are at the end of the syllabus and **additional/background** readings are **optional**.

PART I: Setting the stage empirically, historically, conceptually, and methodologically.

Week 1, Jan. 29: No class.

Week 2, Feb. 5.

Lecture presentation of key trends in and patterns of socio-economic inequality (mainly in US) using quantitative methods. Reading will discuss the contours of societies centered around elite domination.

Required Reading:

Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958/1994, 1994 introduction, pp. 19-21, 106-113, 142-152, 157-160)

Background Reading:

Piketty and Saez, *Science* (2014)

Milanovic, *Global Inequality* (2016: Chp. 1)

Blau and Kahn, *JEL* (2017)

Chetty et al, *Science* (2017)

Quillian et al., *PNAS* (2017) & *Sociological Science* (2019)

Bayer and Charles, *QJE* (2018)

Derenoncourt and Montialoux, *QJE* (2021)

Derenoncourt, Kim, Kuhn, and Schularick., Working Paper (2022)

Autor, Dube, and McGrew, "The Unexpected Compression" (2024)

Kenworthy, *The Good Society*, <https://lanekenworthy.net>

And others...

Week 3, Feb. 12: No class.

Week 4, Feb. 19.

Twentieth century historical background leading up to and including the contemporary period. Multidimensional (e.g., class, race, gender) analysis of economic and political change in a key political and economic region of the U.S.

Also, methods (1): historical and interdisciplinary analysis.

Required Reading:

Winant, *The Next Shift* (2021).

Additional/background reading:

Lichtenstein, Chp. 5 in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (1989; 2013)

Fox, *AJS* (2010)

Week 5, Feb. 26.

Methods (1), continued: historical and multimethod research on the "backlash": the rise of far-right ideology, political organizations, and policy, which seek to overturn the inequality- and risk-reducing policies and democratic political processes discussed in the prior weeks.

Required reading:

Hertel-Fernandez, *State Capture* (2019)

Additional reading:

Project 2025 Mandate for Leadership (2023)

Barber and Dynes, *AJPS* (2023)

Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt* (2008)

MacLean, *Democracy in Chains* (2017)

Week 6, Mar. 5 and 6.

Part 1, Mar. 5.

Introducing conceptual themes of the course through a case study of the contemporary politics of Medicaid in the U.S. Discussion will focus on main concepts, dynamics, definitions, and empirical approaches in the study of inequality and politics, such as: institutional constraints and factors, individual political behaviour, the relationship between the supply and demand sides of politics, and the definition and scope of "inequality" and "politics."

Also, methods (2): the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches (mixed methods) in research on politics and inequality.

Required reading:

Michener, *Fragmented Democracy* (2018).

Background/Additional:

Campbell, *ARPS* (2012)

Tach and Edin, *ARS* (2017)

Part 2, Mar. 6.

Continue themes of previous day with methodological focus on analyses of contextual effects on political preferences and participation and a substantive focus on education but also political learning in multiple organizational settings.

Required reading:

Mendelberg et al., *AJPS* (2017)

Hertel-Fernandez et al., *PoP* (2021)

Frymer and Grumbach, *AJPS* (2021)

Nuamah and Ogorzalek, *APSR* (2021)

Knight and Zhang, *PNAS* (2024)

Additional reading on education and inequality:

Michener et al., *PoP* (2022)

OECD, *Divided We Stand* (2011: Chp. 8)

Busemeyer, *Skills and Inequality* (2014)

Shedd, *Unequal City* (2015)

Pattillo, *DBR* (2015)

DeLuca et al, *Coming of Age* (2016: Chp. 7)

Reeves, *Dream Hoarders* (2017)

Mo and Conn, *APSR* (2018)

Parolin and Lee, *NHB* (2021)

Biasi, *JOLE* (2023)

PART II: Formal Institutions, Structure, and the Supply Side of Politics

Week 7, Mar. 12.

Institutions of representative democracy: electoral systems, policy making process, courts, the constitution, the criminal-legal system, the welfare state.

Required reading:

Page and Gilens, *PoP* (2014)

Levitsky and Ziblatt, *Tyranny of the Minority* (2024, Chps. Intro, 6, 7, 8)

Faber, *ASR* (2020)

Soss and Weaver, *ARPS* (2017)

Darity et al., *RSF JSS* (2024)

Palier et al., *World Politics of Social Investment* (2022: Vol. 2, Chp. 17)

Additional/background reading:

Hacker, *APSR* (2004)
Erikson, *ARPS* (2015)
Evans and Tilley, *The New Politics of Class* (2017)
Lax et al., *APSR* (2019)
Beckett and Murakawa, *TC* (2012)
Hinton and Cook, *ARC* (2021)
Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America* (2014)
“Note: Pack the Union,” *HLR* (2020)

Week 8: Mar. 19.

