



# Democracy, Inequality, and Representation in Comparative Perspective

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The gap between the richest and poorest Americans has grown steadily over the last thirty years, and economic inequality is on the rise in many other industrialized democracies as well. But the magnitude and pace of the increase differs dramatically across nations. A country's political system and its institutions play a critical role in determining levels of inequality in a society. *Democracy, Inequality, and Representation* argues that the reverse is also true—inequality itself shapes political systems and institutions in powerful and often overlooked ways.

In *Democracy, Inequality, and Representation*, distinguished political scientists and economists use a set of international databases to examine the political causes and consequences of income inequality. The volume opens with an examination of how differing systems of political representation contribute to cross-national variations in levels of inequality. Torben Iversen and David Soskice calculate that taxes and income transfers help reduce the poverty rate in Sweden by over 80 percent, while the comparable figure for the United States is only 13 percent. Noting that traditional economic models fail to account for this striking discrepancy, the authors show how variations in electoral systems lead to very different outcomes.

But political causes of disparity are only one part of the equation. The contributors also examine how inequality shapes the democratic process. Pablo Beramendi and Christopher Anderson show how disparity mutes political voices: at the individual level, citizens with the lowest incomes are the least likely to vote, while high levels of inequality in a society result in diminished electoral participation overall. Thomas Cusack, Iversen, and Philipp Rehm demonstrate that uncertainty in the economy changes voters' attitudes; the mere risk of losing one's job generates increased popular demand for income support policies almost as much as actual unemployment does. Ronald Rogowski and Duncan McRae illustrate how changes in levels of inequality can drive reforms in political institutions themselves. Increased demand for female labor participation during World War II led to greater equality between men and women, which in turn encouraged many European countries to extend voting rights to women for the first time.

The contributors to this important new volume skillfully disentangle a series of complex relationships between economics and politics to show how inequality both shapes and is shaped by policy. *Democracy, Inequality, and Representation* provides deeply nuanced insight into why some democracies are able to curtail inequality—while others continue to witness a division that grows ever deeper.

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