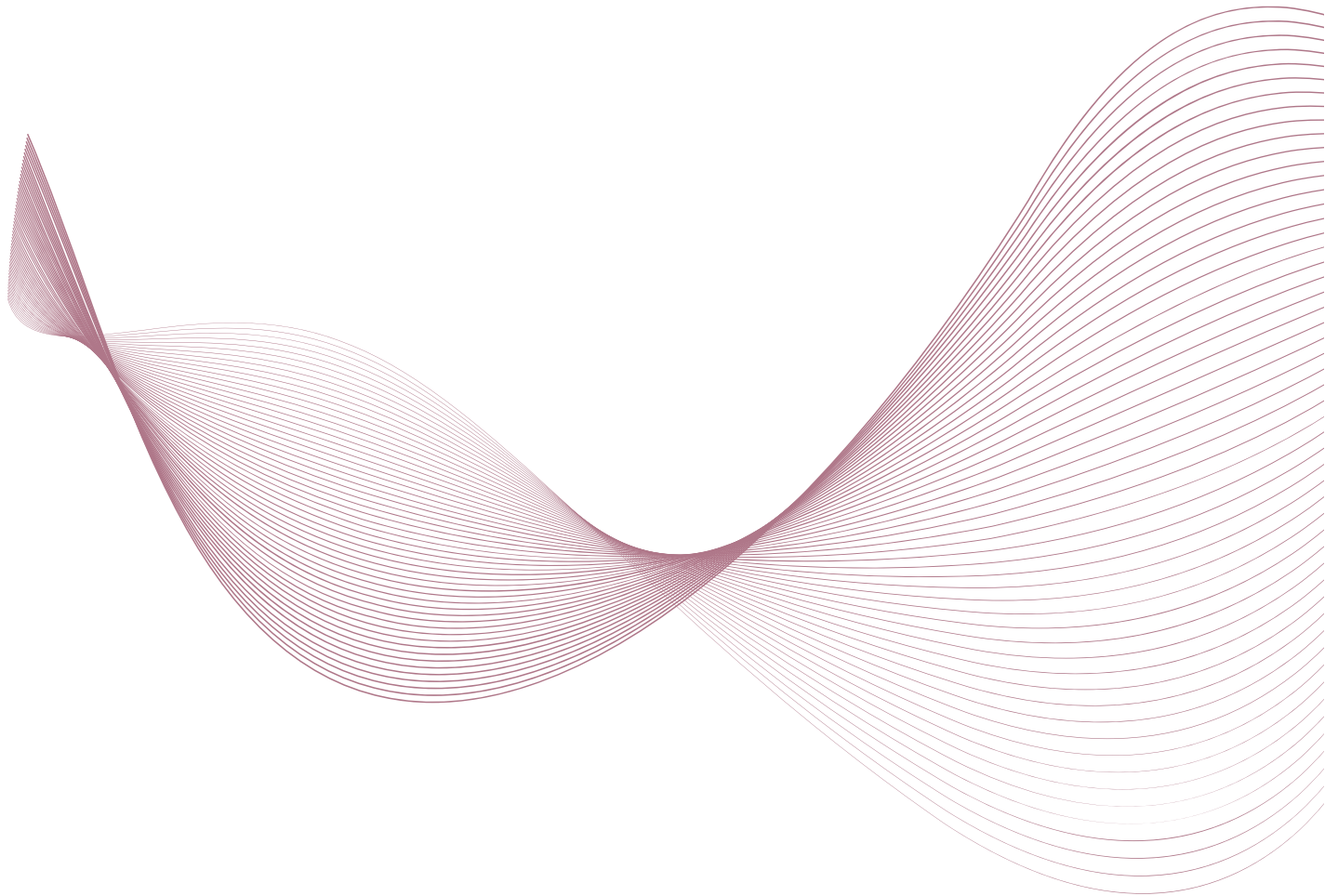


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# Democracy and Autocracy

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## Editor's Introduction

**Vincent Mauro, University of Michigan**

The study of inequality has deep roots in political thought. Aristotle, one of the West's first political thinkers, contemplated how inequality was often intertwined with different political regimes. Inequality as well as its conceptual cousin equality have featured prominently in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Despite this rich tradition, as the discipline of political science has matured, inequality has become less of a prominent fixture in the field.

Contemporary political science has often delegated the study of inequality to other disciplines. With respect to social dimensions of inequality—for example, inequalities in the family, the stratification of society, or across ethnic, racial, or gender lines—sociology has far greater sophistication. Meanwhile, economics has performed well beyond the lion's share of investigating the determinants of income or wealth inequality. Yet political science has often been reluctant to explain differences in *economic* inequality and socioeconomic outcomes across time and space.

At the same time, inequality has remained integral to those studying its (often intimate) connections to democracy, a theme harkening back to Aristotle. Inequality has been thematically present in several significant scholarly treatments of democracy, such as Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Larry Bartels' *Unequal Democracy*, Carles Boix's *Democracy and Redistribution*, Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*, and Seymour Martin Lipset's *Political Man*. In other cases, political scientists have explained inequality through the lens of (re) distribution and social reform, most prominently on differences in welfare states (although sociologists have often dominated this subfield).

Despite these influential works, political scientists have much work to do when it comes to *explaining* inequality. Indeed, extant scholarship in political science has typically conceived of inequality as a “structural constraint” that conditions or affects political outcomes. In more technical language, it is an “independent” or “conditional” variable.

As the aforementioned scholars remind us, economic inequality, or the distribution of income or wealth in any given society, is an inherently political process. In other words, the distribution of income or wealth

is undeniably affected by political dynamics. The choices that political actors make, particularly in terms of policies or programs, matter for socioeconomic outcomes. And these choices are undoubtedly driven, at least in part, by the political environment in which they are situated. Thus, political science should have much to say about inequality.

Despite political science's reluctance to investigate economic inequality, there are some subtle signs that the tide may be turning. Important works, like John Huber and Evelyn Stephens' *Democracy and the Left*, have investigated how political phenomena directly affect differences in levels of poverty and inequality.<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Torben Iversen and David Soskice (2006), have also put political institutions—in this case, electoral systems—front and center for affecting redistribution and levels of inequality across the developed world. In many respects, the subfield of American politics has been at the forefront of the study of inequality in political science. Americanists have not been as shy to dive directly into understanding the political determinants of inequality, led by recent—and important—contributions such as Christopher Faricy's *Welfare for the Wealthy*, William Franko and Christopher Witko's *The New Economic Populism*, Nathan Kelly's *The Politics of Income Inequality in the United States*, and Leslie McCall's *The Undeserving Rich*, among others.

*Unequal Democracies: Public Policy, Responsiveness, and Redistribution in an Era of Rising Economic Inequality*, edited by Noam Lupu and Jonas Pontusson, is an exemplar for breaking down some of the silos that have long plagued the study of inequality. At its core, it seeks to answer an incredibly important and timely question: why does inequality appear to be on the rise across much of the developed world? An equally critical question it asks is: why do many countries, especially those that have traditionally had a strong track record of ameliorating inequality, appear to be less responsive to demands for redistribution today? Not only is *Unequal Democracies* helping political science push itself forward into the domain of explaining economic inequality, but it is also actively building pluralistic bridges across disciplinary, methodological, and subfield divides.

A comprehensive summary of *Unequal Democracies* is outside the scope of this introduction – although, for interested readers, the volume is open access and free to download. However, I would like to highlight how *Unequal Democracies* excels at bridging divides across at least two dimensions.

Broadly speaking, political science has often approached the study of democracy and inequality via two questions: (1) Are there differences or changes in the relative demands for redistribution among a polity's populace? and (2) Are those in power responsive to demands for redistribution? Classic models, typically derived from some variant of the median voter model (Meltzer & Richard 1981), have long posited that structural inequality induces predictable patterns of redistributive demands (the “demand side”) in democracies, which have downstream effects on redistributive policymaking. Yet, a common critique has long argued demands for redistribution do not necessarily translate into political leaders being responsive to those demands (the “supply side”). In other words, even in the most democratic states, those in power have often aligned with a decidedly narrower set of interests than those of the general population (for a recent rendition of this argument, see Gilens and Page 2014). Despite the interconnected nature of the “demand side” models and “supply side” arguments, they have not always been in deep conversation with one another – and in some cases, talk over one another. *Unequal Democracies* makes a serious attempt to decisively meld these two literatures together, or at the very least, provide a space for them to be in serious conversation with one another.

*Unequal Democracies* also does an exceptional job of building better linkages between two traditionally separate subfields of political science: American and comparative politics. This is a challenging task – there are clear lines of demarcation between Americanists and comparativists. One source of these tensions is a persistent belief that the United States is an “exceptional” case – one that defies straightforward comparison with others. While there are certainly dimensions on which American politics diverges from its rich democratic peers (especially its lower levels of democracy and higher levels of inequality), *Unequal Democracies* dispels some of the myths regarding how “unique” the United States really is compared to other Western nations. In some cases, comparisons are indeed difficult to make, especially given the dearth of fine-grained, cross-national data. But the gulf that separates theories and studies of democracy and inequality by Americanists and comparativists defies simple data and empirical-based differences. And given that Americanists in many respects have been leading the way in studying the political determinants of economic inequality, more cross-pollination between the American subfield and other subfields is even more vital. *Unequal Democracies* makes a concerted effort at establishing a relationship between Americanists and comparativists, even if it is an uneasy one. Above all,

<sup>1</sup> Also see Huber and Stephens (2024) *Challenging Inequality: Variation across Postindustrial Societies*. University of Chicago Press.

*Unequal Democracies* shows us that even in instances where hard comparisons are rendered difficult because of a lack of comparable data, we should still strive to engage with theory and empirics from across subfields.

Beyond theoretical approaches to the study of inequality within political science itself, *Unequal Democracies* studies inequality in a pluralistic and interdisciplinary manner. Eclecticism is vitally important to our understanding of inequality, a complex phenomenon affected by biological, economic, political, and social dynamics. One should be mindful of this complexity, as there is no one correct approach to the study of inequality. Of course not all works should be all-encompassing in approach, which is neither parsimonious nor realistic. However, we should strive to build theories, models, and research designs that are, at the very least, amenable and mindful of alternative approaches. *Unequal Democracies* is rife with pluralism in its study of inequality. Theoretically, it draws on literature from economics, political science, and sociology. Empirically and methodologically, it deploys quantitative and statistical analysis, content analysis, ethnography, and qualitative case studies.