A focus on political parties.

Required reading:

Schlozman and Rosenfeld, *The Hollow Parties* (2024, selections)

Skim:

Maxmin and Woodward, *NYT* (2022)
Wegman and Drutman, *NYT* (2025)

Additional reading:

Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances* (2010)
Mudge and Chen, *ARS* (2014)
McCarty and Schickler, *ARPS* (2018)

Week 9, Mar. 26.

Methods (3): focus on media and political/public discourse and methods to analyse media and discourse, with substantive foci on political learning, polarization, and populism.

Required reading:

Martin and McCrain, *APSR* (2019)
Garcia, *Nature* (2023)
Nyhan et al., *Nature* (2023)
Djourelouva et al., *JES* (2024)
Bonikowski, Luo, and Shuyler, *SMR* (2022)

Watch: David Broockman presentation on measuring the extent and impact of polarization. <https://100.ssrc.org/centennial-lecture-series/>

Additional reading:

McCall, Chp. 2 in *The Underserving Rich* (2013)
Nelson et al., *SMR* (2021)

Than et al., Working Paper (2024)

Part III: The Demand Side of Politics -- Individual and Group Identity Processes

Week 10, Apr. 2.

Methods (4): a look at public opinion surveys and polls on income and racial redistribution, labor market inequality, and the American Dream. Methods (5): experimental approaches to public opinion and beliefs about class inequality, racial inequality, economic opportunity, and redistribution.

Required reading:

McCall et al., *PNAS* (2017)
Cheng and Wen, *PNAS* (2019)
Lindh, McCall, et al., Working Paper (2024)
Callaghan et al., *PNAS* (2021)
Brown, Dietze & Craig, *Science* (2023)
Broockman and Skovron, *APSR* (2018)

Skim:

McCall and Kenworthy, *PoP* (2009, Fig. 1)

Additional reading:

Cohen and Luttig, *PoP* (2020)
Scheve and Stravage, *Taxing the Rich* (2016: Chp. 1)
Cramer and Toff, *PoP* (2017)
Williamson, *Read My Lips* (2016: Preface and Chp. 1)
Newman and Hayes, *PB* (2017)
Kochan et al., *ILRR* (2019)
Lindh and McCall, *SER* (2022)
Alesina et al., *AER* (2018)
Franetovic and Castillo, *FiS* (2022)
Cruces, *JPE* (2013)
Kuziemko et al., *AER* (2015)
Kraus et al., *PNAS* (2017)
Gilens and Thal, *POQ* (2018)
Dietze and Craig, *NHB* (2021)
Londono-Velez, *JPE* (2022); Rao, *AER* (2018)
Sands and deKadt, *Nat* (2020)
Wolak and Petersen, *AJPS* (2020)

Background reading:

Meltzer and Richard, *JPE* (1981)
Fehr and Schmidt, *QJE* (2001)
Durante et al., *JEEA* (2014)
Bartels, *PoP* (2005)

Hacker and Pierson, *PoP* (2005)
Lupia et al., *PoP* (2007)
Brady and Bostic, *ASR* (2015)

Week 11: Apr. 9.

Economic insecurity and identity politics: are they part of the rising inequality issue and what are their political effects on the drive to reduce inequality? We examine the roles of class, culture, recognition and other forms of identity in shaping the multidimensional politics of inequality.

Required reading:

Combahee River Collective Statement, in Taylor, *How We Get Free* (2017)
Fraser, *Scales of Justice* (2009: chp 6)
Taiwo, *Elite Capture* (2022: Introduction and Chp. 1)
Kustov, *PoP* (2024) [see also Kustov & Landgrave, *JEPS*, 2025]
Cramer et al., *RSF JSS* (2024)

Skim:

Breznau et al, *PNAS* (2022)

Additional reading:

