
POL 345Y

Class and Inequality in American Politics

Fall 2025

Harrison Hall 210

Tues & Thurs 2:50 – 4:10 PM

Instructor: Dr. Kevin Reuning (ROY-ning)

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Course Website: Canvas

Office: Harrison Hall 222

Office Hours: Monday: 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Tuesday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM

Schedule appointments: <https://calendly.com/reuning>

Course Description

After decades of growing economic inequality, inequality has become central to American politics. The surprise election of Donald Trump is often explained as the result of a growing disconnect between elites and working class white voters. While the mobilization of the Occupy Wall Street movement less than a decade ago shows that voter anger at inequality is not limited to one political ideology. In this class we will explore how economic inequality shapes the political space and why policies directed at economic inequality often fail. We will also explore how economic inequality intersects with other types of inequality.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to define economic inequality and explain how it relates to political inequality.
2. Students will demonstrate evidence-based reasoning by writing a paper on a particular political issue and how economic inequality impacts that issue.
3. Student will critically assess the methodologies used to study economic inequality and its impact and recognize the limitations of those methodologies.
4. Students will be able to explain how economic inequality impacts the contemporary American politics environment.
5. Students will be able to explain the role of inequality in a modern democracy and evaluate the normative implications.

Required Books

- There are *no* required books for this course. All readings will be on canvas. There are some readings that are only available via the library and through annoying online platforms.
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Course Policies

Respect

This course will discuss and tackle issues where opinions can differ, and where opinions can be strongly held. We will do so with respect for all members of the class, in a way that everyone feels welcome to share and discuss. It is also important to remember that this is a *political science* class, not a discussion of politics. We will be discussing how economic inequality impacts political life, including our own. I do not expect anyone to be detached from the subject matter, as these are important subjects, but I do expect everyone to remain focused on the goals of the class: understanding how economic inequality shapes politics.

Preparation

This is a 300 level courses and so you will be expected to do the readings for the day prior to coming to class. In addition, given the nature of the course, I expect you to be aware of current events. Class discussion will include translating what we have been discussing in class to current events. As such, you will be better prepared to participate if you are aware of what is happening. **If it becomes clear that students are not doing the readings in preparation for class we will begin doing reading quizzes.**

Technology

In the class you are expected to be focused on what is going on within the class. Laptops will be required on some days. On those days that laptops are not required you may bring one to take notes, etc. If the laptop becomes a distraction to those around you we will look at reevaluating this policy.

Generative AI (ChatGPT, etc)

The basic question to ask over when you can and cannot use AI is whether your use of AI supplements what you have done or if it replaces what you have done. Below I provide where AI use is acceptable, where it is unacceptable, and places where we can have a conversation about AI use. **Note: This is true for my class. Other faculty might create different boundaries/rules that reflect their pedagogical goals.**

| Acceptable Uses | Unacceptable Uses |
|--|--|
| Checking for grammar or spelling. | Rewriting whole sections of your paper. |
| Creating catchy titles. | Summarizing an article you have not read |
| Checking code, asking questions of how code works. | Writing code without your intervention beyond providing it the assignment. |
| Formatting citation. | Generating assignments in their entirety. |

Philosophy

Generative AI is a powerful tool but there are two important reasons for why you shouldn't use AI for the "bad uses" above. First, in order to learn you need to actually complete tasks. By completing these tasks you can build up basic skills that you can then use to do things that AI tools cannot do. For example, I can find information online that AI tools cannot find because I have a lot of experience finding more basic things.

Second, AI tools have a lot of flaws. These flaws are noticeable to experts but not to beginners. You will only be able to work past these flaws though if you practice things on your own without using AI. For example, AI is very good at making confident claims without any real evidence or support for those claims. You need to learn how to provide evidence for a claim so you don't fall for this.

Email Policy

I will check email between 9am and 6pm, and will try to always respond to any contact within 24 hours. Although I do not expect formality in email communications, I do expect you to respect that emails are not a costless act.

Grade Distribution and Assignments

| Item | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Weekly Quizzes (3 lowest dropped) | 35% |
| Class Activities | 10% |
| Mini Projects | |
| What is class? | 5% |
| Does inequality shape perceptions? | 10% |
| Who is lobbying? | 10% |
| Who are our leaders? | 10% |
| How does inequality matter? | 20% |

Weekly Quizzes

There is no attendance in this class, instead, there will be *weekly in-class quizzes*. These quizzes are meant to test whether you've been keeping up with the readings and taking notes in class. Each quiz will be 5 multiple choice questions (with maybe a few short answer questions throughout the course of the semester), and you will have access to your notes. We will hold the last 5-10 minutes of class for those quizzes and can be on **either** class day during the week.

If you take notes on your computer you will be allowed to access your computer but you **cannot** type on it during the quiz time. If you are typing I will assume that you are using ChatGPT or something similar to help answer the question and you will receive a 0 on that week's quiz.