*Unequal Democracies'* ability to bridge traditional silos in the study of inequality motivates the book review exchange in this edition of *Democracy and Autocracy*. At first glance, *Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America* by Belén Fernández Milmanda and *Back to Black: Racial Reclassification and Political Identity Formation in Brazil* by David de Micheli may seem to occupy entirely different genres of political science. *Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America* studies two classic political science topics: vested power among elites and the presence (or absence) of democratic institutions in Latin America, one of the world's most unequal regions. By contrast, *Back to Black* is more sociological in nature, geared towards understanding the emergence of racial (and especially black) consciousness in Brazil amidst contemporary waves of expanding access to higher education. These two works differ in important ways with respect to question and method. Yet both are fundamentally wrestling with democracy and inequality.

Once again, my argument is not a call to “complexify” our studies of inequality, shoehorning economic, political, and sociological dynamics into theories and methods where they do not belong. Yet there is something valuable about a more nuanced, and sometimes subtle, approach where we are mindful of and engaged with others' work on inequality occurring in worlds separate from our own. Stepping outside one's own subfield (or sub-subfield) and viewing another's

perspective on inequality is a highly fruitful endeavor, as the author exchange between Milmanda and De Micheli illustrates.

The remainder of the newsletter gives readers a richer taste of some of the contributions to *Unequal Democracies*, while also providing a space to take ideas from their respective chapters in the volume towards new avenues or directions. Jonus Pontusson's contribution helps bridge Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page's work on the United States into Europe. Pontusson and his coauthors find that the United States is not unique in how political elites typically favor the interests of the better off, as similar dynamics are present throughout much of Northwest Europe. Mads Andreas Elkjær's contribution provides some healthy debate on whether governments are responsive to lower-income groups. Based on more eclectic sources of data that construct measures of redistribution and inequality beyond household income survey data (namely, tax return data), Elkjær and Iversen (2023) find that governments have redistributed income to lower income earners to a far greater degree than commonly assumed. *Unequal Democracies* seeks to understand why democratic institutions fail to foster an egalitarian response to rising economic inequality. In her contribution, Charlotte Cavaille situates this line of inquiry within the field of comparative political economy and connects it to an old debate on political science on the nature of power and the proper methods for its study. Finally, Noam Lupu and Jonus Pontusson flesh out some tentative conclusions and potential avenues forward for those interested in the study of inequality in democracies – something that was previously left unpursued in *Unequal Democracies*.

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## Reflections on *Unequal Democracies* and Where We Go from Here

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There are at least two different models for edited volumes. In one model, the editors begin with a coherent analytical framework they want to promote and invite contributors who adopt that framework. In another model, the editors begin with some kind of puzzle or research question and invite contributors to offer their own theoretical perspectives on it. In putting together our volume, *Unequal Democracies*, we opted for the latter model. Reluctant to impose our own take on how the rich and diverse chapters in the volume speak to each other, we also opted not to write a concluding chapter.

Inspired by Thomas Piketty's influential book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Piketty 2014), the puzzle we asked contributors to address was initially formulated as follows: Why have governments in advanced democracies done so little to compensate low- and middle-income citizens for the rise in top-end income inequality? As we document in the introductory chapter, this formulation leaves something to be desired. Across the advanced democracies, top-income shares and Gini coefficients before taxes and income transfers indeed increased sharply, and tax-transfer systems only partially offset these increases in the 10–15 years prior to the global financial crisis of 2007–8. However, income inequality before taxes and transfers increased much less, if at all, from 2007 to late 2019, even as inequality after taxes and transfers largely continued to increase. Governments have not only failed to compensate for market forces; they have at times themselves been the source of rising inequality.

In soliciting contributions to the volume, we sought to bring together scholars working within two distinct literatures on the politics of inequality and redistribution: on the one hand, research that asks how citizens' policy preferences and political behavior respond to inequality and, on the other hand, the literature on income and class biases in democratic representation. We hoped to bring these two research streams into direct conversation with each other, given that both are fundamentally interested in offering answers to the motivating question we posed. We also endeavored to bring scholars of US politics and those working in comparative political economy into greater dialogue to consider how we might learn and generalize from the US case.

The critics at the authors-meet-critics panel that we organized for the 2024 APSA meeting provided many insightful comments on what is in the volume and a long list of questions related to the politics of inequality that the volume does not adequately address. They also complained about the lack of a concluding chapter by the editors. We decided to take the opportunity of this newsletter to address that complaint by laying out what we consider to be the research agenda that emerges from *Unequal Democracies*. In the spirit of the volume, we focus on analytical issues that not only speak to the attitudes and behavior of political elites as well as citizens, but also serve, potentially, to link these topics to each other in a more systematic fashion. What we sketch here is not a research program we could possibly hope to pursue on our own, but rather what we see as the next steps in a collective research agenda.

### Variation Across Countries, Time, and Policy Domains

*Unequal Democracies* is framed in terms of understanding common trends in inequality and redistribution across advanced democracies. Yet the extent to which income inequality has increased, and the extent to which governments have retreated from redistribution, varies a good deal across countries (as we show in the introductory chapter). Since the individual chapters tend to focus either on common trends or on cross-national variation, the volume as a whole might well be faulted for sidestepping the challenge of explaining both.

Cross-national variation is an important source of analytical leverage for parsing voter-based and elite-level explanations of common trends and, perhaps more importantly, for parsing different causal mechanisms proposed in the literature. For instance, several contributions to research on demand for redistribution argue that union membership shapes people's attitudes towards inequality and redistribution, while many contributions to the literature on unequal responsiveness suggest that unions have been an important counterweight to the influence of monied interests in electoral and legislative politics (see the chapter by Michael Becher and Daniel Stegmueller). Unionization has declined across advanced democracies since the 1970s, but to varying degrees and from very different initial levels (e.g., Pontusson 2013). Future research ought to systematically address the relevance of this variation for citizens' policy preferences and for the policy choices of governments.

The chapter in our volume by Ruben Mathisen and co-authors shows—following a method pioneered by Martin Gilens (2012)—that policy responsiveness in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden is, on average, strongly biased in favor of the preferences affluent citizens. However, they also present evidence suggesting that the extent of pro-affluent bias varies

across combinations of policy domain, government partisanship, and time-period (see also Rosset, Poltier, and Pontusson 2024). Within-country variation may be just as relevant—possibly even more relevant—as cross-country variation for assessing alternative explanations of unequal responsiveness.

Cross-national variation is arguably most relevant for our understanding of the role of fairness norms in preference formation. As shown by Charlotte Cavaillé in her chapter, fairness norms vary across countries and tend to be stable over time. Distinguishing between fairness assessments pertaining to the distribution of market earnings (based on the proportionality norm) and fairness assessments pertaining to tax-transfer systems (based on the reciprocity norm), Cavaillé identifies distinct clusters of countries that conform to established typologies of welfare states and varieties of capitalism. Given their stability, fairness norms alone can hardly account for rising income inequality across clusters, but they may shed light on the mechanisms through which it has occurred. Moreover, the role of these norms suggests it may be fruitful to distinguish between policy changes that respond to shifts in public opinion and public preferences that constrain policy changes motivated by other actors.

### Beyond Income Groups

With a few notable exceptions, research on the politics of redistribution and unequal policy responsiveness tends to focus on citizens divided into different income-based social groups. One advantage of this approach is that it allows us to make comparisons across groups of citizens of equal size. For instance, if we study unequal policy responsiveness, we can use income groups to determine whether a particular income group has outsized political influence because we know how responsiveness should look if all income groups had equal influence (see the chapter by Larry Bartels for a discussion of this logic). However, relative income is correlated with social class, gender, race or ethnicity, and immigrant status—and it seems very plausible that these other characteristics are at least as important for political influence. Most obviously, immigrants are often over-represented at the bottom of the income distribution and many of them do not have the right to vote, so immigration might be a key explanation for growing anti-poor bias in political representation. Anti-poor bias would still be a normative problem, but it would no longer be a puzzle from the perspective of median-voter models. Like paying attention to variation across countries and policy domains, going beyond relative income opens possibilities for exploring the causal mechanisms behind many explanations of our volume's central puzzle.

Going beyond income groups is equally relevant for research on public opinion. Citizens commonly

misperceive their position in the income distribution and the level of inequality in their country (e.g., Gimpelson and Treisman 2018). And if voters evaluate whether redistributive policies benefit people like themselves, they are far more likely to think of themselves as members of an identity group like workers or white men than as members of an income decile. In this respect, research on unequal representation and redistribution lags behind the comparative literature on public policy preferences, where occupational classes have featured prominently for over a decade (e.g., Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). In our volume, Macarena Ares and Silja Häusermann's contribution explores how members of different occupational classes feel they are represented by political parties across a range of social policy issues, but there is much more work to be done on the role of social identities like class, race, and gender.

The one area of research on unequal representation that has taken these social groups more seriously is the new literature on the descriptive under-representation of less-affluent groups. As Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu (2023) point out, much of that work focuses on occupational groups, but education and wealth also feature prominently as measures of the economic backgrounds of politicians. Research on the descriptive representation of class groups has shown consistently that less-affluent citizens are under-represented across the world's democracies (as in Carnes and Lupu's chapter in our volume) and that politicians from more-affluent backgrounds pursue different policy outcomes (as in Marta Curto-Grau and Aina Gallego's chapter in our volume). As a result, many scholars suggest that the descriptive under-representation of the less affluent may explain biases in responsiveness. But an important next step in this research agenda will be to link these phenomena directly. Are less-affluent politicians actually more responsive to less affluent citizens? Moreover, we still don't know why less affluent people are descriptively under-represented, an open question that Carnes and Lupu highlight in their chapter.

While most research on the economic backgrounds of politicians focuses on social class and affluence, it may also be fruitful to disaggregate our broad social class categories. In a recent contribution, Erzsébet Boduki and coauthors (2024) show that British Labour cabinets (and shadow cabinets) have become increasingly populated with ministers from professional and managerial backgrounds, much like Conservative cabinets, but Labour ministers are much more likely to have held these positions in the public and nonprofit sectors than Conservative ministers. This distinction too surely has important implications for their policy choices. There is still a great deal we need to understand about the backgrounds of politicians and how those backgrounds relate to inequality in representation.

