

Political Science 389
The Politics of Inequality in the U. S.

Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30 – 4
2306 Mason Hall

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:05pm – 5:30pm,
Thursdays 11:30-noon, and by appointment

Tuesdays 10-11:30am, and
by appointment

OVERVIEW

In this course we will explore several aspects of economic inequality in the United States. First, we will wrestle with arguments about why we might be concerned about growing inequality (as opposed to poverty or other related but distinct phenomena). Second, we will compare the American political economy and U.S. social welfare spending to other rich democracies, and then attempt to explain the mix of political and economic forces that might be driving inequality. How might we think about the relative importance of these forces? Do the stagnation of middle-class incomes and the zoom at the top of the income distribution have common causes? Third, we will try to understand the *consequences* of the new inequality. How should we expect it to affect U.S. politics? Will there be new calls for the redistribution of wealth? Will the better-off use their political influence to muffle these calls? Why might the new inequality be to blame for the financial crisis? For unprecedented levels of polarization in Washington? Finally, we will discuss what—if anything—should, and could, be done to combat the new inequality, and we will consider whether such policies might be in tension with other goals we might have.

No knowledge of economics is necessary to take this course. Some coursework in U.S. politics is recommended but not required. The reading load is difficult in both quantity (about 150 pages per week) and substance.

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your course grade will be based on the following:

20%: Class Participation. This is based on attendance at lecture, attendance and participation in section, and responses in section (see Christina Kinane's section syllabus for details)

30%: In-class midterm exam.

50%: In-class final exam OR paper. The paper should be of no more than 3,500 words and focus on a single policy proposal we have discussed. The paper should assess the proposal's likely effectiveness in reducing some facet of inequality, its political feasibility, and, from your own perspective, its desirability. (A much more detailed paper assignment will be handed out later.)

Grade Grievances

If you believe that you have been unfairly graded, follow this procedure:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before approaching Professor Mickey.
2. Provide a brief explanation in writing for why the grade you received was unfair.

Departmental grade grievance procedures are outlined at <http://polisci.lsa.umich.edu/undergrad/grievance.html>.

GENERAL POLICIES

I. Class Sessions. The class will start at *exactly* 2:40 and end at 4:00; please be on time.

II. Religious Observances and Other Scheduling Conflicts. In keeping with the University of Michigan policy of respecting students' religious commitments (http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html#conflicts), all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. You are responsible for reporting to the instructor your absence of class well in advance. The following are major religious and cultural holidays during the semester that conflict with our course.

Rosh Hashanah (begins at sunset)	Sept. 24
Sukkot (begins at sunset)	Oct. 8
Shemini Atzeret (begins at sunset)	Oct. 15
Diwali	Oct. 27

This list is based on (http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html) and may not be complete; you are encouraged to let the professor know about other religious

commitments and holidays. Furthermore, we are aware of and, in principle, sympathetic to the many other pressures students have in their lives and are willing to accommodate reasonable requests for missing class or rescheduling exams. But it is *your* responsibility to bring conflicts to the professor's attention, and to do so *in advance*.

III. Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are violations of academic integrity and thus violations of the LS&A Academic Conduct Code, and they will result automatically in a failure in the course. Furthermore, as the LS&A Academic Judiciary Manual of Procedures specifies, a student may be expelled from the university for academic misconduct. For the purposes of this class, plagiarism will be defined as *submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source*. For more information, see <http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity>.

Disabled student accommodations. If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please make an appointment to see Prof. Mickey. If you haven't done so already, you are also encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), Rm. G-664 Haven Hall, tel. 763-3000 (Voice/TTY/TDD). More information is available at <http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/>.