If you miss a quiz you will **not** be able to make it up **unless** you miss it for a university sanctioned event, a religious holiday or military training. The lowest 3 will be dropped, so missing one or two should not impact your grade significantly, as long as you are keeping up and doing well on the other quizzes.

In Class Activities

Throughout the semester we will work on in-class activities that will require you to research or apply knowledge from what we have learned. You will be graded in your participation in these activities. If you miss class you need to check canvas. I will post any activity we did there and you will be expected to submit it within a week of the class you missed. These assignments will be worth 5 points total. **Because you have a week from missing class to complete them there are no extensions**

Mini Projects

Throughout the semester you will complete short projects where you will collect some data, and think through how it fits with what we've discussed in class and what it means more broadly for American politics. Below I briefly explain each of these projects with much more detail provided in the associated canvas page.

| Project | Due Date | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| What is class? | Sept 18 | 5% |
| Does inequality shape perceptions? | Oct 2 | 10% |
| Who is lobbying? | Nov 2 | 10% |
| Who are our leaders? | Nov 23 | 10% |
| How does inequality matter? | Finals Date | 20% |

What is class?

Social class is important but can also be hard to define and identify. For this project you will talk to two other college students about their experience applying for college, as well as their own perception of their social class status. You will look at these responses and relate them

to your own experiences to write up the ways that you see class shaping their life at college. The student does *not* have to go to Miami University but I do think that will make it more interesting for you.

How does inequality shape perceptions?

For this project you are going to examine the polling for 2 different political issues. You will look at crosstabs to see what groups support and what groups oppose different positions. You are going to present this data in either a table or bar chart and then explain what differences you find. Is class the biggest split in American politics? What is? Given what we've learned, how is this surprising or not?

Who is lobbying?

Lobbying is one of the most obvious places to find economic inequality in American politics. For this project you are going to examine the lobbying groups in a particular state to identify who is spending the most, and then what that means for those trying to make political change.

Who are our leaders?

For this project you will again look at a state and identify some of the political leaders. You'll then have to do research to figure out what their background is. The final product will explain who these individuals are and what their backgrounds mean for the issues that will be easy (or difficult) for them to spend their time on.

Does Inequality Matter?

Your final project will be answering the question: How does economic inequality shape American politics?

Extra Credit

I will provide several extra credit opportunities throughout the semester and will announce them in class and on Canvas.

Late work policy

In order to receive a deadline extension on one of the mini-projects, you should contact me more than **24 hours before the deadline**. If an assignment is turned in late without an extension but within 24 hours of the due date, your grade will decrease by 5 percentage points (a 95% would become a 90%). For every additional 24 hours after this it loses another 5%.

Letter Grade Distribution

| | | | |
|---------------|----|---------------|----|
| >= 93.00 | A | 73.00 - 76.99 | C |
| 90.00 - 92.99 | A- | 70.00 - 72.99 | C- |
| 87.00 - 89.99 | B+ | 67.00 - 69.99 | D+ |
| 83.00 - 86.99 | B | 63.00 - 67.99 | D |
| 80.00 - 82.99 | B- | 60.00 - 62.99 | D- |
| 77.00 - 79.99 | C+ | <59.99 | F |

Academic Integrity

Miami University is a scholarly community whose members believe that excellence in education is grounded in qualities of character as well as of intellect. We respect the dignity of other persons, the rights and property of others, and the right of others to hold and express disparate beliefs. We believe in honesty, integrity, and the importance of moral conduct. We defend the freedom of inquiry that is the heart of learning and combine that freedom with the exercise of judgment and the acceptance of personal responsibility.

Miami demands the highest standards of professional conduct from its students, faculty, and staff. As a community of scholars, our fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Integrity in research and creative activities and in academic study is based on sound disciplinary practices and expectations, as well as a commitment to the values of honesty and integrity.

Any student caught committing academic dishonesty will, at a minimum, receive a 0 for the assignment at hand. For more information on academic dishonesty and potential punishments visit <http://MiamiOH.edu/integrity>.

Disability Services

If you are a student with a physical, learning, medical and/or psychiatric disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course that are listed in this syllabus, you are encouraged to contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 529-1541 (V/TTY), located in the Shriver Center, Room 304.

Course Outline

Introduction to Political Science

- **August 26**

- *Goal:* Is calling a political science a science just a funny joke?

Inequality History and Measurement

- **August 28**

- *Goal:* Understand how economic inequality is measured and how it has increased overtime.
- Pages 1 to 25 of Donovan, Sarah A., Joseph Dalaker, Marc Labonte, Paul D. Romero. 2021. "The U.S. Income Distribution: Trends and Issues." Congressional Research Service. R44705.

- **September 2 & 4**

- *Goal:* Identify different economic theories for why economic inequality has increased.
- Nolan, B., Richiardi, M.G. and Valenzuela, L., 2019. "The drivers of income inequality in rich countries." *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 33(4), pp.1285-1324.