Lindh and McCall, *ARS* (2020)
Edin et al, *JEP* (2019)
Craig, Rucker and Richeson, *CDPS* (2018)
Iyengar et al., *ARPS* (2019)
Baldassari and Park, *JoP* (2020)
Brady and Finnegan, *ASR* (2014)
Moran, *EJST* (2018)
Beramendi et al., *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism* (2015)
Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash* (2019)
Gidron and Hall, *BJS* (2017)
Bobo, *BJS* (2017)
McCall and Orloff, *BJS* (2017)
Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis* (2018)
Mutz, *PNAS* (2018) & *Socius* (2018)
Morgan, *Socius* (2018)
Morgan & Lee, *Socius* (2019)
Green & McElwee, *PoP* (2019)
McDermott et al., *ASIPP* (2019)
Park, *SF* (2017)
Craig and Richeson, *CDPS* (2016)
Junn and Matsuoka, *PoP* (2020)
Carter et al, *DBR* (2021)
Jardina and Mickey, *AAAPSS* (2022)
Melcher, *PB* (2021)

Autor et al, *AER* (2020)

Ethnographies of identity and politics:

Stockman, *American Made* (2021)

Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment* (2016)

Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016)

Silva, *We're Still Here* (2019)

Week 12, Apr. 16: No class.

PART IV: The Demand Side of Politics -- Grassroots Organizing, Social Movements, and Protest

Week 13, Apr. 23.

The melding of grassroots organizing, (deep) canvassing, and electoral politics.

Required reading:

Putnam, Chp. in *Upending American Politics* (2020)

Skocpol et al., *SAPD* (2022)

Walters & Skocpol, *SAPD* (2024)

Ternullo, *AJS* (2024)

Druckman, *ARPS* (2021)

Additional/background reading:

Broockman and Kalla, *Science* (2017)

Levine, *American Insecurity* (2015: Chp. 1)

Klar and Krupnikov, *Independent Politics* (2016: Chp. 5 or 8)

Maxmin and Woodward, *Dirtroad Revival* (2022)

Giridharadas, *The Persuaders* (2022)

Han and Kim, *AAAPSS* (2022)

Schram and Fording, *JREP* (2021)

Hill et al., *SA* (2021)

Week 14, Apr. 30.

Back to institutions: this week is a return to Part II because we will be attending a GC Public Programs event that I am organizing on the movement towards post-neoliberalism, which coincides with this week's readings on market institutions, such as the power of the private economy; neoliberalism; corporate employment and wage-setting practices and norms; unions.

Required reading:

Anderson, *Private Government* (2017: Chps. 1-2)

Levy and Temin, NBER Working Paper (2007)

Fligstein and Goldstein, *ARS* (2022)

Madariaga, *CP* (2020)

Dawson and Francis, *PC* (2015)

Skim:

Dube, *Research Brief* (2018)

Khan, *NYT* (2023)

Delgado, *NYT* (2024)

Additional reading:

Sjoberg, *ASR* (2009)

King and Pearce, *ARS* (2010)

Darity and Hamilton, *RBPE* (2012)

Stout, *Brookings Issues in Governance Studies* (2012)

Mizruchi, *Fracturing of the Corporate Elite* (2013)

Thelen, *Varieties of Liberalization and the New Politics of Social Solidarity* (2014)

Green, *CPP* (2014)

Luce, *NLF* (2015)

Rosenfeld and Denice, *ASR* (2015)

Eidlin, *ASR* (2016)

Milkman, *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality* (2016: Chps. 3-4)

de Leon, *Labor Studies Journal* (2017)

Osterman, *ILRR* (2017)

Wilmers, *AJS* (2017)

Andrias, *HLPR* (2017)

Naidu et al., *Harvard Law Review* (2018)

Thelen, *PoP* (2019)

Wu, *The Curse of Bigness: Anti-trust in the New Gilded Age* (2018)

Stoller, *Goliath: The 100-year War between Monopoly Power and Democracy* (2019)

Hertel-Fernandez, *PoP* (2016, 2021)

Bernhardt et al., *ILRR* (2022)

Hacker et al., *ARPS* (2022)

Galvin, *Alt-Labor and the New Politics of Worker Rights* (2024)

Week 15, May 7.

Political exclusion and political protest and social movements.

Required reading:

Milkman, *ASR* (2017)

Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (2016: Chps. 6-7)

Woodly, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements* (2021: Chps. Introduction, 5, Conclusion)

Additional reading:

Hooker, *PT* (2016)

Enos et al., *APSR* (2019)

Week 16, May 14.

Connecting domestic and international movements.

Required reading:

Lamont Hill, *Except for Palestine* (2021).

Week 17, May 22: Papers due.

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