Other stuff. You are strongly encouraged to attend office hours for any course-related issues. Updates of this syllabus, announcements, etc. will be available on our Coursetools website. The **add/drop deadline is 11:59pm on Sept. 22.**

COURSE OUTLINE

Sep. 3	Course Overview and Some Data about Inequality
Sep. 8, 10	Should We Care about Economic Inequality?
Sep. 15, 17	The U.S. in Comparative Perspective: Varieties of Capitalism and of Welfare States among Rich Countries
Sep. 22, 24 [*]	The Bartels Thesis
Sep. 29, October 1	Evaluating Bartels
Oct. 6, 8 [†]	Stagnation at the Middle, I: Technology, Trade, and Higher Education
OCT. 13	NO CLASS—FALL BREAK
Oct. 15 [‡] , 20	Stagnation at the Middle, II: Unions and What They (Used to) Do
Oct. 22, 27 [§]	The Zoom at the Top: Financialization of the Economy & Taxation
Oct. 29	IN-CLASS MIDTERM
Nov. 3, 5	Political Consequences of the New Inequality: Unequal Voice?
Nov. 10, 12	Elite Polarization as Consequence and Cause of the New Inequality?
Nov. 17, 19	Addressing Inequality Indirectly by Reforming Political Institutions
Nov. 24, Dec. 1-3	Inequality-Reducing Policies
NOV. 26	NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK
Dec. 8, 10	Summing Up: Inequality and Some Possible Futures of U.S. Politics
Dec. 19, 10:30-12:30	FINAL EXAM (PAPER DUE AT NOON EST VIA CTOOLS)

* Rosh Hashanah (begins at sunset).

† Sukkot (begins at sunset).

‡ Shemini Atzeret (begins at sunset).

§ Diwali.

COURSE READINGS

Students might want to purchase the following:

Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

*Other readings will be made available via the *Coursetools* site.

COURSE SCHEDULE and READINGS

Each week, please do the readings in the order in which they're listed below. Note that this course is being taught for the first time; readings are likely to change.

September 3 Course Overview and some Information about Inequality

Sep. 8, 10 Should We Care about Economic Inequality?

John Rawls, "Distributive Justice," in Alan Ryan, ed., *Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1971]), 73-94.

Robert Nozick, "Distributive Justice," in Alan Ryan, ed., *Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1974]), 95-116.

Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?," *Ethics* 109 (1999), 287-337.

Sep. 15, 17 The U.S. in Comparative Perspective: Varieties of Capitalism and
of Welfare States among Rich Countries

Jonas Pontusson, *Inequality and Prosperity: Social Europe vs. Liberal America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chaps. 1-4 (1-94).

Alberto Alesina and Edward L. Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the U.S. and Europe: A World of Difference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chaps. 1-2 (1-13, 15-49).

****optional background information on measures of economic performance:**

James J. Gosling and Marc Allen Eisner, *Economics, Politics, and American Public Policy*, second ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2013), chap. 2 (18-34).

Also, the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* is good for quickly looking up terms and concepts you're not familiar with, and it's available online (after logging in via MIRLYN): <http://www.dictionaryofeconomics.com/dictionary>.

Sep. 22, 24 The Bartels Thesis

Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), chaps. 1-4 (1-126).

Sep. 29, October 1 Evaluating Bartels

Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, chap. 6 (162-196).

Lane Kenworthy, "How Much Do Presidents Influence Income Inequality?", *Challenge* 53 (2010), 90-108.

Leslie McCall and Lane Kenworthy, "Americans' Social Policy Preferences in the Era of Rising Inequality," *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (2009), 459-474.

OCT. 6 **INSTRUCTOR SICK—LECTURE CANCELED**

Oct. 8 Stagnation at the Middle, I: Technology, Trade, and Higher Education

Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality and What to Do about It* (New York: New Press, 2012), chaps. 4-6 (60-107).

Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Opportunity: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 1-85, 111-161.

OCT. 13 **NO CLASS—FALL BREAK**

Oct. 15, 20 Stagnation at the Middle, II: Unions and What They (Used to) Do

Richard B. Freeman, *America Works: The Exceptional U.S. Labor Market* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007), 20-127.

Frank Levy and Peter Temin, "Institutions and Wages in Post-World War II America," in *Labor in the Era of Globalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15-45.

Oct. 22, 27 The Zoom at the Top: The Financialization of the Economy & Taxation

Facundo Alvaredo, "The Top 1 Percent in International and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27 (2013), 3-18.