## Interest Groups, Unelected Policymakers, and Media

Studies of unequal responsiveness assume that elected officials adopt policies in response to the preferences of citizens. Drawing on the framework of median-voter theories, they also assume that the policy preferences of citizens are exogenous to the policymaking process. Disagreements within this literature center on which citizens most influence elected officials – essentially an empirical question.

Several of the contributions to our volume instead conceive of policymaking as an elite-driven process. The chapter by Jacob Hacker, Paul Pierson, and Sam Zacher, for instance, focuses on intra- and inter-party dynamics. But a long line of work in American and comparative political economy makes a strong case that policymakers respond first and foremost to pressures from organized interests, particularly organized business but sometimes organized labor as well (e.g., Hacker and Pierson 2011). Other work emphasizes the role of information provided by firms or the agenda-setting role of experts and technocrats (e.g., Culpepper 2012; McNamara 1998). In this tradition, electoral politics matters, but mostly as a constraint on policymakers. Affluent citizens exercise political influence by contributing financial resources, but they may also be coincidentally represented by virtue of their policy preferences being closely aligned with the business interests that really drive policymaking (Enns 2015). In short, unequal representation by relative income might come about without policymakers necessarily responding more attentively to affluent citizens.

Research on unequal representation would benefit from paying more attention to political elites: not only elected elites, but unelected elites as well, and not only to their occupational backgrounds, but also the processes through which they choose policies. Across Western Europe, we observe a decline in people from working-class backgrounds in the higher ranks of leftist parties since the 1970s. At the same time, technocratic decision-making has increasingly replaced tripartite corporatist bargaining in the agenda-setting phase of policymaking. It would be productive to assess the relative importance of these parallel developments for policy outcomes, and to understand the relationship between them. Researchers can do so by leveraging variation across countries and policy domains, but this may also be a place for traditional comparative approaches: elite interviews and process-tracing case studies.

The literature on citizens' perceptions of inequality and their policy preferences would also benefit from greater attention to the role of political elites. Studies show that union members are more concerned about inequality



and more supportive of redistribution than other survey respondents (e.g., Mosimann and Pontusson 2017). Along with social interactions among union members, the rhetoric of union leaders and their positions in public policy debates seem to explain some of this effect on members' policy preferences (e.g., Kim and Margalit 2017). But other political actors shape the attitudes and preferences of citizens as well—and perhaps more so than union officials. The rhetoric of election campaigns and news media surely influence the perceptions and preferences of citizens as well as the salience of certain issues and whether they get asked about in public opinion surveys. As the chapter in our volume by J. Scott Matthews, Timothy Hicks, and Alan Jacobs shows, news media also plays an important role in distracting citizens' attention from distributive politics. Scholars of political behavior have long noted the role that elites play in shaping public opinion – and research on citizen attitudes toward inequality ought to take those influences more seriously.

### Bringing Political Economy Back In

Like much of the literature on unequal representation and recent work on the politics of redistribution, our volume takes a decidedly behavioral approach. With just a couple of exceptions, the chapters in our volume assume that citizens' policy preferences matter in considering the politics of inequality. A more traditional political economy perspective would suggest that citizens actually care more about economic outcomes than they do about the specific policies governments adopt, and that they arguably also care more about their absolute income growth than they do about their position in the income distribution (a perspective that Mads Elkjær and Torben Iversen do take up in our volume). Relatedly, a longstanding tradition in comparative political economy argues that economic performance is key to the reelection prospects of incumbents. Parties in government may cater to the distributive interests of their core constituencies, but only insofar as this does not undermine economic performance (cf. Garrett 1998). Studies of unequal representation ought to engage more systematically with the possibility that governments represent less affluent citizens by delivering economic performance even if they do not deliver policy responsiveness.

One possible retort is that these kinds of dynamics have led less affluent citizens to feel that they are poorly represented in politics, fueling the rise of right-wing populism (see Schäfer and Zürn 2023). But studies also show that working-class citizens perceived themselves as lacking political voice already in the early 1970s (Rennwald and Pontusson 2022). It may still be that these sentiments were activated in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–08 and the sluggish economic growth that followed, or that rising inequality has reduced the benefits that less-affluent citizens derive

from economic growth. But these are important nuances that ought to shape how we think about unequal representation and its political implications.

Another central consideration in political economy approaches is the government budget. It seems plausible to suppose that the economic and social policies favored by less-affluent citizens (say, generous unemployment benefits) are more expensive than the ones favored by affluent citizens (say, unrestricted immigration or school choice). By implication, we might expect policy responsiveness to become more biased in favor of affluent citizens when governments are under pressure from financial markets to rein in public expenditures. On the other hand, budgetary pressures might incentivize governments to increase taxes on high-income earners. Macroeconomic conditions and the budgetary situation of the government could therefore influence policy responsiveness and could do so in ways that vary across policy domains. This consideration remains largely absent from the recent literature on unequal representation (but see Elsässer and Haffert 2022).

Such considerations about economic constraints could well inform the policy preferences of individual citizens as well. People who think rising inequality is an inevitable byproduct of globalization or technological change are less likely to demand compensatory redistribution than those who think that political choices drive inequality. Similarly, those who see a tradeoff between redistribution and economic growth are less likely to demand redistribution than those who see no such tradeoff (although both types of individuals may report similar support for redistribution when measured using the standard survey item, which does not pose a tradeoff). And these perceptions may well be shaped by elite rhetoric and media framing. If we want to better understand individual preferences for redistribution, we also need to consider how citizens understand the causes of inequality and the consequences of redistribution.

We live in an era of higher inequality in advanced democracies, and we have yet to fully understand why elected governments are failing to reduce it. Although *Unequal Democracies* brings together an important set of explanations, it leaves many stones unturned. In our view, the most promising avenues for building our understanding will leverage variation across space and time, push beyond the narrow focus on income groups, pay greater attention to the role of organized interests and media, and draw inspiration from factors central to political economy like budget constraints and policy tradeoffs. Far from being the final word on the political puzzle of rising inequality in advanced democracy, we hope that *Unequal Democracies* serves as a catalyst for more research on these important issues.



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# Do Democracies Compensate Lower-Income Groups for Rising Market Inequality?

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Market income inequality has risen in most affluent democracies since the 1980s, raising concerns that *democratically elected governments* have become either unable or unwilling to respond to majority demands for redistribution. Research using macro-level data on inequality and redistribution argues that governments have not compensated the poor or the middle class for rising inequality; to the contrary, they have actively contributed to its increase (Pontusson, 2024; Lupu and Pontusson, 2023b; Hacker and Pierson, 2010; Burgoon et al., 2022).

According to several influential accounts—from Piketty (2014) to Streeck (2011) and Rodrik (2011)—the lack of government responsiveness to rising inequality is closely associated with deepening globalization and footloose capitalism, which have amplified the structural power of the affluent to the point where redistributive policies have become ineffective and largely symbolic. Another influential argument from survey-based literature suggests that governments fail to respond to rising inequality because the democratic process has been captured by the rich (for a systematic review, see Elkjær and Klitgaard, 2024). In this view, the rich use their growing fortunes to exert disproportionate influence on public policy (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gilens and Page, 2014; Lupu and Tirado Castro, 2023). While much of this research focuses on the U.S., several comparative scholars extend these arguments to other, primarily European, democracies (Persson and Sundell, 2023; Lupu and Pontusson, 2023a). Supposedly, democratic institutions globally are being subverted by the power of money.

In this brief essay, I present a critical discussion of the “subversion of democracy” argument, focusing on the claim that governments have not responded to rising inequality.

## Redistribution in the Age of Rising Inequality

Standard political economy theories of inequality under democracy predict that rising market income inequality will increase demand for redistribution, which in turn would increase the level of redistribution in society (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). From a theoretical perspective, it is therefore puzzling if governments do not compensate the lower and middle classes for rising market inequality; many recent studies use this stylized

claim of a lack of compensation to motivate analyses of redistributive attitudes and policies.

In the United States, Hacker and Pierson (2010) argue that politics has played a major role in driving up economic inequality. However, while these scholars interpret the U.S. trajectory as distinct from that of other advanced democracies (Hacker et al., 2021), some comparative scholars do not consider the U.S. experience unique. Pontusson (2024, 1), for instance, claims that “[d]emocratically elected governments across liberal democracies have failed to compensate low- and middle-income citizens—the majority of citizens—for a pervasive and dramatic increase of top income shares.” In *Unequal Democracies*, Lupu and Pontusson (2023b, 8) go further, asserting that governments have “either failed to respond to market inequality or adopted policies that reduced redistribution.”

The evidence for these claims, however, is not unequivocal. Most studies arguing that governments do not respond to rising inequality rely on household income surveys to estimate inequality among the working-age population. Redistribution is then calculated as the percentage-point reduction in the Gini coefficient from before to after taxes and transfers—a method used by the OECD in several publications (OECD, 2011, 2008; Causa and Hermansen, 2017) and by Pontusson (2024) and Lupu and Pontusson (2023a).<sup>1</sup> Although these studies report mixed patterns across countries and time periods, they generally indicate decreasing levels of redistribution between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s.

Yet, there are several reasons to be critical of this evidence of lacking compensation. First, household income surveys are notoriously ineffective at capturing the incomes of households at the very top of the income distribution, thus missing critical information about the part of the distribution where most action has taken place in recent decades.

Second, most studies of redistribution focus solely on cash transfers, ignoring the substantial redistributive effects of in-kind services, such as education, healthcare, and child and elder care. The omission of public goods and other in-kind services from studies of redistribution may be increasingly problematic over time, as many middle-class voters favor social investment policies over traditional redistributive (cash) benefits (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

Third, most studies of redistribution focus on the working-age population. Although this choice may be reasonable when examining labor market dynamics,

<sup>1</sup> Pontusson (2024) and Lupu and Pontusson (2023a) also examine the changes in the top 10% income share from before to after taxes and transfers, but they do not look at redistribution to groups in the middle and bottom of the income distribution.

such as how policies help workers manage risks (sickness, unemployment, or injuries), or investigating the relative power of labor and capital, it limits what the evidence reveals about the extent to which democratic governments compensate different voter groups. This approach thus excludes the large and growing elderly population from analysis. In OECD countries, the share of the population aged 65 or above has risen from 9% in 1960 to 18% in 2021 and is projected to reach 27% by 2050 (OECD, 2023). Most elderly fall within the bottom half of the income distribution and rely heavily on state-sponsored benefit programs; they are also politically active and have interests distinct from the working-age population (Vlandas and Ganslmeier, 2021; Vlandas, 2018, 2023). By excluding the elderly, these studies overlook transfers targeted to this group, and thereby the growing significance of “gray power.”

