

## Hidden, Yet Pervasive: Social Inequality in Journalism (Research)

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Special Issue Editors

Social inequality is typically understood as the unequal distribution of (economic) resources, power, and prestige within society, where conditions of high inequality grant privileges, opportunities, and rewards to individuals in certain positions while denying them to others (Ballantine et al., 2019). Forms of social inequality are growing globally (e.g., Piketty, 2014) and lie at the heart of many burning problems of our time, ranging from political polarization over climate change to the societal impact of generative AI. The 2024 Human Development Report by the United Nations identifies social inequalities as a key to addressing today's grand challenges. In a deeply mediatized world, public discourses around social inequality are pivotal to how these challenges develop and unfold—positioning journalism research at the forefront of their analysis. While journalism research has a rich tradition of examining certain forms of inequality (e.g., gender inequality; see Steiner, 2012), some forms remain underexplored (e.g., class inequality; see Usher, 2021), and others are largely neglected in our field (e.g., wealth inequality, environmental inequality, rural-urban divides).

Against this backdrop, the special issue aims to stimulate critical reflection on what and how journalism scholarship can contribute to understanding the complex dynamics around social inequality in contemporary societies. Specifically, we invite works that focus on those dimensions of social inequality and journalism that have received limited scholarly attention. We welcome contributions that foster a more holistic understanding of social inequality as a research object in our field, examining how inequalities are connected through an intersectional lens (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender/sexuality, language, dis/ability, and so on; see Byerly et al., 2023) and illuminating the unifying principles underlying different forms of inequality (e.g., beliefs in various forms of supremacy, meritocratic beliefs). Finally, we encourage reflection on what a deep consideration of social inequality as a pervasive principle of contemporary societies implies for the theories, methods, and empirical evidence generated by journalism research.

We invite contributions that explore *social inequality within journalism* across various levels of analysis (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). These include individual news creators (e.g., questions on journalists' culturally situated experiences and backgrounds), journalistic routines (e.g., how manual or AI-supported processes in

journalism contribute to perpetuating inequalities), media organizations (e.g., how global media elites impact news ecosystems), journalism as a social institution (e.g., what values related to social inequality are inherent in journalism cultures), and the broader social system (e.g., comparative analyses on the relationships between social inequality and journalism in different national and cultural contexts). We call for submissions addressing *social inequality through journalism*, investigating the role journalism plays in maintaining, legitimizing, and/or counteracting social inequalities (e.g., through specific forms of media coverage). We especially encourage authors to submit papers bridging the perspectives of inequalities within journalism and their impact on broader social disparities.

We also invite works on *social inequality within journalism research* itself, assessing how social and structural inequalities in contemporary society might change the way we conduct journalism research—theoretically and empirically. We are particularly interested in reflecting on how scholarship itself might compound existing inequalities or help to address them. This includes but is not limited to examining disparities in knowledge production within the field, conceptualizing social inequality in relation to similar or related concepts (e.g., diversity), or reflecting on the consequences of inequality for our theory building (e.g., Kreiss & McGregor, 2024). We also seek contributions that take a historical approach and explore how social inequalities within, through, or in relation to journalism (research) have evolved over time. In addressing these topics, we encourage a wide range of methodological approaches, reflecting the multifaceted nature of social inequality as a research object.

### **Submission Process**

As a way of decentering standards in journalism (research) globally (Mutsvairo et al., 2021), we particularly invite scholars from the Global South to respond to this call for papers. We are committed to publishing all articles open access, if possible and desired, either through Gold Open Access (full open access) or Green Open Access (preprints), based on available options and the authors' preferences. The editors will organize a collaborative workshop for authors to discuss and further develop papers for the special issue. Full-paper submissions (6,500–9,000 words) should adhere to the guidelines of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* and follow APA, 7th edition, style. Manuscripts should be submitted via <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jmcq>.

### **Timeline**

- September 1, 2025: Deadline for full-paper submissions
- Late 2025: Collaborative online workshop with special issue editors and peer feedback
- Spring/Summer 2026: Target publication date of special issue

### **Contact**

Special issue inquiries should be sent to: [jmcqcallinequality@ifkw.lmu.de](mailto:jmcqcallinequality@ifkw.lmu.de)

## References

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