POL-GA 3500: Inequality
Spring 2020
Tuesdays 4:00-5:50pm EST

Instructor Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Office Hours</th>
<th>Meeting Room</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tara Slough</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tara.slough@nyu.edu">tara.slough@nyu.edu</a></td>
<td>F 10 am - 12 pm</td>
<td>Link/Sign-up</td>
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Office hours can be on Zoom or in person (19 W. 4th, Office 415). Please indicate your preference on the sign-up.

Course Motivation

We live an era of rising levels of economic inequality (at least in the United States) and increasing visibility of some social inequalities globally. Diverse literatures in political science examine the causes, manifestations, or outcomes of such inequalities. However, political scientists too often avoid or dance around the study of inequality, even when our work is directly relevant. In light of current policy debates, this arguably represents a missed opportunity. Indeed, the study of inequality is better developed in other social sciences (i.e., economics and sociology). This course seeks to bring together a variety of recent work on inequality from political science and other social sciences to: (1) organize existing literatures around the theme of inequality; and (2) develop new research agendas in political science related to the study of inequality.

In so doing, we will examine a number of “big” questions. For example, how do we define political inequality? Are political and economic inequality distinct? How do we measure inequality? When do political institutions reduce or exacerbate inequality in outcomes? To what extent do perceptions of inequality matter for redistribution preferences? Under what conditions does inequality generate conflict or instability?

Expectations

This is an advanced course that engages with current research in political science and economics. I assume some familiarity with statistical methods and formal models.

Reading and participation (25%):
You are expected to read all required readings and come to class prepared to critically engage with the readings in class discussion every week. Not all readings explicitly discuss “inequality,” though all have implications for the study of inequality. You may want to consider these implications when reading and preparing for class discussion.

Reproduction and Extension of an Article (25%):
During the semester, you will be asked to reproduce and extend one paper on the syllabus. You
may complete this assignment alone or with a partner. Through this assignment, you will learn about:

1. Reproducible workflow and replication package organization. We will apply some aspects of the Berkeley Initiative for Transparent Social Science (BITSS) [Guide for Accelerating Computational Reproducibility in the Social Sciences](https://www.bitss.org) to catalogue and organize replication packages.

2. Accurate and complete communication of a research design. You will formally characterize the research design and examine its properties.

3. Creative applications of secondary data analysis. At a time when many forms of field and human subjects research are infeasible due to the pandemic, we will emphasize ways to build from existing data.

This assignment will take the form of a memo. Guidance for the memo is posted in the course Dropbox. You will be expected to have examined the research design and reproduced (or attempted to reproduce) the paper’s results by the class session in which the work is discussed. The written memo will be due within one week of that class. You are welcome to incorporate feedback or ideas from class discussion in the written memo.

Please select an article by February 9 using this [form](#). I have marked the articles that represent good candidates with a ‡. These articles use very different research designs – which aspects of this assignment are most challenging will depend on the research design of the article that you choose.

**Research Design (50%)**: The final paper for this course is an original research design on a topic related to course materials. Research designs should clearly articulate a research question and provide a comprehensive “roadmap” for a full paper. Your research design may be for an empirical paper, a theory paper, or a theory/empirics paper. Expectations for each type of paper are below:

- For an **empirical paper**: Your research design should include a well-motivated research question. You should then develop an argument in response to this question, drawing out implications that you will test empirically. You should then describe your data sources in detail. If your paper relies on original data collection (i.e., a survey, archival research, or an experiment), you should carefully describe the design of the data collection and/or experiment. If your paper relies exclusively on secondary data, you should collect and process as much of the data as possible. Regardless of your research design and the data you are using, you should simulate any data that you have not yet collected, clearly noting what data is simulated versus “real.” You should then clearly identify the estimands that test the implications of your argument and your estimators thereof. You should then estimate the results using the simulated (or mixed data). Finally, you should explore the properties of your estimator. You can do this analytically (by derivation) or by simulation. For any simulations, you can write your own Monte Carlo simulations or use DeclareDesign.

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1 You may also reproduce papers on the “recommended reading” lists, though you will likely benefit less from class discussion of these works.
• For a **theory paper**: Your paper should present a well-motivated research question. Your paper should then present the model, defending modeling choices and assumptions. You should further identify the equilibrium concept that you will use. The analysis of the model need not be complete, but you should clearly describe: (1) what work you have done to solve the model; and (2) describe your next steps with respect to the analysis.

• For a **theory/empirics paper**: Your paper should draw on the outline for an empirical or theory paper and adopt the “best of both worlds.” The expectation is that you follow the guidance for papers as above, albeit with the acknowledgement that one component may be more developed than the other.

### Readings

Note: All articles are collected in a course Dropbox. Electronic copies of the required books are freely available through Cambridge Core with your NYU credentials.

#### Week 1 – February 2: Introduction and Motivation

**Recommended**


#### Week 2 – February 9: Political(?) Origins of Economic Inequality

**Required**


**Recommended**

Week 3 – February 16: Political vs. Economic Inequality

- **Required**


- **Recommended**


Week 4 – February 23: Measurement of Inequality

- **Required**


- **Recommended**


Week 5 – March 2: Regimes and Transitions

- **Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 6 – March 9: Institutions and Outcomes**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 7 – March 16: Elections**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 8 – March 23: Representation**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 9 – March 30: Identity**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 10 – April 6: Beliefs about Inequality and Preferences for Redistribution**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 11 – April 13: Redistribution I: Policy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 12 – April 20: Redistribution II: Implementation**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 13 – April 27: Spatial Inequality and Segregation**

**Required**

• Recommended
  
  
  

Week 14 – May 4: Conflict

• Required

  
  
  

• Recommended

  
  