Fourth, studies of redistribution tend to rely on broad measures, such as changes in the Gini coefficient from before to after taxes and transfers, which provide only a single estimate of redistribution for the entire population. As a result, they cannot capture targeted taxes and transfers to specific groups. Most theories of democracy consider the poor more vulnerable than the middle class, yet using broad measures of redistribution obscures distinctions between redistribution to the poor, middle, and rich.

Finally, because existing studies rely on household income surveys fielded at different times—often in 10-year intervals—they provide limited insights into the drivers of changes in redistribution. Redistribution can change due to active policy adjustments by governments, but it can also shift due to structural economic changes, such as fluctuations in unemployment. Consequently, changes in macro levels of redistribution between two points in time may not necessarily reflect government action or inaction but might simply mirror different stages of the business cycle. In short, strong conclusions based on household income surveys warrant caution.

## Evidence of Compensation

A recent line of research on redistribution seeks to address the limitations of household income surveys by combining multiple data types. The largest project in this regard is the World Inequality Database (WID), a successor to the World Top Incomes Database, which compiled data on global top income shares (Atkinson, Piketty and Saez, 2011; Atkinson and Piketty, 2007). WID extends this data to cover the entire income distribution, both pre- and post-tax, for the entire adult population (20 years and older) in most advanced democracies (see Piketty and Saez, 2003; Piketty, Saez and Zucman, 2018; Blanchet, Chancel and Gethin, 2022). An important advantage of WID is that it combines household survey data with tax data to achieve more accurate estimates of incomes at the top

of the distribution. WID includes not only labor and capital incomes but also imputed rent for homeowner-occupiers in pre-tax income, while retained corporate earnings are distributed to capital owners. WID also accounts for all forms of taxes—wealth, business, and indirect taxes—and includes in-kind benefits and public goods in post-tax income, but with only healthcare assumed to have redistributive effects in their standard series (for more information, see Alvaredo et al., 2016). Aligning these income measures with macroeconomic aggregates (national accounts), WID effectively distributes all income within society to individuals, providing the most comprehensive and precise dataset on income inequality and redistribution in advanced democracies.

Research using these improved data reveals different patterns. Elkjær and Iversen (2023b) analyze changes in redistribution across classes in the U.S. and Western Europe. In both regions, redistribution to households in the middle of the income distribution has increased since 1980, seemingly driven by rising top-end income inequality. In effect, the middle class has been compensated for rising inequality through tax-and-transfer policies over the past four decades (see also Elkjær and Iversen, 2023a; Elkjær and Iversen, 2020; Fisher-Post and Gethin, 2023; Blanchet, Chancel and Gethin, 2022; Piketty, Saez and Zucman, 2018).

Redistribution to households at the bottom of the income distribution has also increased in Western Europe since 1980. However, in stark contrast to Europe, redistribution to the bottom third of the income distribution in the U.S. has stagnated around 4% of national income, making the U.S. the only advanced democracy where more of the national income was redistributed to the middle than to the bottom third by 2019 (Elkjær, 2024). Thus, while it appears accurate to conclude that the poor in the U.S. have not been compensated for the dramatic rise in top-end income inequality, this conclusion does not hold in Western Europe.

## Have Government Responses to Rising Inequality Been Strong Enough?

A critical question remains: have these increases in redistribution “adequately” compensated the lower and middle classes for rises in market inequality? Answering this question is difficult, as no universally accepted benchmark exists for assessing the strength of government responses. However, Iversen and Soskice (2019) propose a simple test: whether post-tax income growth in a group keeps pace with overall economic growth.

Using WID data, Elkjær and Iversen (2023b) show that the redistributive responses of Western European governments since 1980 have been strong enough to ensure inclusive economic growth, with both low and middle-income after-tax incomes closely tracking

overall economic growth. The U.S. is (once again) a notable outlier. Despite increased redistribution to the middle class, post-tax income growth for the middle income segment has significantly lagged behind overall economic growth: about 21% from 1980 to 2016. For the poorest American households, post-tax income growth has fallen even further behind, lagging by approximately 44% relative to overall economic growth in the same period.

These findings suggest that governments in advanced democracies generally care about, and are capable of supporting, the well-being of the majority of their citizens. However, the U.S. remains an outlier, particularly regarding households at the bottom of the income distribution, whose living standards have stagnated over the last forty years, far behind the overall economic growth. In summary, this recent research suggests that the American experience does not generalize to Western European countries.

## Conclusion

It has become a stylized fact that governments do not compensate lower-income groups for rising market inequality. However, the evidence supporting this claim is largely based on household income survey data, which has significant limitations. Newer time series data on inequality and redistribution, drawn from a combination of data sources that utilize the strengths of each, force us to reconsider the accuracy of these claims. Contrary to common belief, it appears that the middle class—and, perhaps surprisingly, the poor—have been compensated for rising inequality in most advanced democracies, with the important exception of the U.S., where redistribution to low-income households has not increased since 1980.

In conclusion, while the notion of lacking compensation aligns with the reality of low-income groups in the U.S., redistribution to both the poor and the middle class has increased in most advanced democracies. In Western Europe, these increases have been sufficient to ensure that the post-tax incomes of lower- and middle-income groups have kept pace with overall economic growth. Given the stark differences in experience between the U.S. and Europe, it may be appropriate to exercise caution when grouping Western European countries with the U.S. in discussions of income inequality and redistribution.

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## Unequal Responsiveness in Comparative and Historical Perspective

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To write the chapter in *Unequal Democracies* entitled “Unequal Responsiveness and Government Partisanship in Northwest Europe,” I brought together scholars from Germany (Lea Elsässer and Svenje Hense), the Netherlands (Wouter Shackel), Norway (Ruben Mathisen) and Sweden (Mikael Persson). My co-authors had previously built datasets and written single-country papers (now articles) on which the chapter draws. In this essay, I will briefly summarize the chapter and articulate why I consider it to be an important contribution to the literature on political inequality and, in particular, the strand of this literature that focuses on policy responsiveness.

Like the papers of my co-authors, the chapter relies on the approach to measuring political inequality developed by Martin Gilens in his seminal study of the US (Gilens 2012). To recapitulate briefly, Gilens sorts survey respondents by relative income and estimates the probability of policy change based on survey items soliciting support for specific proposals for policy change. Across survey items pertaining to any and all policies that fall within the jurisdiction of the federal government, Gilens finds that the preferences of high-income citizens consistently predict policy change, but the preferences of low-income and even middle-income citizens have no influence whatsoever when they diverge from the preferences of high-income citizens.

It is tempting to suppose that the income bias documented by Gilens is unique to the US, with its exceptionally unequal distribution of income and institutions that allow for money to play such an outsized role in the electoral process. However, my co-authors have shown that replicating Gilens’ research design yields similar results for their respective countries. Their papers suggest that policy responsiveness is just as biased in favor of the affluent (possibly even more biased) in “Social Europe” as in “Liberal America.” This is an intriguing finding, but also deeply puzzling. After all, a large comparative literature documents that tax-transfer systems in the countries studied by my co-authors are much more redistributive than the tax-transfer system in the US. How could this possibly be the case if policy responsiveness is equally biased in favor of the affluent?

Doesn’t it imply that there is something wrong with the Gilens approach to measuring political inequality?

Our chapter tackles the challenge of reconciling the results of replicating Gilens’ approach with what we know about redistributive outcomes in the US and Northwest Europe (see also Rosset, Poltier and Pontusson 2024). The observation that affluent citizens in Northwest Europe are more supportive of redistribution than affluent citizens in the US provides one way that these “facts” might be reconciled, but it is quite a stretch to conceive the postwar development of redistributive welfare states in Northwest Europe as a response to the demands of affluent citizens. It seems far more plausible to argue that affluent citizens in these countries have adjusted their policy preferences, and perceptions of fairness, in response to reforms introduced by political parties seeking to mobilize (or pacify) low-income citizens exposed to unemployment and other labor-market risks—perhaps because affluent citizens, like everyone else, want to believe that they live in a just world (Bénabou and Tirole 2006) and perceive “the world” as encompassing the tax-transfer system as well as the (capitalist) economy.

Going beyond standard applications of the Gilens approach, the chapter explores two other “reconciliation paths.” One path posits that policy responsiveness is less unequal in the domain of redistributive politics, and economic policy more broadly conceived, than in other policy domains. The other path posits that policy responsiveness in Northwest Europe has become more unequal—more like policy responsiveness in the US—over time.

As indicated by its title, the chapter also seeks to assess whether Left governments are less biased in favor of the preferences of affluent citizens than Right governments. Many comparative studies of the determinants of social spending, welfare generosity and redistribution of income find that Left government is associated with policy outputs and outcomes that serve the objective interests of low-income citizens. Against this background, it seems reasonable to suppose that Left governments will be more responsive to the preferences of low-income citizens relative to those of high-income citizens. However, interests and preferences are necessarily aligned and there are many studies that suggest that the third-way orientation adopted by New Labour and Social Democratic parties in Northwest Europe in the 1990s entailed a retreat from redistribution, at least as traditionally conceived by these parties and their supporters (e.g., Lynch 2020).

