

Economic Inequality and American Democracy

Spring 2018

Location: Monday 9:00-11:25, CL 339

Professor: Dr. Laura Bucci (lcb52@pitt.edu)

Office: 4800 W. Posvar Hall

Office Hours: Monday 1-3, Wednesday 10-12, or by appointment

The flaw in pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent —E.E. Schattschneider

1 Course Description

The candidacies of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump emphasized that the American economy was not working for the average American. The policies meant to alleviate this problem were wildly different, but the underlying truth remains the same. Individuals are less financially secure today; gaps in income and wealth are as large as they were during the Gilded Age; economic productivity has risen dramatically with no growth to real wages for the bottom 80% of income earners; it is unclear how often representatives listen to non-rich constituents, if they do at all. While inequality has grown in other western democracies, the United States is growing more unequal the most rapidly. Shortly after the “rights revolution” of the late 1960s, many of the formal and legal categories of discrimination were worn down, but are now replaced by economic divisions that reinforce power differences by race, ethnicity, and gender, undermining promises of greater equality. In this course we will study a growing literature on the consequences of economic inequality for representative democracy. Can representative government survive, in a meaningful way, when there is such disparity between citizens?

We will examine this question by looking at three major aspects of the American political system: the problem of inequality, its continuation via politics and policy, and its consequences on citizenship. Is inequality a problem, and do what extent? Does U.S. policy ameliorate or exacerbate inequality, and how does that policy benefit some groups over others? Finally we will ask what the consequences of economic inequality are for political behavior.

2 Expectations

Grade Components

- Participation: 20%

I expect you to be ready to discuss materials within the classroom, engage in in-class activities. It is important that you demonstrate you can think critically about the information presented, and be able to speak respectfully to your classmates. Participating does not mean you need to speak a lot, only that you think about the material, express some thoughts, and read closely.

Participating means that you need to be **in class**. You are allowed to miss one classes with no penalty, but all additional absences will be penalized, as you will not be participating.

- Leading Discussion: 15%

Once during the semester, each person will be responsible for guiding student discussion. As a part of this, students leading the discussion will be asked to **create 4-5 questions to guide conversation**. Questions should relate to the readings, but be broad enough to get us talking (For example, questions should look more like: How does X help us learn about the politics of geography, rather than what city does X study) I will model these types of questions in the first few weeks.

As the discussion leader, you should have general answers to the questions you’ve written. You will need to read the material earlier than other students in order to prepare your questions.

Questions should be submitted to all students before 9PM Wednesday evening the week prior to your discussion.

- Reading Journal (5 X 4% each): 20%

Each week, you should prepare brief typed answers to discussion questions. They can be in outline form, but should show an indication that you are thinking about the question posed by your classmates and some ideas you've had along the way. At five points during the semester, I will collect and grade the journal for that class period.

Journals are not meant to be punitive, but to make conversation during class move smoothly and to reward your colleagues' efforts in producing questions.

- Research Paper: 45%

Papers should be address a concise question about a cause or consequence of economic inequality. I will provide an additional rubric for construction of this research paper. Final papers should be between 10-12 pages, double-spaced. You will have the opportunity to refine this paper throughout the semester, first submitting a research question, then outline, before presenting the final work.

- Research Question: 5%
- Outline: 10%
- Research Presentation: 10%
- Final Draft: 20%

Final Grade Scale

Point Range	Letter Grade
100-93	A
92.9-90	A-
89.9-87	B+
86.9-83	B
82.9-80	B-
79.9-77	C+
76.9-73	C
72.9-70	C-
69.9-67	D+
66.9-65	D
< 65	F

*There is no curve and no rounding.

3 Course Policies

Failure to adopt these principles could result in lowered grades, removal from the course, or disciplinary action. By remaining enrolled in this course you agree to:

1. Do your own work

- Plagiarism is a form of cheating. It is serious, it will be punished. If you are unsure what plagiarism looks like, please consult the [guidelines for academic integrity](#)
- The University states that “All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honest. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines of Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy.”

- Do not cheat; do not attempt to cheat. I will notice, and I will report it to the University. In my experience, people never cheat *well*, and you are doing a great disservice to your own academic career, and disrespecting your fellow classmates. All definitions from your textbook should be paraphrased.

