

# INEQUALITY AND PUBLIC OPINION\*

## MA Political Science, Summer 2020

Last updated: April 22, 2020

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**Time:** Wednesdays (only select weeks), 12-1pm.  
**Location:** Online (platform tbd).  
**Office hours:** by appointment (Skype/UNICOM#3.4330)<sup>1</sup>

**Instructor:**

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### COVID-19 NOTICE

Due to the current situation the course will be held **completely online**, with only a reduced number of **interactive sessions**. Greater emphasis than usual will be put on **guided self-study**.

While this requires more self-organization on your end, it should also give you the flexibility to accommodate coursework during these extraordinary circumstances. If there is anything that inhibits you from taking the course as outlined below, or you face any challenges during the term, please let me know immediately, so we can find a feasible solution.

## 1 Course Description

Economic inequality has been on the rise around most of the world for decades. Although it is at the root of many societal challenges, governments have put no, or few, redistributive policies into place that would counteract rising inequality. This is especially surprising in Western Democracies where public opinion and resulting electoral pressures could be expected to push governments towards such policies. At the same time, there are puzzling

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\*Preliminary, might be subject to minor changes.

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differences between countries. Although Europe has lower levels of inequality than the United States, Europeans are generally much more supportive of redistribution. In this course, we set out to understand these dynamics. Starting with the bigger picture, we first study how inequality and public opinion have changed in the past decades, and what implications these changes have for policy-making. We then address in detail the origins of public opinion about inequality by zooming in on what people know about inequality, when they regard it as wrong or unfair, and what kind of redistributive policies they prefer. At the end of the course, students will be able to manoeuvre contemporary debates on the origins and importance of public opinion about inequality.

## Goals

The main goal of the course is to acquaint students with contemporary debates on the origins and importance of public opinion about inequality, especially in the context of Western democracies. In addition, the course advances students' scientific literacy by closely working through select studies on the topic.

## Course format

Due to current situation, the course will be held entirely online (should the situation suddenly allow for in-person seminars, online study will remain as an option). In addition to a welcome and wrap-up meeting, the course is split into six two-week blocks. At the beginning of each block, short video lectures introducing the topic will be made available. You then have two weeks to complete the required readings (usually two) and accompanying worksheets. Each block ends with an one-hour online meeting (for exact dates and deadlines, see schedule below).

To participate in these meeting you need a stable internet connection as well as access to a laptop or phone (please get in touch if you don't have access to either). For better audio, I advice using a headset during the meetings.

## 2 Course Requirements

Students will be assessed based on the following assignments (all are mandatory to pass the course):

- **Worksheets.** All students have to complete a total of six worksheets throughout the course (one for each block). These worksheets serve as a reading guide and include questions to assess the understanding of the assigned texts.
- **Research paper.** At the end of the course, students have to write a research paper on the *consequences of the current crisis for inequality and public opinion* (1,500 words for 3CP, 3,000 words for 6CP, +/-10%). Therefore, students have to develop a concrete question and argument based on a theme covered in the course and integrate the corresponding readings. All students need to set up one consultation with the instructor before the last meeting. Papers are due six weeks after the last meeting.

- **Research plan (optional).** In addition to the small version of the research paper above, MA students in Political Science have the option to submit a “Hausarbeit” in the form of a research plan. This research plan needs to develop a concrete research question, review the related literature, derive one or more testable hypothesis and lay out a plan for the empirical analysis (i.e. data, method). The research plan should consume about 6,000 words (+/-10%) and needs to be submitted within three months after the last meeting.

## Grading

All assignments are graded on a 100-point scale. For the final grade, points are weighted and summed as follows. Average of the three best worksheets (50%) plus research paper (50%). Points are converted to final grades as indicated in the table below. All documents have to be submitted in PDF format over studIP.

Points	Grade
100–96	1.0
95–91	1.3
90–86	1.7
85–81	2.0
80–76	2.3
75–71	2.7
70–66	3.0
65–61	3.3
60–56	3.7
55–51	4.0
50–0	5.0

## Late Submission

Submissions that are up to 12 hours late are downgraded by one full grade (e.g. from 1.7 to 2.7), between 12 and 24 hours by two full grades. Submissions after more than 24 hours are not accepted. Exceptions are granted only in the case of illness and personal emergencies (these must be communicated as early as possible).

## E-learning

Important updates, videos, texts, and other resources are shared by the instructor through the university’s e-learning platform, studIP (<https://elearning.uni-bremen.de>). All participants need to enroll for the course on the platform in order to successfully complete the course. It is their responsibility to check for updates and announcements, at least on a weekly basis.