To test these ideas, we pool survey data from Germany (266 survey items over the period 1998–2016), the Netherlands (291 items over 1979–2012), Norway (557 items over 1966–2014) and Sweden (844 items over 1960–2012), weighting survey items so that each country carries the same weight in our analyses. Like Gilens, we estimate support for specific policy changes at the 90th, 50th, and 10th percentile of the income distribution and the effects of support for policy change on the adoption of policy over two or four years following any given survey item being asked. Following Schakel, Burgoon and Hakverdian (2020), we address the problem of correlated measurement errors by focusing on the effects of preference gaps between respondents at different percentiles, while controlling for support for policy change at the 50th percentile. Bigger preference gaps mean that respondents in the 90th percentile are more supportive of policy change than respondents in the lower percentile (50th or 10th). To explore the effects of government partisanship, we interact preference gaps with the average share of cabinet portfolios held by Left parties (Greens as well as Social Democrats) in the year a survey item was fielded and the subsequent two or three years. We estimate separate models for policy items that we code as pertaining to economic–distributive issues and all other policy items and, in a final step, we also estimate separate models for survey items asked before 1998 and for survey items asked from 1998 onwards.<sup>1</sup>

Separate analyses of the conditioning of policy responsiveness by government partisanship, variation across policy domains and variation over time do not yield many meaningful results, but an interesting pattern emerges when we take all three considerations into account. With the preference gap between the 90th and 50th percentile as the independent variable of primary interest and government partisanship set at zero or 100% of cabinet portfolios, Figure 1 below presents our main findings.<sup>2</sup> Our analysis indicates that Right governments have always been biased in favor of affluent citizens and that their bias has become more pronounced. This holds for economic–distributive issues as well as other policy domains. Left governments were biased in favor of affluent citizens on “other issues” but not on economic–distributive issues in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. In the data covering the period

from 1998 to 2016, however, the responsiveness of Left governments in the economic–distributive domain appears to be just as pro–affluent as the responsiveness of Right governments.<sup>3</sup>

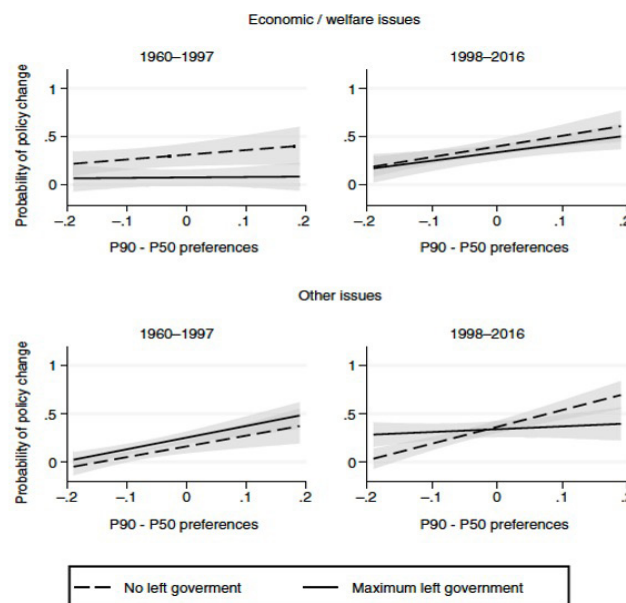


Figure 1

Previous, Gilens-inspired studies show us that income bias in political representation is a pervasive feature of liberal democracies, but do not directly address the reasons for this phenomenon. Unequal responsiveness may be due to unequal participation in politics, the role of money in electoral campaigns, interest groups, the social background of elected politicians or perhaps objective (economic) constraints faced by policymakers. To my mind, the analysis summarized above illustrates how the Gilens approach might be modified to shed at least some preliminary light on causal mechanisms, by taking into account government partisanship and by leveraging variation across policy and over time.

Until the 1990s, Left governments in Northwest Europe appear to have been equally responsive to the preferences of low-, middle- and high-income citizens in the domain of (re)distributive politics. Taken together, the legacy of past policy choices and the retreat from redistribution by mainstream Left parties provide a coherent and reasonably parsimonious explanation for the coexistence of redistributive tax-transfer systems and pro–affluent bias in these countries. The analysis that I have summarized does

1 1998 serves as the cutoff on account of being the first year in the Germany dataset and on account of the self-styled Third-Way Social Democratic leaders, Blair and Schröder, gaining power in 1997–98.

2 The estimates presented here are based on measuring government partisanship over three years (the year of the survey item and the subsequent two years). The results are very similar with 90–10 preference gaps and/or partisanship measured over five years.

3 The results for “other issues” are hard to interpret on account of temporal as well as cross-national variation in survey questions asked about policy change. By comparison, “economic–distributive issues” are relatively similar across countries and over time.

not allow us to parse between alternative explanations of the strategic reorientation of mainstream Left parties, but it highlights the relevance of this topic for comparative studies of income bias in policy responsiveness.

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## The Three Faces of Power in Comparative Political Economy: A Brief Review and Some Thoughts

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The study of the relationship between capitalism and democracy is the bread and butter of comparative political economy (CPE). One prominent line of inquiry examines the extent to which democratic political institutions help correct capitalism's excesses, be it in the form of income and wealth redistribution in the face of rising market inequality or pre-distribution policies (from antitrust to labor regulation) that help distribute market power more evenly. Most contributions assume a benchmark model, one in which politicians respond to citizens' demand for compensation and protection: the main research goal is to theorize and document the factors and mechanisms that explain deviations from this benchmark model.

In this review essay, I propose a simple way of organizing this literature, one that builds on Lukes' typology of power and its three 'faces' or dimensions (Lukes, 2004). As a reminder, Lukes distinguishes between power as successfully imposing one's preferred outcome on others with opposite preferences (the first face), power as excluding challenging issues from the scope of political decision-making (second face) and power as suppressing latent conflicts within society through preference manipulation (third face). Put differently, the first face is about one side imposing their preferred outcome on another; the second face is about one side making the other side's demands politically voiceless; and the third face about preventing people from feeling any grievances by "shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things" (Lukes 2004, 11). I propose to distinguish between studies on the basis of which face of power they are most concerned with. Studies that speak to the second and third faces of power receive the bulk of the attention. Throughout, I rely on a narrow definition of CPE, namely the subset of studies that use the tools of economics (formal models and causal inference) to study politics in Western democracies (Weingast & Wittman 2008).

This short review is first and foremost an exercise in boundary crossing: my goal is to identify points of convergence between two literatures—political economy (as narrowly defined above) and radical thought—that rarely speak to each other. This is also not an exhaustive literature review. Instead, I have chosen to highlight a few contributions that, I believe, have



the potential to turn these convergences into fruitful conceptual, theoretical and empirical bridges between these two literatures.

## The Democratic Moderator Hypothesis

Do democratic institutions foster compensatory responses to capitalism's excesses? Most political scientists seeking to answer this question proceed in two steps. First, they start by hypothesizing the existence of a built-in "democratic moderator" rooted in voters' material self-interest and the electoral connection (Meltzer & Richard 1981; Acemoglu et al. 2015; Allen et al. 2023). The democratic moderator hypothesis usually proceeds as follow: capitalism's excesses (such as labor commodification, market capture and income inequality) create mass demand for compensatory measures that elected officials, as single-minded seekers of reelection, respond to in the form of offsetting policies (be they social insurance programs, antitrust measures or progressive taxation). Next, pointing to limited evidence for such built-in moderators, scholars turn their attention to the factors and mechanisms overlooked by the democratic moderator hypothesis. A simple way of organizing this literature is to identify which face of power a given contribution speaks to.

## The First Face of Power: Politics as Organized Combat

One thriving line of research relaxes the assumption that democratic institutions transfer political power to the poorer majority and focuses instead on theorizing the mismatch between *de jure* and *de facto* power (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2008). This is what Hacker and Pierson (2010) call the study of "politics as organized combat." It focuses on the ability of actors opposed to redistribution to engage in collective action, use brute force or lobbying, etc., in order to affect policy outcomes (both at the legislative and implementation phases). This line of work's main emphasis is on Lukes' first face of power, i.e., power as coordinated action by a set of actors aimed at imposing their preferences on people with opposing preferences through coercive or non-coercive means.

CPE has little to offer to this line of work: it is the bread and butter of political science done well (Moe 2005). I thus turn to contributions that speak to the more controversial dimensions of Lukes' typology of power, namely the second—and most importantly—third faces of power.

## Explaining What's Missing: The Second Face of Power

In their discussion of the politics underpinning extreme income inequality in the United States, Hacker and Pierson distinguish between two types of literatures. One is the previously mentioned "politics as organized combat" literature. The other is the "politics as electoral spectacle" literature. This latter line of work is central to CPE. It assumes functioning democratic institutions and focuses on mass political behavior and the electoral connection. While it is often criticized as missing the forest for the trees, I believe it has more to offer to the study of power than it is often given credit for.

Most contributions from the "politics as electoral spectacle" literature start with a formal model of the democratic moderator hypothesis. This formalization makes clear that, for the democratic moderator hypothesis to hold, political competition needs to be unidimensional, i.e., pitting those in favor of redistributive and compensatory policies against those who oppose them. To explain why the democratic moderator hypothesis fails, an important line of inquiry relaxes this assumption and assumes—more plausibly—two dimensions, one capturing competition over more versus less redistribution and the other competition over, for example, social mores or ethnocentrism (see Iversen & Goplerud [2018] for an extensive review). Models of politics as a multidimensional electoral spectacle demonstrate how a two-dimensional space interacts with the party system to reduce the equilibrium level of redistribution via a "policy-bundling effect" (Roemer 1998; Roemer et al. 2007). Bundling means that distinct issues are presented in packages, restricting the choice set of voters. What the baseline model shows is that the level of redistribution offered by the pro-redistribution party decreases as the salience of the second dimension increases.

By emphasizing what is missing, this line of work is in conversation with Lukes' second face of power, which focuses on non-issues and the mechanisms underlying them. It seeks to identify the conditions under which radical responses to capitalism's excesses do not become plausible alternatives to the status quo. Key factors include a party system with a small number of parties, voters that disagree on the non-redistributive issue, a disconnect between income and preferences on non-redistributive issues, and the salience of the second dimension issue. When the second dimension is salient enough, the pro-redistribution party cannot win by running on redistribution alone; it also needs to attract moderate voters. If these voters are "rich enough" (i.e., income higher than the average population income), then the level of redistribution offered by the pro-redistribution party decreases as the salience of the second dimension increases. Scholars have highlighted

the emergence of an educational cleavage pitting high-skill, university-educated voters who vote for the center left and the green party against low-skill, working-class voters who vote for the far right, which has brought renewed attention to these models (Piketty 2018; Cavaillé 2021).

This line of research, which remains underdeveloped, suggests ways forward for studying Lukes' second face of power. For example, an obvious next step for researchers is to ask, with Iversen and Goplerud (2018), what determines whether people vote according to their economic interests or ethnocentrism. Many studies point to the role of exogenous events, the media, and the discursive context more generally (e.g., Hopkins 2010). We still lack a good understanding of how changes in the discursive context occur and are experienced differently by different types of voters. In their review of multidimensional models of redistributive politics, Iversen and Goplerud (2018) point to possible avenues of inquiry. These include Riker's concept of "heresthetics (Riker, 1980, 1986) – a scenario in which political entrepreneurs try to stake out new dimensions to upset the reigning equilibrium." A related approach is to "see politicians as strategically staking out new dimensions and altering the salience of existing ones in a manner that produces partisan advantages" (Iversen & Goplerud 2018, 311).

