

Reading Tips and Study Questions

CLASS FIVE

Required reading

1. **Marty Gilens**, "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness," in *Who gets represented*, edited by Enns and Wlezien (New York: Russell Sage, 2011).
2. **J. Phillip Thompson**, "Is empowerment possible?" In *Double trouble: Black mayors, black communities and the call for a deep democracy* (New York: Oxford, 2005).
3. **Katherine Newman**, "[In the South and West, a Tax on Being Poor.](#)"

Recommended reading

4. **Cathy Cohen**, "Minority report: Kanye West, Barack Obama and political alienation," in *Democracy remixed* (New York: Oxford, 2010).

Session overview

In this session, we will explore the causes and consequences of *political* inequality—as opposed to economic or spatial inequality—in a more focused, evidence-based way.

But this look at political forces and outcomes includes, not surprisingly, the need to examine the links among those mutually reinforcing types of inequality: for example, how the labor market, the rules of campaign finance and lobbying, the geography of political jurisdictions and "territorial" politics, racialized politics, and more intersect.

Discussion questions

1. After the surge in social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the influential scholar-activists Piven and Cloward concluded, with disappointment, that poor groups do not have the capacity for sustained influence in America's politics and policymaking. Other analysts, including **Thompson**, suggest a more evolutionary perspective. Consider the arguments for participatory democracy and Thompson's idea of "deep pluralism." Do these counter-arguments convincingly address the pessimism by Piven and Cloward or other observers?

2. Katherine Newman argues that regressive tax policies have strongly negative effects on the poor. Newman traces the origins of such policies to post-slavery politics. Have you seen similar trends in states outside the South? If so, what are their political origins?

Recommended only, for further reference:

3. Skim Cathy Cohen's chapter. Look, in particular, at the graphs on pgs. 146-149. Do you agree with her that black youth are particularly alienated? Why do you think Latino youth seemed to be more hopeful about the future? Given recent trends in immigration policy, the Dream Act followed by stalled progress in immigration reform and continued mass deportations of immigrants, do you think Latino youth are likely to be as hopeful as in Cohen's study? Do you think white youth alienation from government has the same causes as black youth alienation? What might be the consequences of these trends for community engagement and political participation?

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