

Economic Inequalities and Their Effects on Society

Given by Herman van de Werfhorst

Tuesdays 11:00-13:00

Register [online](#)

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This course integrates insights from sociology, political science and economics on the societal consequences of economic inequalities, such as inequalities by earnings, household income, and wealth. A few important lines of research will be discussed on which the jury is still out, and debates are currently held. One line of research studies societal consequences outside the economic sphere; societies that have larger economic inequalities are said to have all kinds of societal ills, such as bad health, more crime, less social trust, and fewer interpersonal engagements. Another research agenda proposes the Great Gatsby Curve: intergenerational social mobility goes down if economic inequalities go up. A third line of scholarship discusses household and gender inequalities in light of economic distributions. A fourth line of research discusses global economic inequalities and their potential effects on contemporary world-wide problems such as climate change and migration. The course discusses these scientific debates, including the proposed mechanisms for why economic inequalities matter, and possible moderations of inequality and its effects by institutional contexts.

Participation:

Participants are expected to read the core readings of every week, and come well-prepared to class. Should you be interested to read more about the topic of the week, there are some suggestions under “Optional readings”. If you want to get suggestions for further reading on related topics, let me know and we can find a way to help you find your way.

Participants write a short reflection note each week (see below for instructions). These can be uploaded on Brightspace, not later than Monday at noon on the day before the seminar. We use these notes as input for the discussions we can have on the readings. Researchers are also asked to give one presentation during the course (instructions below).

Weekly reflection note:

Please write a short note of max 300 words to highlight issues you’d want to discuss in class, and/or additional research questions you think about in relation to the readings.

Presentation:

Please prepare a presentation of around 10 minutes, with the aim to bring the outside world into the classroom. Preferably related to the readings of that week, but you can make the case for choosing connection to another week's readings, researchers connect scholarly work to issues discussed in broader society. This could, for instance, refer to reports of NGO's or governments, news items, websites, whichever you please.

Learning objectives

- Understand different concepts of economic inequalities
- Understand the broad research questions in the field about the correlates of economic inequalities in society
- Understand research designs used to study income inequality patterns and effects
- Be able to connect the academic literature to real world phenomena concerning economic inequalities.

Programme

Week 1: Introduction: Economic inequalities, what are we talking about?

9 January 2024 – Seminar Room 2

Atkinson, Anthony B. 2015. *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* Harvard University Press. (chapter 9: Shrinking the cake?).

Maio, Fernando G. De. 2007. "Income Inequality Measures." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 61(10):849–52. doi: [10.1136/jech.2006.052969](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2006.052969).

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press. (Chapter 1: Income and output).

Pfeffer, Fabian T., and Nora Waitkus. 2021. "The Wealth Inequality of Nations." *American Sociological Review* 86(4):567–602. doi: [10.1177/00031224211027800](https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211027800).

Week 2: Economic inequalities and social mobility

Friday, 19 January 2024, 11:00-13:00 2023 – Seminar Room 3

Literature:

Corak, Miles. 2013. "Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27(3):79–102.

DiPrete, Thomas A. 2020. "The Impact of Inequality on Intergenerational Mobility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1):379–98. doi: [10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054814](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054814).

Durlauf, Steven N., Andros Kourtellos, and Chih Ming Tan. 2022. "The Great Gatsby Curve." *Annual Review of Economics* 14(1):571–605. doi: [10.1146/annurev-economics-082321-122703](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-082321-122703).

Week 3: Social mobility within and across generations

23 January 2023, 11:00-13:00, – Seminar Room 3

Cheng, Siwei, and Xi Song. 2019. “Linked Lives, Linked Trajectories: Intergenerational Association of Intragenerational Income Mobility.” *American Sociological Review* 84(6):1037–68. doi: [10.1177/0003122419884497](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419884497).

Lersch, Philipp M., Wiebke Schulz, and George Leckie. 2020. “The Variability of Occupational Attainment: How Prestige Trajectories Diversified within Birth Cohorts over the Twentieth Century.” *American Sociological Review* 85(6):1084–1116. doi: [10.1177/0003122420966324](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420966324).

McEwen, Craig A., and Bruce S. McEwen. 2017. “Social Structure, Adversity, Toxic Stress, and Intergenerational Poverty: An Early Childhood Model.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(1):445–72. doi: [10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053252](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053252).

Week 4: Economic inequality and health

30 January 2024

Link, Bruce G., and Jo Phelan. 1995. “Social Conditions As Fundamental Causes of Disease.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 80–94. doi: [10.2307/2626958](https://doi.org/10.2307/2626958).

Barnes, Lucy, Peter A. Hall, and Rosemary C. R. Taylor. 2023. “The Structural Sources of Socioeconomic Inequalities in Health: A Cross-National Perspective.” *Socius* 9:23780231231174832. doi: [10.1177/23780231231174832](https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231174832).

Thoits, Peggy A. 2010. “Stress and Health: Major Findings and Policy Implications.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51(1_suppl):S41–53. doi: [10.1177/0022146510383499](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510383499).

Week 5: Mechanisms for inequality effects: resource-based and psychosocial explanations

6 February 2024

Wilkinson, Richard G., and Kate E. Pickett. 2009. “Income Inequality and Social Dysfunction.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:493–511.