Another related take on politics as electoral spectacle is to assume that redistributive and compensatory policies are themselves multi-dimensional (Kuziemko et al. 2023; Piketty 2018; Iversen & Soskice 2006). In my own work unpacking the dimensions of redistributive politics, I find that center-left parties face electoral incentives that lead them to pursue equity over equality, that is, to favor poorly redistributive "equal opportunity" policies (e.g., a meritocratic education system and the absence of discrimination on the labor market) instead of more radical attempts at egalitarian redistribution (Cavaillé 2023).

While "politics as electoral spectacle" contributions are often criticized for their narrow emphasis on the electoral connection, to understand the relationship between capitalism and democracy in Western democracies, the studies mentioned here remain central for at least two reasons. First, they help theorize changes in the "boundaries of the possible," thus improving our understanding of what is missing and why. Second, they complicate the democratic moderator hypothesis that anchors much of the literature empirically and normatively. Indeed, once we assume a multi-dimensional space, and against the democratic moderator hypothesis, the pathway to egalitarian responses to capitalism's excesses narrows dramatically. This conclusion does not require "organized combat"; instead, it is enough to assume representative democracy and its corollary, partisan democracy. This is a conclusion worth pondering.

## Political Economy and Lukes' Third Face of Power

What about the third face of power? According to Lukes' "radical" view of power, individuals' desires may be the product of a system that works contrary to their interests. Power is exerted when their subjective wants do not align with their objective interests. One resulting hypothesis is that the democratic moderator hypothesis fails because people are made to want and believe the "wrong thing."

Few orthodox political economists are comfortable going down this third face path, and for good reasons. Indeed, the approach is paternalistic: can a researcher comfortably state that they know better than agents themselves what is in their 'real' interest? (Hay 2002). In addition, the third face turns empirical assumptions baked into the benchmark hypothesis into normative judgments (i.e., low-income voters should want more redistribution), undermining its value as an analytical framework.

Still, important features of Lukes' third face of power remain amenable to systematic study using the tools of "orthodox" political economy applied to the study of mass preferences and political behavior.

## Toward a Positive Study of Hegemony?

Lukes' third face of power owes much to Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci, a Marxist, there is no stable capitalist society without "hegemony," defined as a kind of collective consent achieved via a shared conception of the world that is accepted by all as "natural," but which serves ruling class interests by obscuring the nature of class domination. A common critique of Marxist social science is that it is hard to falsify, and Gramsci's conception of ideology as a ruling class project is no exception. Still, important formal work by Bénabou and Tirole (2006) (see also Alesina and Angeletos [2005]) on the emergence and persistence of dominant ideologies preserves Gramsci's contention that shared ideas and ideals are "order-producing" while dispensing with the top-down class project. Instead, these models posit a bottom-up mechanism with micro-foundations in social psychology. The result is an illuminating account of how "diverse politico-ideological equilibria" can emerge from the complementarities between individual-level self-motivation concerns and country-level institutional arrangements. As Bénabou and Tirole explain, applying this paradigm to the study of inequality and redistribution leads to the following insights (Bénabou and Tirole, 2016, 154):

When the safety net and redistribution are minimal, agents have strong incentives to maintain for themselves, and pass on to their children, beliefs that effort is more important than luck, as these will lead to working hard and persevering in the

face of adversity. With high taxes and generous transfers, such beliefs are much less adaptive, so fewer people will maintain them. Thus, there can coexist: i) an “American Dream” equilibrium, with just-world beliefs about social mobility, and little redistribution; and ii) a “Euro-pessimistic” equilibrium, with more cynical beliefs and a large welfare state. In the latter, the poor are less (unjustly) stigmatized as lazy, while total effort (annual hours worked) and income are lower, than in the former. More generally, across all steady-states there is a negative correlation between just-world beliefs and the size of the welfare state, just as observed across countries.

In my own research, I find that theorizing beliefs about the status quo and redistribution as complementary goods helps explain important patterns of stability and change, at least with respect to mass attitudes toward redistributive social policies (Cavaillé 2023). I begin with different micro-foundations than Bénabou and Tirole: instead of focusing on self-motivation, I build on studies from across the social sciences to posit that the impulse to do what is collectively recognized as the “fair thing” is central to human cognition. With respect to opinions about inequality and income redistribution, this means that people derive utility—in the form of self-esteem and social approval—from supporting policies that move the status quo closer to what is prescribed by agreed-upon norms of fairness. This impulse is the individual-level observable manifestation of a moral system, i.e., a social technology that helps regulate the constant toggle between cooperation and opportunistic behavior characteristic of social life. Simply put, it contributes to the monitoring of envy and resentment from those who have “less than others” and promotes consent over policies that take from those who have more than others. The consensual reproduction of inequality implies that enough individuals share the same understanding of what is fair (what ought to be) and share the perception that the status quo is fair according to this definition. In other words, the type of “politico-ideological” equilibria described by Bénabou and Tirole are evidence of an uncontested allocation of goods, i.e., one collectively recognized as “fair.”

The market economy produces one type of good—market income—whose allocation is, at least partly, regulated (and contested) through the “effort should pay” principle, or in the words of Milton Friedman (1962, 167), the principle of “payment in accordance to product.” Friedman described this as the “basic core of value judgments that are unthinkingly accepted by the great bulk of [a society’s] members” and enables “resources to be allocated efficiently without compulsion.” This means that the Euro-pessimistic and the American Dream equilibria are both “fair,” i.e., uncontested, though each in different ways. But market income is not the only thing that needs to be allocated

fairly. Another is the proceeds of “social solidarity,” i.e., the allocation of pooled resources to those in permanent or temporary need. In this case, and mirroring the Euro-pessimistic versus American Dream typology, there are two ideal-typical equilibria possible. One is a high level of solidarity rooted in the widely shared beliefs that social solidarity (fairly) benefits “team players.” Another is a low level of solidarity rooted in the widely shared beliefs that it (fairly) punishes “free riders.”

I find that we cannot simply assume that people who oppose income redistribution because they find markets meritocratic enough also find an increase in social solidarity unfair because it benefits the “lazy poor.” Conversely, people who find markets unfair can express the same distrust of social solidarity. It is beyond the scope of this review piece to discuss the reasons for this disconnect. Instead, a quick discussion of attitudes in Scandinavian countries will help illustrate its implications. As shown in survey data, Scandinavians tend to find their economic system relatively meritocratic. As a result, in Scandinavian countries, support for income redistribution, as traditionally measured, is often lower than one might expect. In Denmark for example, agreement with the traditional redistribution item was a low 55% in 2014, compared to a high 90% in Portugal. In that sense, when it comes to the redistribution of market income through pre-distribution policies or progressive taxation, Scandinavians are closer to the American Dream equilibrium than the Euro-pessimism one. Where Scandinavian countries differ from the United States is in terms of their comparatively much lower concerns about free riding and moral hazard. This is what sustains their large welfare state, not the belief that effort does not pay.

This line of work proposes an interpretive framework consistent with well-documented patterns of correlation between fairness beliefs and policy preferences at the individual level and fairness beliefs and redistributive institutions at the country-level. Based on this research, the benchmark model, which predicts an egalitarian response to rising inequality, fails because it overlooks the stabilizing properties of politico-ideological equilibria. This conclusion is achieved without pointing fingers at a specific social class. Yet the argument is Gramsci-friendly in that it powerfully captures the role that an “ideological order” can play in the reproduction of income differences. Readers interested in the empirical study of this ideological order can refer to Cavaillé (2023), where I describe tools commonly found in behavioral economics that are particularly helpful for this purpose (e.g., Almås et al. (2020)).

## Concluding Thoughts

The studies discussed in this review help explain the limits of the democratic moderator hypothesis. They each emphasize mechanisms and factors that speak to one of the three faces of power conceptualized by Lukes. Critiques of Lukes' radical perspective on the nature of power have pointed to his reliance on the concept of "objective" interests. Without the latter, it is difficult to identify the second and third faces of power "in action." In contrast, the studies mentioned here make no reference to objective interests while still proposing ways of unpacking the nature, causes, and consequences of domination by omission (the second face) and hegemony (the third face).

While these studies sidestep the debate on the nature of individual interests, they do raise a different conceptual question, one regarding the importance of agency and responsibility in how one identifies the exercise of power. Indeed, in studies of policy-bundling and politico-ideological equilibria, power (in its second and third faces) manifests itself as an emergent property and does not presuppose actors (individual or collective) who can reasonably be held responsible for supply-side and ideological limits imposed on "the boundaries of the possible." But can there be power without a "perpetrator"?

I will not answer this question here (see e.g. Hayward and Lukes [2008] for more). More humbly, I hope that readers who identify as radical theorists, intrigued by the contributions mentioned here, will want to take a deeper dive in a subfield whose tools and methods they tend to distrust. Conversely, I hope that political economists who identify with the definition of the field used here will turn to radical theory to reflect on the nature of their work and its ability to speak truth about power.

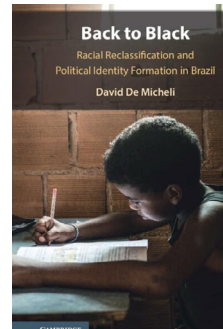
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## Author Exchange



***Back to Black: Racial Reclassification and Political Identity Formation in Brazil***. By David De Micheli. Cambridge University Press, 2024. 318p. Paperback.

Review by Belén Fernández Milmanda, Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Trinity College.

Brazil is home to the largest African-descendant population outside of Africa. Historically, however, in a country characterized by fluid racial categories, many Afro-Brazilians identified away from blackness, especially after experiencing upward social mobility. Strikingly, this historical tendency has recently reversed. Over a decade, between 2000 to 2010, Brazil went from being a country where most of the population identified as white to one where most identified as black or brown. In *Back to Black*, David De Micheli offers a novel explanation of this puzzle, which he terms a “reclassification reversal.”

Why are Brazilians choosing to identify as black or brown in greater proportions than before? De Micheli goes beyond typical instrumentalist explanations centered on the role of affirmative action policies implemented at the state and federal level—which in most cases postdate the reclassification reversal—to highlight the role of citizenship institutions. De Micheli argues that the sudden reversal of reclassification towards blackness instead of whiteness among Brazilians is the unintended consequence of the expansion of access to education that started with the democratic transition in the 1980s and accelerated in the Cardoso (1995–2002) and Lula (2003–2010) administrations. As more and more lower-class Brazilians accessed education, they became more aware of the thinly veiled racism they had experienced throughout their lives. Hence, Brazilians that choose to identify as black do not do so to gain some “advantage” or to access some benefits they would not have had access to as whites, but because of a new racial consciousness gained during their quest for social mobility.

