Inequality in the distribution of income and wealth has been rising in the United States and throughout the world in recent decades. In this seminar, we will investigate the political factors contributing to economic inequality in the United States, other developed democracies, transition countries, and globally. The first half of the seminar will focus primarily on the United States and the second half will examine inequality in comparative and global perspective. We will review economic and political theories explaining rising inequality, and consider the consequences of economic inequality for political equality, racial divisions, social mobility, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in exacerbating inequality. Throughout the course, we will seek to relate political to economic factors that affect economic inequality, identifying commonalities and differences across countries.

It is assumed that each student has taken Gov 20, Foundations of Comparative Politics, or an equivalent course, and Economics 10a (microeconomics) or equivalent.

Readings: All will be available on Canvas or through Hollis.

Course requirements:

There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam, each worth about 30% of the final grade, both online take-home exams. In addition, each student will write a research paper worth about 35% of the final grade. Attendance and quality of participation in seminar discussion will also be taken into account in determining the final grade.

The research paper must analyze the political sources or consequences of economic inequality, using the concepts and methods discussed in the course. The paper should be about 20 pages in length. It may deal with one or more national political systems, or subnational territorial units such as regions or cities—past paper topics have ranged widely but all have either taken inequality as a factor leading to particular consequences or as the outcome of some particular causal factor. Some papers have had a policy focus, others have been more theoretical. Some have used quantitative data analysis; others have been in-depth qualitative case studies. Regardless of your chosen topic, you must clear it with me and submit a short 1-2 paragraph statement of the question for my approval by March 1. The paper is due on the last day of class, April 26. Late papers will be penalized by one half grade per day, unless there is documented evidence of severe personal or medical problems.

You must comply with the Harvard College Honor Code:
Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

This means that you may study with other students in preparation for exams. However, you may not provide help to or seek help from any other person when taking an exam or writing your paper. When using a direct quotation or paraphrase, be sure to provide an appropriate bibliographic reference to the source.

Schedule of topics and readings:

**Jan. 27.** Trends in US Economic Inequality: Long-Term and COVID-19-related

Emmanuel Saez, "Striking It Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States,” March 2, 2019. [Canvas]


**Feb. 1.** Inequality and Social Mobility in the US


**Feb. 8.** Labor Markets and Wages
David Weil, *The Fissured Workplace*, ch. 1 (pp. 1-27) [on Canvas]


Neil Irwin, “To Understand Rising Inequality, Consider the Janitors at Two Top Companies, Then and Now,” *New York Times*. September 3, 2017. [Canvas]

**Feb. 15.** Social Effects of Inequality


Carol Graham and Sergio Pinto, "The Geography of Desperation in America: Labor force Participation, Mobility, Place, and Well-Being." *Social Science & Medicine* 270: (February 2021). [Canvas].

**Feb. 22.** Economic vs. Political Determinants of Inequality


Luigi Zingales, “Towards a Political Theory of the Firm,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31:3 (Summer 2017), 113-130. [Canvas]

**Mar. 1.** Political Sources of Rising Inequality in the US: Interest groups

*Research paper topic submission deadline*

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pearson, *Winner-Take-All Politics* (2010), chs. 4-6. [Canvas]


**Mar. 8.** Inequality and polarization
Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 2016), chs. 6-8. [Canvas]

Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches, 2nd ed. (MIT Press, 2016), chs. 4-6. [Canvas]


Midterm review session. Date TBD

Midterm exam:
Friday, March 11, 5 PM. Midterm exam posted to course Canvas site
Monday, March 15, 5 PM. Completed midterm exam must be uploaded to Canvas

(March 15. No class. Spring recess)

March 22. Inequality trends in the developed world

OECD, In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All (2015), ch. 1. [Canvas]

Rakesh Kochhar, “Middle Class Fortunes in Western Europe,” Pew Research Center. (April 24, 2017) [Canvas]

Miles Corak, Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility,” Journal of Economic Perspectives27:3 (2013), pp. 79-102. [Canvas]

March 29. Inequality in Transition Countries 1: Russia, China, Germany

Thomas F. Remington, "Food Insecurity and Inequality in Russia." Russian Politics 4(3): (2019). 302-327. [Canvas]

Thomas F. Remington, “Russia” (unpublished ms. [on Canvas].)

April 5. Inequality in Transition Countries 2: Rent-seeking and hidden incomes in China


Thomas Remington, “China” (unpublished ms. [on Canvas]

April 12. Geographic Convergence, Divergence, and Mobility.


**April 19. Piketty and responses**

Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (chs. 6-8). [online through Hollis]


**April 26. Globalization**

**Research paper due**

Branko Milanovic, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, chs. 1-2. [Canvas]

Branko Milanovic, *Worlds Apart*, ch. 1. [Canvas]