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States," *Politics and History* 38 (2010), 152-197.

Darrell West, *Billionaires: Reflections on the Upper Crust* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2014), chaps. 1 and 7-8 (1-27 and 129-163).

Benjamin I. Page, Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright, "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans," *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (2013), 51-68.

Oct. 29

IN-CLASS MIDTERM

November 3, 5

Political Consequences of the New Inequality: Unequal Voice?

Kay Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), chaps. 1, 5, 9, and 11 (1-24; 117-146; 232-269; and 312-346) [total: 137 pages].

Bartels, chap. 9 ("Economic Inequality and Political Representation") in *Unequal Democracy*, 252-282.

Nov. 10, 12

Elite Polarization as Consequence and Cause of the New Inequality?

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), introduction and chap. 2 (ix-xiv and 31-80).

David W. Brady and Craig Volden, *Revolving Gridlock: Politics and Policy from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush*, second ed. (Boulder: Westview, 2006), 12-36.

Nolan McCarty, "The Policy Effects of Political Polarization," in Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 223-248.

Nov. 17, 19

Addressing Inequality Indirectly by Reforming Political Institutions

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), chaps. 3-6 (81-178).

Seth Masket, "Mitigating Extreme Partisanship in an Era of Networked Parties: An Examination of Various Reform Strategies," Center for Effective Public Management, Brookings Institution (March 2014), 1-17.

Nov. 24 Inequality-Reducing Policies I: The Estate Tax and
the Earned Income Tax Credit

Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, chap. 7 (“The Strange Appeal of Estate Tax Repeal”), 197-221 (**25 pages**)

Thomas Edsall, “Cutting the Poor Out of Welfare,” *New York Times*, Jun. 8, 2014 (**7 pages**)

Obama Administration, “The President’s Proposal to Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit,” March 2014 (**18 pages**)

Cong. Paul Ryan (D-WI), “Reintegrate the Poor, Reinvigorate America” (speech at Social Mobility Summit, Washington, Jan. 13, 2014) (**5 pages**)

Nov. 26 **NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK**

December 1, 3 Inequality-Reducing Policies II: Universal Preschool; alt-labor

Department of Education, “Early Learning: America’s Middle Class Begins Early,” <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning> (accessed Nov. 2014), [2 pages].

W. Steven Barnett, Kirsty Brown and Rima Shore, “The Universal vs. Targeted Debate: Should the United States Have Preschool for All?,” *Preschool Policy Matters* 6 (2004), [13 pages].

Richard D. Kahlenberg, “From All Walks of Life: New Hope for School Integration,” *American Educator* 36 (2012-2013), [13 pages].

David J. Armor, “The Evidence on Universal Preschool: Are Benefits Worth the Cost?,” *Policy Analysis* no. 760 (Oct. 2014), Cato Institute [13 pages].

W. Steven Barnett, “Actually, We Do Know if High-Quality Preschool Benefits Kids: What the Research Really Says,” *Washington Post* (Oct. 21, 2014) [7 pages]

Stephanie Luce, “Living Wages, Minimum Wages, and Low-Wage Workers,” in Stephanie Luce, Jennifer Luff, Joseph A. McCartin, and Ruth Milkman, eds., *What Works for Workers? Public Policies and Innovative Strategies for Low-Wage Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014), 215–238 [24 pages]

Richard B. Freeman, “What Can Labor Organizations Do for U. S. Workers When Unions Can’t Do What Unions Used to Do?,” in Stephanie Luce, Jennifer Luff, Joseph A. McCartin, and Ruth

Milkman, eds., *What Works for Workers? Public Policies and Innovative Strategies for Low-Wage Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014), 50–70 [21 pages].

Dec. 8, 10 Summing Up: Inequality and Some Possible Futures of Inequality in the U.S. and Beyond

Branko Milanovic, “Global Inequality: From Class to Location, from Proletarians to Migrants,” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 5820* (Sept. 2011), 2-21.

Dec. 19, 10:30-12:30 FINAL EXAM (PAPER DUE AT NOON EST VIA CTOOLS)