The book offers something quite scarce in the identity politics literature: an empirical and systematic analysis of how identities form and take on a political meaning at the individual level. Through rigorous empirical analysis that makes creative use of both quantitative and qualitative tools, De Micheli shows how entry into

previously inaccessible spaces (like university education or better employment opportunities) brought many Brazilians from lower-class backgrounds face-to-face with racial hierarchies and inequalities, evincing for them the connection between their skin color and the obstacles they faced moving up the social ladder. Thus, *Back to Black* highlights an important intervening variable frequently overlooked by instrumental accounts of identity politics: the informal social hierarchies that can stigmatize certain ethno-racial identities and that are characteristic of Latin American societies.

As a scholar interested in the politics of inequality in Latin America, this fantastic book sparked many questions for me. One is about the relationship between reclassification towards blackness and political ideology. In Chapter 7, De Micheli proposes a link between reclassification towards blackness and support for leftwing parties or candidates. Without negating this connection, I wonder if the inverse of this relationship could also be at play. Could political views also affect people's self-understanding, not just the other way around? Are leftwing Brazilians more likely to see themselves as non-white? Since empowering and/or revalorizing non-white otherness has been an important part of the Brazilian left's discourse and agenda, it could be the case that Brazilians who support the left are also more likely to identify as non-white. Hence, it is not their newfound non-white identity that leads them to support the left, but their support for leftwing ideas, to which they were exposed in college, that makes them reclaim their non-white identity.

Another important question that De Micheli's work poses, and future research should tackle, is why this reclassification reversal within the population has not yet translated into greater representation of non-whites in national politics. As of this day, the overwhelming majority of Brazilian politicians, specially at the national level, identify as white. According to Brazil's Superior Electoral Court<sup>1</sup>, in the 2022 elections, only 26 percent of the politicians elected to the Lower Chamber and 22 percent of those elected to the Senate, identified as black or brown. Moreover, none of the 27 elected governors identified as black and only 9 as brown. Relatedly, a question that kept nagging me while I read *Back to Black* is how can a politician like Bolsonaro remain so popular in a country in which most of the population identifies as non-white despite his racist rhetoric and effective attacks on affirmative action policies? Future research should aim at disentangling the causes of the persistent gross underrepresentation

of black Brazilians in politics, as well as explaining why despite rising levels of racial consciousness, non-white Brazilians are still willing to support racist politicians.

### **Response from David De Micheli**

I am grateful to Belén Fernández Milmanda for her thoughtful review of my book and the questions she raises regarding causes of identity change and the implications of the book's findings for inequality in representation.

Milmanda raises an important point regarding the causal role that ideology or political sympathies might play in racial reclassification processes as an omitted variable. This is especially true since the social policy expansion of Brazil's recent "inclusionary turn" has helped to build public loyalty to leftist parties, especially among the lower classes. Moreover, one causal pathway through which education exerts effect on reclassification, I argue, is exposure to social networks and movement spaces – a domain we may expect to be associated with the political left. However, I can offer two pieces of evidence that can reassure us about concerns of omitted variable bias.

First, reports from interviewees indicate that reclassifiers' prior political sympathies were heterogeneous. While some interviewees gained exposure to social networks via prior leftist connections, others highlighted the inadvertent exposure to social networks they gained through new campus friendships, for example, or by simply enrolling in preparatory courses for the university entrance exam. Several of these latter interviewees expressed consternation at the politics of leftist movements, saying that while they identified with racial concerns, they did not subscribe to more radical leftist tendencies, such as Marxism. Additionally, interviewees who gained exposure via information and labor market pathways were less likely to indicate prior leftist sympathies. Indeed, several emphasized that they previously held conservative beliefs on racial issues, such as opposing affirmative action policies. These interviewees tended to emphasize the personal and subjective experiences altered by new information and labor market experiences, which led them to rethink and reinterpret their racial identities. All in all, while we tend to (and in fact I do) associate politicized blackness with the political left in Brazil, it is unclear that the racial reclassification that often precedes this politicization is restricted to individuals with leftist loyalties.

Second, though many quantitative data sources I analyze (microlevel census and administrative data)

<sup>1</sup> <https://sig.tse.jus.br/ords/dwapr/r/seai/sig-candidaturas/painel-perfil-candidato>

often exclude political variables like ideology and partisanship, my analyses of public opinion data seek to control for such influences. In Chapter 4, I present analyses of public opinion surveys from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, which allow me to control for political ideology (1980s) or partisanship (1990s and 2000s), an imperfect but reasonable proxy. Estimates in the book's appendix show that partisanship correlated with racial identification only in the 1990s, but that this was not limited to leftist parties. In this survey, partisans of the leftist PT and conservative PSDB were both more likely to identify as black. This correlation, however, disappears by the late 2000s, when education emerges as a significant and positive correlate of black identification. Apart from the accounts of interviewees, then, public opinion data indicate that education has come to predict racial reclassification, above and beyond political sympathies.

Finally, I share Milmanda's concern for the underrepresentation of the darker-skinned among political elites, no matter how they choose to identify racially. For in-depth analysis of these questions, I refer readers to the on-going work by political scientists who attribute underrepresentation to campaign strategies (Mitchell 2009), voter discrimination (Janusz 2018), and the unequal distribution of party resources across candidates (Bueno and Dunning 2017). Given my focus on the mass public, I would add to this list the simple and unsatisfying explanation that structural change takes time. While the reclassification reversal has been rapid in many respects, it is still one that has unfolded over decades, and the translation of newfound identities into the electoral arena has lagged behind these broader sociopolitical shifts. Thus while Chapter 7 demonstrates the electoral consequences of the reclassification reversal, the highly-educated black voters I analyze still represent a small slice of the electorate. Only with time can one hope that Brazil's increasingly race-conscious voters will overcome the forces of inequality and discrimination identified by other scholars, and translate their critical electoral mass into improved descriptive representation. Milmanda and I agree that how and whether such change occurs is certainly worthy of future investigation.

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***Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America***. By Belén Fernández Milmanda. Cambridge University Press, 2024. 276p. Hardback.

Review by David De Micheli,  
Assistant Professor of Political  
Science and Ethnic Studies,  
University of Utah.

Why do agrarian elites have greater policy influence in some Latin American democracies than others? And how is it that agrarian elites, once considered a threat to democratic survival, have come to tolerate democracy? Latin America has long held the ignoble title of the world's most unequal region for its distribution of land and income. Given the centrality of wealth inequality to theories of democratization, it is striking to observe that agrarian elites in Latin America—whose immobile assets make them especially vulnerable to threats of redistribution—have seemingly made peace with democracy. In *Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America*, Belén Fernández Milmanda compellingly documents how this came to pass, and explains the conditions under which elites pursue varied strategies to protect their economic interests despite lacking electoral clout. In doing so, Milmanda sheds light on an underexamined component of regime stability in Latin America's third-wave democracies, and joins recent studies that emphasize the central importance of electoral organizations to elites' strategic adaptations to democracy (see Ziblatt 2017).

Through careful process-tracing analyses of Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, Milmanda shows that elites' perceptions of an existential economic threat compels coordinated investments in electoral organizations: parties in some cases (Chile) or multiparty candidate-centered caucuses in others (Brazil). By electing parties and politicians with direct ties to agrarian interests, these organizations are capable of profoundly influencing agrarian policy (land reform and confiscatory taxes), and thus of shielding elites from redistribution. The existence of an existential threat thus helps solve collective action and coordination problems and encourages elites to pursue electoral strategies to defend their interests.

Absent existential threats, elites are not incentivized to invest in electoral organizations, and instead opt for nonelectoral strategies—direct access to officeholders via personal contacts, or if all else fails, protest. Such was the case in Argentina, where elites experienced neither the trauma of serious land reform efforts (as in Chile), or popular mobilization influencing a new constitution at the time of transition (as in Brazil). Yet because nonelectoral channels of influence depend on the government's willingness to grant access to elites, this strategy of influencing policy is less reliable than electoral strategies, and can leave elites vulnerable should unfriendly governments sweep into power.

From the perspective of democratic survival, Milmanda's findings will inspire optimism for observers of Latin American democracy by reinforcing the idea that agrarian elites no longer threaten regime stability as they once did. Like Ziblatt's elites in 19th century England, today's agrarian elites in Latin America have found strategies to protect their interests despite lacking electoral numbers. Yet this same ability of elites to adapt so effectively to threats of redistribution also raises the question of under what conditions democratic institutions might lead to more equitable outcomes for society as a whole, especially when redistribution is favored by the masses and not elites. That elites have so succeeded in shaping redistributive policy to suit their interests thus calls into question what democracy can effectively deliver in contexts of profound inequality, such as Latin America.

We might also ask: to what extent does the ability of elites to preserve the status quo under democratic institutions threaten democracy *indirectly*, e.g., by contributing to democratic deficits that undermine mainstream parties and politicians, or by building popular demand for outsider candidates who can pose serious threats to democratic institutions? Indeed, in each of the cases Milmanda analyzes, there has been a groundswell of public support for right-wing populist leaders in recent years. This culminated in the election of Brazil's Bolsonaro in 2018 and Argentina's Milei in 2023. Far-right candidate José Kast was defeated only in the second round of Chile's 2021 general election. While we may celebrate that elites no longer represent the threat to democracy they once did, there is an irony in that elites' newfound democratic toleration has come to coincide with public support for "aspiring autocrats" (Gamboa 2022) – a pattern decidedly distinct from the democratic breakdowns of decades past (Bermeo 2003). The question, it seems, is no longer whether elites are willing to tolerate the will of the masses; it is whether mass publics will tolerate democracy on the terms of economic elites.

No doubt, these are difficult questions to answer without the benefit of hindsight, and only time will tell how these competing interests play out. But one thing is certainly clear: that Milmanda's findings raise such questions for Latin America's current historical moment is a testament to the broad implications and relevance of this exciting new research. *Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America* provides a fresh perspective on the relationship between economic elites and democracy in Latin America, and is essential reading for all analysts and observers of economic elites, party politics, and redistribution in democracy.