## Academic Integrity

Academic community builds on original scholarly work and a constant exchange of ideas. It is therefore imperative to fully acknowledge one’s use of other people’s work, be it as

a quotation or by paraphrasing it. Failure to acknowledge any source, also called plagiarism (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism>), leads to downgrading and possibly failure of the course (please consult your Prüfungsordnung [“examinations regulations”] for details). Specialized software makes it extremely easy to discover plagiarism! Note that plagiarism includes copying from your classmates.

Proper acknowledgement is done by citing the respective source, indicating the name(s) of the authors or institutions and date of publication. A reference list at the end of your document then lists details of all citations, e.g. names, dates, title of publication, publisher. There are different citation styles. I recommend the widely used Harvard style (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard\\_style](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_style)), but you may use any other as long as you use it consistently.

### 3 Readings

All readings are available through studIP. Please use the worksheets to guide you through the mandatory readings. Supplementary readings are marked with a star (★).

### 4 Schedule

\*\*\* Ahead of our first meeting, please watch the introductory video on studIP \*\*\*

#### Welcome

##### MEETING

- April 22, 12-1pm.

#### Block 1: Inequality around the World

##### READINGS

- Wilkinson & Pickett (2011), *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, Bloomsburg Press. [Chapters 1-2]
- Alvaredo et al. (2017), *World Inequality Report 2018*, World Inequality Laboratory. [Chapters 2.1 & 2.3]

##### ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 1, due on day before meeting.

##### MEETING

- April 29, 12-1pm.

#### Block 2: Public Opinion in (Western) Democracies

##### READINGS

- Kenworthy & McCall (2009), Inequality, Public Opinion and Redistribution, *Socio-Economic Review*, 6(1).
- Gilens (2005), Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(5).
- ★ Milanovic (2000), The median-voter hypothesis, income inequality, and income redistribution: an empirical test with the required data, *European Journal of Political Economy*, 16(3).

ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 2, due on day before meeting.

MEETING

- May 13, 12-1pm.

### Block 3: Political Inequality and Distributive Conflict

READINGS

- Lupu & Pontusson (2011), The Structure of Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution, *American Political Science Review*, 105(2).
- Kelly & Enns (2010), Inequality and the Dynamics of Public Opinion: The Self-Reinforcing Link Between Economic Inequality and Mass Preferences, *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(4).
- ★ Finseraas (2012), Poverty, ethnic minorities among the poor, and preferences for redistribution in European regions, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22(2).

ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 3, due on day before meeting.

MEETING

- May 27, 12-1pm.

### Block 4: Perceptions of Inequality

READINGS

- Gimpelson & Treisman (2018), Misperceiving Inequality, *Economics & Politics* 30(1).
- Kuziemko et al. (2015), How Elastic Are Preferences for Redistribution? Evidence from Randomized Survey Experiments, *American Economic Review*, 105(4).
- ★ Trump (2017), Income Inequality Influences Perceptions of Legitimate Income Differences, *British Journal of Political Science*.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 4, due on day before meeting.

MEETING

- June 10, 12-1pm.

## Block 5: Inequality and Fairness

### READINGS

- Shariff, Wiwad & Aknin (2016), Income Mobility Breeds Tolerance for Income Inequality: Cross-national and Experimental Evidence, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 11(3).
- Becker (2019), Mind the Income Gaps? Experimental Evidence of Information's Lasting Effect on Redistributive Preferences, *Social Justice Research*, online first.
- ★ Corak (2013), Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(3).
- ★ Alesina, Stantcheva & Teso (2018), Intergenerational Mobility and Preferences for Redistribution, *American Economic Review*, 108(2).

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 5, due on day before meeting.

### MEETING

- June 24, 12-1pm.

## Block 6: Policy and Preferences

### READINGS

- Beramendi & Rehm (2016), Who Gives, Who Gains? Progressivity and Preferences, *Comparative Political Studies* 49(4).
- Neimans, Busemeyer & Garritzmann (2018) How Popular Are Social Investment Policies Really? Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Eight Western European Countries, *European Sociological Review*, 34(3).
- ★ Ballard-Rosa, Martin & Scheve (2016), The Structure of American Income Tax Policy Preferences, *Journal of Politics*, 79(1).
- ★ Bartels (2005), Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind, *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(1).

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 6, due on day before meeting.

### MEETING

- July 8, 12-1pm.

## Wrap-up: Inequality and Public Opinion during the Corona crisis

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Worksheet 7, due on day before meeting.

### MEETING

- July 15, 12-2pm.