Lynch, John W., George D. Smith, George A. Kaplan, and James S. House. 2000. “Income Inequality and Mortality: Importance to Health of Individual Income, Psychosocial Environment, or Material Conditions.” *British Medical Journal* 320:1200–1204.

Van de Werfhorst, Herman G., and Wiemer Salverda. 2012. “Consequences of Economic Inequality: Introduction to a Special Issue.” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 30(4):377–87. doi: [10.1016/j.rssm.2012.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2012.08.001).

Smith, Heather J., Thomas F. Pettigrew, Gina M. Pippin, and Silvana Bialosiewicz. 2012. "Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16(3):203–32. doi: [10.1177/1088868311430825](https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868311430825).

Please also re-read McEwan & McEwan of week 3.

Optional readings:

Blau, Judith R., and Peter M. Blau. 1982. "The Cost of Inequality: Metropolitan Structure and Violent Crime." *American Sociological Review* 47(1):114–29. doi: [10.2307/2095046](https://doi.org/10.2307/2095046).

Pearlin, Leonard I., Scott Schieman, Elena M. Fazio, and Stephen C. Meersman. 2005. "Stress, Health, and the Life Course: Some Conceptual Perspectives." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46(2):205–19. doi: [10.1177/002214650504600206](https://doi.org/10.1177/002214650504600206).

Week 6: Economic inequality and politics

13 February 2024

Abou-Chadi, Tarik, and Simon Hix. 2021. "Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right? Education, Class, Multiparty Competition, and Redistribution in Western Europe." *The British Journal of Sociology* 72(1):79–92. doi: [10.1111/1468-4446.12834](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12834).

Andersen, Robert, Burgoon, Brian, and Van de Werfhorst, Herman G. 2014. Inequality, Legitimacy and the Political System. Pp. 218-238 in Salverda, Wiemer, Nolan, Brian, Checchi, Daniele, Marx, Ive, McKnight, Abigail, Tóth, István György, Van de Werfhorst, Herman G. (eds.). *Changing Inequalities and Societal Impacts in Rich Countries: Analytical and Comparative Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Starmans, Christina, Mark Sheskin, and Paul Bloom. 2017. "Why People Prefer Unequal Societies." *Nature Human Behaviour* 1:0082. doi: [10.1038/s41562-017-0082](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0082).

Optional readings:

A debate:

Mijs, Jonathan J. B. 2021. "The Paradox of Inequality: Income Inequality and Belief in Meritocracy Go Hand in Hand." *Socio-Economic Review* 19(1):7–35. doi: [10.1093/ser/mwy051](https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy051).

Bartram, David. 2023. "Does Belief in Meritocracy Increase with Inequality? A Reconsideration for European Countries." *The British Journal of Sociology* 74(5):763–80. doi: [10.1111/1468-4446.13042](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13042).

Week 7: Global inequality

20 February 2024

Hung, Ho-fung. 2021. "Recent Trends in Global Economic Inequality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1):349–67. doi: [10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-105810](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-105810).

Lakner, Christoph. 2017. "Global Inequality." Pp. 259–79 in *After Piketty. The Agenda for Economics and Inequality*, edited by H. Boushey, J. B. DeLong, and M. Steinbaum. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Paglialunga, Elena, Andrea Coveri, and Antonello Zanfei. 2022. "Climate Change and Within-Country Inequality: New Evidence from a Global Perspective." *World Development* 159:106030. doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106030).

Optional reading:

Milanovic, Branko. 2012. "Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: In History and Now. An Overview." [*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6259*](#).

Week 8: Economic Inequality and Geography

Friday, 23 February 2024, 11:00 – 13:00, Sala del Capitolo

Reardon, Sean F., and Kendra Bischoff. 2011. "Income Inequality and Income Segregation." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4):1092–1153. doi: [10.1086/657114](https://doi.org/10.1086/657114).

van Ham, Maarten, Tiit Tammaru, Rūta Ubarevičienė, and Heleen Janssen, eds. 2021. *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality: A Global Perspective*. Springer Nature. (Chapter 1). (<https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/48225>).

de Haas, Hein, Mathias Czaika, Marie-Laurence Flahaux, Edo Mahendra, Katharina Natter, Simona Vezzoli, and María Villares-Varela. 2019. "International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects." *Population and Development Review* 45(4):885–922. doi: [10.1111/padr.12291](https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12291).

Week 9: Partner choice and economic inequalities

05-03-2024 11:00-13:00

Breen, Richard, and Leire Salazar. 2011. "Educational Assortative Mating and Earnings Inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(3):808–43. doi: [10.1086/661778](https://doi.org/10.1086/661778).

Lersch, Philipp M., and Reinhard Schunck. 2023. "Assortative Mating and Wealth Inequalities Between and Within Households." *Social Forces* 102(2):454–74. doi: [10.1093/sf/soad064](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soad064).

TO BE COMPLETED

Week 10: The household and economic inequalities

12-03-2024

Bittman, Michael, Paula England, Liana Sayer, Nancy Folbre, and George Matheson. 2003. "When Does Gender Trump Money? Bargaining and Time in Household Work." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(1):186–214. doi: [10.1086/378341](https://doi.org/10.1086/378341).

TO BE COMPLETED