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Piketty's Book on Wealth and Inequality Is More Popular in Richer States

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Justin Wolfers

Thomas Piketty's tome "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" is currently the top-selling book at Amazon.com. It's also been the subject of intense media coverage from publications with New York, Washington and Wall Street in their names. But has Mr. Piketty kicked off a broad national conversation about inequality, or is the book being read mostly in the East Coast liberal echo chamber?

To investigate, I studied Google searches of "Piketty." (The bulk of searches of his last name began with the publication of his magnum opus.) Google Correlate helpfully reports these by state (and Washington, D.C.), scaled by the total number of searches in each location.

The data suggest that Mr. Piketty, a French economist, has been most

popular in Washington. It's not even close: The city is an extreme outlier, with searches on his name two and a half standard deviations more common in Washington than in the runner-up state, Massachusetts. Next come New York, Connecticut, Maryland and New Jersey, all of which lie along the Acela corridor. All are reliably liberal states, too.

I can't tell you where Piketty has been least popular, because below a certain level of search activity, Google doesn't release the actual numbers. But it is notable that he's been far less successful in liberal states outside the corridor, such as California or Illinois.

But perhaps this isn't just about ideology. The states where Piketty is popular are also extremely rich states. The correlation of his popularity with average personal income is stronger than that with a state's ideology.

Vive la révolution!

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