1 Course Description

This course is about the distribution of power in contemporary democratic societies: who governs? Is there a “power elite?” Or, does public policy making incorporate the diverse interests that exist in democratic societies? What is the relationship between income and power? What are the political consequences of increasing income inequality? What are the implications of racial and ethnic inequities for the quality of democratic representation? Which policies increase political inequality? What are effective remedies for unequal influence? Finally, which institutions move democratic practice furthest towards full democratic equality?

This course will address these questions, focusing first on the local distribution of power (in Ferguson, MO, and in other American cities), and then in state and national governments, in a broadly comparative context. For each level of government, we will examine the distribution of power, its relationship to income and sociodemographic distributions, and sustaining policies and institutions.

Students will have the opportunity to work with income and labor force surveys in a mid-term assignment, and in a final paper, to examine different dimensions of American inequality and their implications for the quality of American democracy.
2 Requirements and Grading

Evaluation will be based on the following course requirements:

1. Discussion Papers (10%)
   Students will be required to prepare and circulate a two-page discussion paper once during the quarter. These papers should identify a question that does not receive enough attention in that week's readings, but is important to our understanding of the material. Papers should consider and outline possible answers to these questions, and discuss how the set of possible answers might alter our understanding of the empirical work on each topic. In order to be properly evaluated, discussion papers should be well-written and proof-read; in-text citations (APA style) should be complete and used appropriately. Students will share their analysis in a brief presentation, at the beginning of each week’s section; students can sign up for their preferred topic during the first week of class.

   Discussion papers are due by noon, on Thursday, during the week in which the readings are covered. Late papers will not be accepted; students will be assigned a grade of 0/10 for papers that are not submitted on time.

2. Class and Section Participation (20%)
   Students are expected to have read all course materials before class and section (including their colleagues’ Discussion Papers), and should be prepared to analyze them in detail. Students who do not effectively contribute to class and section discussions – i.e., those who are absent, do not raise on-point questions or comments, or are unprepared – will not receive full credit for participation.

3. Assignment: American Income Inequality. (20%)
   For this assignment, students will use the 2014 Current Population Survey Annual Social And Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) to calculate measures of income inequality for the US and for each state. This hands-on assignment will guide students, step-by-step, through an analysis and comparison of income distributions, with the goal of providing insight into the challenges of assessing overall economic well-being and the effectiveness of government responses to poverty and inequality.

   This assignment will be distributed on April 9 and is due on May 1.*

4. Final Paper. (Topic Memo, 10%; Final Paper, 40%)
   Students will develop their own analysis on a question related to the causes, effects, and remedies of political inequality, using the measures of inequality developed in the Assignment. Students must develop a working hypothesis, informed by the existing political science literature, and provide an empirical test of this hypothesis, or its implications. Topic memos should clearly state a research question, identify three pieces of existing research on the topic (and a brief discussion of their insufficiencies), and outline a strategy for empirical analysis. Students will be encouraged to meet with
their instructor and section leader to review their topic memo, before proceeding with the larger project. (A list of suggested topics will be posted on Coursework early in the quarter.)

Topic memos will be due on May 8; final papers will be due on June 7.*

* N.B. Late assignments, topic memos, and final papers will be penalized at a rate of one-third of a letter grade per day late, for a maximum of six days, at which point students will be assigned a grade of ‘0.’

If you feel strongly that your grade on an assignment does not reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal in the following way: Write a memo that explains, in as much detail as possible, why you think you should have received a different grade. Give the memo to your TA, along with your graded work, and a letter in which you formally request that the assignment be re-graded. If you and your TA cannot reach an agreement, the TA will pass the materials to the course instructor, who will evaluate the work, and your argument in favor of a different grade. The grade assigned by the instructor may be higher, lower, or identical to the grade that you originally received, but it will be final.

3 Laptop/Tablet/Phone Policy

Laptop/tablet/phone use is prohibited during most* class and section meetings. Students should have paper copies, or well-organized notes, for all required readings.

* Laptops will be permitted only on days in which we will discuss the analysis and measurement of income inequality (noted below).

4 Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/dae).
5 Books, Required, and Recommended Reading

This course will draw on a variety of academic research. Most course materials will be posted on Coursework. In addition to these chapters, articles, and essays, we will read most of the following books. Students may wish to purchase their own copies; they will also be on reserve at the library.


All required readings should be completed before class, in the order listed on the syllabus. Recommended readings provide context for the material presented in class and may also be helpful for the completion of assignments, etc..

6 Course Outline

Introduction


Part 1. The Long-Term Consequences of Local Distributions of Power

April 2. Focus on Ferguson, MO

• Masket, Seth. “Ferguson is a Serious Outlier.” *Pacific Standard* August 18, 2014.


April 7. Who Lives Where? Why?


April 9. Geographic and Social Mobility


April 14. Political Representation in American Cities


Part 2. Political Inequality in the American States

April 16. Local Beliefs and the Attitudes about Inequality


April 21. Income Inequality in the American States *


* N.B. Most of this class will be devoted to the analysis of income data and the practical measurement of income inequality. Students should bring their laptops, and be prepared to analyze the CPS dataset, posted on Coursework.

April 23. The American Safety Net

Part 3. Political Inequality and American Democracy

April 28. Unequal Democracy 1


April 30. Unequal Democracy 2

- Bartels, Unequal Democracy. Chapters 6-8.

May 5. Unequal Democracy 3


May 7. [No class.]

- Inequality for All. (Documentary available on Netflix, Amazon Prime, and on reserve at the library).

* N.B. Students should schedule a meeting with the course instructor and section leader to discuss their final research project.

May 12. Income Inequality and Political Polarization


Part 4. The Politics of Inequality in Contemporary Democracies

May 14. Political Roots of Contemporary Inequality


May 19. How Electoral Rules Affect the Poor


**May 21.** Income Inequality, Growth, and Political Stability


• *EconTalk*, Episode: Daron Acemoglu on Inequality, Institutions, and Piketty. November 3, 2014.

**Part 5. Case Study: Post-Secondary Education as a Remedy to Political Inequality?**

**May 26.** Education and Democratic Citizenship


**May 28.** Politics of Post-Secondary Education, continued

• *This American Life*, Episode 550: “Three Miles.”

• Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality*. Chapters 4-6.

**Conclusion**