What is Class?

- **September 9 & 11**

- *Goal:* Understand how economic class shapes an individual's life
- Chapter 1 of Lee, Elizabeth M. 2016. *Class and Campus Life: Managing and Experiencing Inequality at an Elite College*. Cornell University Press.

How does inequality shape opinions?

- **September 16 & 18**

- *Goals:* Understand the social science research process and apply it towards economic preferences.
- ["6 facts about Americans' views of government spending and the deficit"](#)

- **September 23 & 25**

- *Goal:* Identify competing theories for American preferences towards income inequality.
- Suhay, E., Tenenbaum, M., and Bartola, A. 2022. *Explanations for Inequality and Partisan Polarization in the US, 1980-2020*. In The Forum. De Gruyter.
- Chapters 6 of Condon, Meghan and Amber Wichowsky. *The Economic Other: Inequality in the American Political Imagination*. University of Chicago Press.

Inequality in Political Organizations

- **September 30 & October 2**

- *Goal:* Understand pluralism and what how it fails to explain the current status of interest groups.
- Federalist # 10
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman Philip Edward Jones, Hye Young You, Traci Burch, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2014. "Louder Chorus- Same Accent: The Representation of Interests in Pressure Politics, 1991-2011." Brookings Report

- **October 7 & 9**

- *Goal:* Introduce different types of political organizations and the strategies they use to be successful
- Schlozman, K., Jones, P., You, H., Burch, T., Verba, S., & Brady, H. 2015. "Organizations and the Democratic Representation of Interests: What Does It Mean When Those Organizations Have No Members?" *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(4), 1017-1029.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A. 2014. "Who passes business's"model bills"? Policy capacity and corporate influence in US state politics." *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), 582-602.

- **October 14 & 16**

- *Goal:* Understand the unique nature of labor unions and how they shape class politics
- Frymer, P., and Grumbach, J. M. 2021. Labor unions and white racial politics. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(1), 225-240.

- **October 21 & 23**

- *Goal:* Applying intersectional lense to interest groups to think about who they represent.
- Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. "Do interest groups represent the disadvantaged? Advocacy at the intersections of race, class, and gender." *The Journal of Politics* 68(4):894-910.
- Dwidar, M. A. (2022). "Coalitional lobbying and intersectional representation in American rulemaking." *American Political Science Review*, 116(1), 301-321.

Political Representation and Inequality

- **October 28 & 30**

- *Goal:* Explain how elected officials view of groups can shape the policy they create.

- Schneider, Anne, and Helen Ingram. 1993. "Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy." *American Political Science Review* 87(2) 334-347

- **November 4 & 6**

- *Goal:* Understand how descriptive representation can shape policy outcomes.
- Chapter 4 of Butler, Daniel M. 2014. *Representing the advantaged: How politicians reinforce inequality*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carnes, Nicholas. "Does the numerical underrepresentation of the working class in Congress matter?." *Legislative studies quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2012): 5-34.

- **November 11 & 13**

- *Goal:* Explain the evidence of unrepresentative policies and connect it to theories we've discussed throughout class.
- Flavin, Patrick, and William W. Franko. "Economic segregation and unequal policy responsiveness." *Political Behavior* 42 (2020): 845-864.
- Schaffner, B., Rhodes, J., & La Raja, R. 2020. "Economic Inequality in Representation on Municipal Councils and in Policy." In *Hometown Inequality: Race, Class, and Representation in American Local Politics* (pp. 164-190).

Public Policy for the Poor and the Rich

- **November 18 & 20**

- *Goal:* Identify policies that target poverty and how the United State's policies differ from other countries.
- Daguerre, Anne. 2008. "The second phase of US welfare reform, 2000-2006: blaming the poor again?." *Social Policy & Administration* 42(4): 362-378.

- **November 25**

- *Goal:* Be able to explain how taxes impact income and wealth distributions and understand how our current tax system developed.
- Faricy, Christopher. 2016. "The distributive politics of tax expenditures: how parties use policy tools to distribute federal money to the rich and the poor." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 4(1): 110-125.

- **December 2 & December 4**

- *Goal:* Understand how federalism and inequality interact and the role of states, counties and municipalities in shaping inequality.
- Kelly, Nathan J., and Christopher Witko. 2012. "Federalism and American inequality." *The Journal of Politics* 74(2): 414-426.

Additional Resources

- Howe Writing Center: <http://miamioh.edu/hcwe>
- Students also may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to call Student Counseling Service (513-529-4634). For emergencies outside of business hours, the Community and Counseling and Crisis Center (844-427-4747) has a 24-hour hotline.
- Students come to Miami from a variety of economic backgrounds. If you are having financial trouble I urge you to make use of the services available through Miami Cares Resources: <https://www.miamioh.edu/emss/offices/student-success-center/miami-cares/index.html>