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## Response from Belén Fernández Milmanda

I would like to thank Dr. David De Micheli's for his thoughtful and generous review of *Agrarian Elites and Democracy in Latin America*. Dr. De Micheli's review highlights a key question that my work poses regarding democratic sustainability in highly unequal societies: to what extent does elites' ability to preserve the status quo under democratic institutions indirectly threaten democracy, e.g., by contributing to democratic deficits that undermine mainstream parties and politicians and by building popular demand for outsider anti-system candidates? In other words, is there a tradeoff between securing democracy from destabilization from above and threats from below? Similarly to De Micheli, in the book's concluding chapter, I weigh the political consequences of making democracy tolerable to economic elites. Unlike *redistributivist* theories of democratization, which assume democracies will redistribute more from the rich to the poor (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006), my work, like Albertus' (2015), shows that agrarian elites can use democratic institutions to protect their wealth from redistributive pressures. These limits to redistribution have helped democratic continuity in the region, lowering elites' incentives to destabilize it. However, by protecting the interests of wealthy elites, democracies have simultaneously frustrated the redistributive



expectations of the same dispossessed groups that the process of democratization incorporated into the political arena. More than 30 years ago, in her analysis of the unfolding democratization wave in Latin America, Terry Karl (1990) warned us about the paradox afflicting young democracies in the region: how assuring economic elites that democratic government would not threaten their interests—something crucial for democratic survival—would limit democracies' ability to solve the region's massive poverty and inequality.

Indeed, as De Micheli points out, several countries across the region have seen the rise of rightwing populist anti-system candidates in recent years. One might wonder, however, if what has fueled popular support for the likes of Bolsonaro, Milei or Kast is a reaction against Latin American democracies' *egalitarian gains* rather than the dissatisfaction with persistently high inequality. Even when the leftwing administrations of the 2000s did not decrease land inequality, they did reduce income inequality (although levels were still high relative to other regions). Moreover, as De Micheli's book shows, some of these leftwing governments advanced social equality by empowering women and other minorities like Afro-descendants and indigenous groups. Could leftwing governments' accomplishments in racial and gender equality explain the rightwing reaction that followed them better than their failure to eradicate income inequality? Or does persistent income inequality make citizens more open to messages that blame minorities for their woes? Across the world, gains in social equality in the face of persistent or increasing income inequality have spurred support for rightwing anti-system candidates. Future research should explore why increased income inequality has fueled support for politicians like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro or Javier Milei, whose policies have *increased* rather than decreased inequality. In any case, De Micheli's book and mine are good examples of how, once more, the study of Latin American Politics can shed light on problems that affect societies across the world.

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## Meet the Authors



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**David De Micheli** is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Ethnic Studies at the University of Utah. His book, *Back to Black* (Cambridge, 2024), explores how educational expansion has led to the growing salience of racial, and especially black, identities in Brazil and ushered in a new era of racial

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## Editorial Team

### Executive Editors



**Dan Slater** specializes in the politics and history of enduring dictatorships and emerging democracies, with a regional focus on Southeast Asia. At the University of Michigan, he serves as the Director of the Center for Emerging Democracies and the James Orin Murfin Professor of Political Science. Previously, he served for 12 years on the faculty at the University of Chicago, where he was the Director of the Center for International Social Science Research, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, and associate member in the Department of Sociology.



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### Managing Editor



**Adam Fefer** is managing editor of the Democracy and Autocracy Newsletter. His research focuses on democracy, ethnic conflict, and power-sharing institutions, with a geographical focus on the Horn of Africa, South Asia, the US, and the Levant. Adam has a Ph.D. in Political Science from UC San Diego and a B.A. from UC Berkeley.

### Guest Editor



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### About *Democracy and Autocracy*

*Democracy and Autocracy* is the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association's Democracy and Autocracy section (formerly known as the Comparative Democratization section). First known as *CompDem*, it has been published three times a year since 2003. In October 2010, the newsletter was renamed *APSA-CD* and expanded to include substantive articles on democracy, as well as news and notes on the latest developments in the field. In September 2018, it was renamed the *Annals of Comparative Democratization* to reflect the increasingly high academic content and recognition of the symposia.

## Section News

From the [Journal of Democracy](#):

*Billions Voted This Year: How Will Democracy Fare?*

More than 4 billion people cast ballots in what was dubbed the “year of elections.” Seven of the 10 most populous countries in the world, including India, Indonesia, and the United States, held national elections. Voters in dozens of other countries, ranging from Mexico and South Africa to Pakistan and South Korea, also delivered verdicts this year. Will democracy survive this test, especially in states where authoritarian populists are on the ballot? The truth is that for all the worry, democracy has shown remarkable durability across the globe. The following collection of essays reveals why democracy usually comes out on top—and spotlights some of the elections that may matter most.

Kurt Weyland, “[Why Democracy Survives Populism](#)”

Populism is a mortal threat to liberal democracy, but it rarely hits the mark. The evidence shows that these would-be strongmen require an extraordinary set of circumstances to succeed, which is why they so rarely do.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “[Democracy’s Surprising Resilience](#)”

Despite worry of an authoritarian resurgence, the vast majority of “third wave” democracies are enduring. Democracy, buoyed by economic growth and urbanization, is outperforming most people’s expectations and fears.

Kate Baldwin, “[Democracy’s Devout Defenders](#)”

When Africa’s leaders act undemocratically, they face an unexpected opponent—the power of the pulpit. Within civil society, church leaders and their faithful have become leading defenders of liberal democracy.

Jason Brownlee and Kenny Miao, “[Why Democracies Survive](#)”

Democracies are under stress, but they are not about to buckle. The erosion of norms and other woes do not spell democratic collapse. With incredibly few exceptions, affluent democracies will endure, no matter the schemes of would-be autocrats.

Christian Welzel, “[Why the Future Is Democratic](#)”

The swelling pessimism about democracy’s future is unwarranted. Values focused on human freedom are spreading throughout the world, and suggest that the future of self-government is actually quite bright.

*Some of the Year’s Biggest Elections*

Dan Slater, “[Indonesia’s High-Stakes Handover](#)”

Indonesians have just elected a former general accused of human-rights abuses, with little respect for democratic institutions. The country’s democracy has not failed, but it may soon be fighting for its life.

Milan Vaishnav, “[The Rise of India’s Second Republic](#)”

While he did not achieve the sweeping victory many predicted, Narendra Modi led his ruling coalition to a third consecutive victory. In so doing, he is laying the foundation for a new political order in which India is simultaneously more democratic and more illiberal.

Viridiana Ríos, “[Why Mexico Is Not on the Brink](#)”

Claudia Sheinbaum won Mexico’s presidency in a landslide, but celebration of her election as the country’s first female president was blunted by a deeper concern: Mexico’s deteriorating democracy. In truth, the country’s democratic institutions are highly resilient, and there is reason to be optimistic about what lies ahead.

Adeel Malik and Maya Tudor, “[Pakistan’s Coming Crisis](#)”

Pakistani voters sent the military a message in the February elections: They no longer trust the “guardian of the country.” Worse for the generals, they can no longer escape accountability for their corruption and incompetence because everyone knows the military is in charge.

David Everatt, “[The Long Decline of South Africa’s ANC](#)”

After thirty years of ANC dominance, the 2024 elections have ushered in multiparty politics in South Africa. Will the party’s centrist shift be



enough to stop its descent, or is it destined to fracture further?

Michael Bernhard (University of Florida) published and edited the following volume and articles, respectively:

Kim, W., Bernhard, M., & Hicken, A. (2024). [Party system institutionalization and the durability of competitive authoritarian regimes](#). *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(4), 1374–1396.

Bernhard, M., Kreppel, A., & de la Torre, C. (Eds.). (2024). *Still the Age of Populism?: Re-examining Theories and Concepts*. Taylor & Francis.

Martin Dimitrov (Tulane University) published the following book:

Dimitrov, M. K. (2024). *The Adaptability of the Chinese Communist Party. Elements in Politics and Society in East Asia*.

James L. Gibson (Washington University in St. Louis) published the following book:

Gibson, J. (2024). *Democracy's Destruction? Changing Perceptions of the Supreme Court, the Presidency, and the Senate after the 2020 Election*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Kenneth F. Greene (University of Texas at Austin) published the following articles:

Greene, K. F. (2024). [Money can't buy you love: Partisan responses to vote-buying offers](#). *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2), 644–660.

Greene, K.F., Rossiter, E., Seira, E., & Simpser, A. (2024). "[Interacting as Equals: How Contact Can Promote Tolerance Among Opposing Partisans](#)." *Nature Human Behavior*. This paper also won the APSA 2024 Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior (EPOVB) Section Best Paper.

Maiah Jaskoski (Northern Arizona University) edited and published the following special issues and articles, respectively:

Arce, M., & Jaskoski, M. (2024). [Development Elites, Impacted Communities, and Environmental Governance in Latin America](#). *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1–13.

Jaskoski, M. (2024). [Opportunities and Choices During Environmental Licensing: Community Participation in Latin America's Extractive Sectors](#). *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1–26.

Paul Kenny (Australian National University) was awarded the 2024 Brian Farrell Book Prize from the Political Studies Association of Ireland for *Why Populism? Political Strategy from Ancient Greece to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Don S. Lee (Sungkyunkwan University) was promoted to Associate Professor, appointed as Head of Department of Public Administration, and published the following books and articles:

Lee, D. S. (2024). *The Presidents Dilemma in Asia*. Oxford University Press.

Kuk, J. S., Lee, D. S., & Rhee, I. (2024). [Does Exposure to Election Fraud Research Undermine Confidence in Elections?](#) *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 88(SI), 656–680.

Lee, D. S., & Park, S. (2024). [Bureaucratic responsiveness under dynamic political settings: Experimental evidence from local governments](#). *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 49(2), 323–352.

Carl LeVan (American University) published the following article:

LeVan, A. C. (2024). [Liberal visions of multiculturalism and majoritarianism](#). *Frontiers in Political Science*, 6, 1451776.

Mark Mun Vong (University of Cape Town) published the following article:

Vong, M. (2024). [The Dynamics of Pro-Government Labour Mobilisation in Cambodia](#). *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1–17.

Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro (Brown University) published the following article:

Vidotto, S., Weitz-Shapiro, R., & Winters, M. S. (2024). [Political Knowledge in the Context of Changing Institutions](#). *Political Research Quarterly*, 1–15.