2. Come to class ready to learn

- Lateness: Coming to class is disruptive to your classmates, who arrived on time. If lateness becomes a problem, I reserve the right to count late students as absent.
- Use of Cellphones: Keep your cellphone away during class time.

3. Contact me with problems

- Disability and Special Needs Accommodations: If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services by the end of the first week of the term. The office of Disability Resources and Services is located in 140 William Pitt Union (412-648-7890 Voice or TDD), and their website is <http://www.drs.pitt.edu>. If you have a physical, learning, or emotional disability, please let me know as early as you can so that I can better accommodate you.
- Email: Email is a form of professional communication. Please write respectfully and professionally in emails. I tend to respond to email fairly quickly, but if I have not addressed your question in 24 hours, let me know. Nights before papers are due, I will be unreachable after 9pm.
- Grades: If you disagree with your grade, wait 24 hours, and send me a written note about what you believe is wrong. I am happy to discuss grades at that point.
- When you don't understand something, come to office hours.

4. Respect your classmates

- An Open Classroom: It is important to me that you leave this class better able to engage critically with political topics. This means that all students, regardless of age, background, political belief, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or ability, should feel that the classroom is safe, welcoming, and to their beneficial learning. If there is a way to make you feel more welcome in the course, please let me know via email or come to visit during office hours.

There may be times in class when not everyone agrees; That's ok. It is important that you engage with your peers in a constructive manner. Derogatory comments will not be accepted.

*Books

Unequal Democracy by Larry Bartels **2nd edition

Winner Take All Politics by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson

Affluence and Influence by Martin Gilens

Coming Up Short: Working-class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty by Jennifer M. Silva

4 Course Schedule and Assignments

* I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as needed.

1/8 Introduction

- Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, "American Democracy in an Age of Inequality" <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/taskforcereport.pdf>

1/15- No Class- Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Theme: The Problem of Inequality

1/22- Inequality on the Rise

- Review Task Force
- Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* - Chapter 1, 5

Theme: What Reinforces Inequality?

1/29 Some Theories

- Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram. 1993. "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy" *APSR*
- Hacker, Jacob S. 2004. "Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States." *The American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 243-260.
- Hacker, Jacob and Paul Pierson. 2011. *Winner Take All Politics*. Section 1.

2/5 Policy Preferences

- Bartels, Chaps 3, 6

2/12 The Deserving Poor

Research Question Due Today

- Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Ch 4
- Devah Pager. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record" *American Journal of Sociology*. *Read the summary on CourseWeb*
- Joseph Soss, 1999. Lessons of Welfare: Policy Design, Political Learning, and Political Action. *The American Political Science Review* 93 (2): 363-380.

2/19 The Rent Is Too Damn High

- Richard Rothstein. 2017. *The Color of Law*, Chapter 10
- Matthew Desmond. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* Chapters 7-8 p. 81-100

2/26 It's the Geography

Revised Question & Outline Due Today

- Kathy Cramer. 2012. "Putting Inequality in its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Politics of Perspective" *APSR*
- Elizabeth Rigby and Gerald Wright, "Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in the American States" *AJPS*

3/5 SPRING BREAK

3/12 You Better Work

- Strolovitch, D. Z. (2013). "Of Mancessions and Hecoveries: Race, gender, and the political construction of economic crises and recoveries." *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(1), 167-176.
- Hacker, Jacob & Paul Pierson. *Winner Take All Politics*. Section 2.

3/19 Other Welfare Policies

- Faricy, C. (2011). "The politics of social policy in America: The causes and effects of indirect versus direct social spending." *The Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 74-83.
- Suzanne Mettler. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy* Chapter 4.

Theme: What are the Consequences for Political Life?

3/26 What Does This Mean For Me

- Silva, J. M. 2013. *Coming Up Short: Working-class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford University Press.

4/2 Representation: Who Gets Represented

Research Question, Theory, Design due today

- Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence* Chapters 1-4

4/9 Representation Cont'd

- Nicholas Carnes. (2012). "Does the numerical underrepresentation of the working class in Congress matter?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 37(1), 5-34.
- Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2005. "Are Voters Better Represented?" *The Journal of Politics* 67 (4): 1206-1227.

4/16- Final Paper Presentations

Final Papers due via CourseWeb, Exam Week