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2 Social and Political Inequality

Marcel Maussen and Armen Hakhverdian

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, the public debate on social and political inequality in relation to ethnicity, gender, age, income and education returned in all its intensity, both within and outside the Netherlands. Take the Occupy protests against the yawning wealth gap between the rich and the poor in the Western world and the great success of Thomas Piketty's *Capital* in the 21st Century, in which the French economist describes how patterns of inequality and concentration of wealth have developed over the last two centuries. Education is also gaining visibility as a social and political cleavage. For example, Mark Bovens and Anchrít Wille, in their book *Diplomademocratie* [Diploma Democracy], focused attention on the almost complete absence of people with a secondary education or less from politics and civil society. Or consider the rise of political parties such as *Denk* [Think] and *Artikel 1*, which are committed to the interests of the 'new Dutch', or the Black Lives Matter movement, which has put police violence against Black Americans on the agenda. The inequality between men and women is regularly in the news, too, whether it is about expressions of sexism, sexual violence against women, or the male-female ratio in politics.

Social inequality is the subject of research in political science, in at least two ways. First, social inequalities lead to a lot of political conflict and political struggle. Some people and social groups have more economic, social or cultural resources than others, and they therefore have many more opportunities in their lives than others. For these and other reasons, social inequality is an 'inexhaustible breeding ground' for potential conflicts of interest and conflicts (Bader 1991: 87). Second, political scientists are interested in the relationship between social inequality and inequality in terms of politics and power. Certain people and social groups have more opportunities than others to have their wishes and interests prevail and to turn collectively binding decisions to their favour. This inequality in terms of power is not self-explanatory, and certainly not in democratic political systems in which the interests and needs of all citizens have equal weight and all citizens have an equal voice, on paper at least. (Dahl 1998, 2006). Within political science, research into the relationships between social inequality and inequality in terms of power or politics has traditionally

been of considerable importance, and many political scientists study the extent to which democratic ideals are realised in political practice (Lijphart 1997; Gilens 2012).

In this chapter, we discuss how political scientists look at social and political inequality. In so doing, we also use sociological concepts and theories on social inequality. We begin with an outline of the historical development of social inequality and introduce the thinkers who have shaped the debate. We then discuss some key concepts according to which social inequality can be conceptualised. The second part of the chapter is about political inequality and research within political science into unequal political representation.

2.2 Equality and inequality, both social and political

Social or societal inequality concerns the unequal distribution of life chances among different people and groups. This includes the uneven distribution of opportunities within a society, but also inequality between citizens in various regions of the world. In this chapter, we focus on unequal distribution within societies, even though we are aware that these inequalities are closely related to international relations. Life chances enable people to realise certain goals, ambitions and expectations, individually but also in coordination with others. Since societies have existed, and right up to the present day, life chances have been unevenly distributed. Some people have more access to food, prosperity, security, good housing and health than others, and therefore have more opportunities to freely choose what they want to do or be, to be healthy and live a long time, get an education, travel, have leisure time, go on holidays, maintain personal relationships, have children, and so on. In this chapter, we take as a point of departure the idea that life chances are determined by access to resources on the one hand and, on the other, by certain freedoms that people have, for example in terms of formal rights, but also in relation to social norms about what someone may or may not do, or what is or is not deemed appropriate to do.

The distribution of life chances is intertwined in countless ways with the unequal distribution of political resources and opportunities to gain power in situations of political conflict and collective decision-making.¹

1 The authoritative political scientist Robert Dahl describes political resources as 'everything to which a person or a group has access that they can use to influence, directly or indirectly, the conduct of other persons' (1998: 177).

People and groups have unequal opportunities to decide on important matters that concern them or to occupy positions of political authority. In this chapter, we make a distinction between social and political inequality. When we speak about *social* inequality, we mean the unequal distribution of life chances, while *political* inequality has to do with unequal opportunities to influence binding collective decision-making, to be heard, and to settle political conflicts to your advantage.² We address the relationships between social and political inequality in the second part of the chapter.

As noted above, life chances have been distributed unequally since time immemorial. In the feudal societies of medieval Europe, for example, your life chances were completely different if you were born in a farming family than if you came into the world as the son or daughter of an aristocrat. As the child of a farmer, you were dependent on a landlord, you had to work your entire life, you died relatively young, and you had virtually no say in the social and political relations in society. In the colonial societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European settlers had access to all sorts of resources, rights and privileges, while the colonised indigenous people were oppressed and exploited. Today, there is still a world of difference between your life chances if you are born in a prosperous country in say Europe or North America and those you have if you are a child of parents in a country torn apart by poverty and war in Africa or the Middle East. But even in a prosperous country such as the Netherlands, the distribution of life chances depends, for example, on gender, skin colour, religion, sexual orientation, the social class of your parents, your education, whether you have a physical disability, and on countless other characteristics and factors.

Although there are considerable social inequalities in every era, there are important differences among societies and types of societies. Historical sociologists refer to the fundamental structure of a society. It is a matter then, for instance, of economic conditions that have a significant influence on the formation of social classes; consider the differences between and among feudal, capitalist, industrialised and late-capitalist economies. But we also have to consider types of political relationships and relationships of authority that characterise a society. International relations also determine to a large extent the fundamental structure of a society and the social inequalities that go with it. For instance, research into macro factors and historical formations of this kind is being done by Marxist historians, in

2 As described in Chapter 1, section 3 above, the inequality of power has to do with the unequal distribution of a *capacity*, and not exclusively the exercise of that capacity.

structuralist approaches to social change, and in the so-called 'systems approach' in international relations.

The question is, however, whether, social inequalities in a particular type of society and in a given period are being thematised and problematised – and, if so, which ones. Social inequalities are almost always pointed out, but they are not always regarded as objectionable or unjust. Social inequalities were and are legitimised or condoned in all sorts of ways. According to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, people were essentially unequal and it was therefore logical that social privileges should be unevenly distributed, and that some people were free citizens while others were slaves. In feudal societies, inequalities were justified by an appeal to a God-given social order in which social origin largely defined one's life chances. Exploitation and slavery in colonial societies were justified on the basis of racist ideas about the superiority of white Europeans, and these ideas were widespread and accepted in Europe and the United States. The same applies to the fact that inequality between men and women in all sorts of societies was and is legitimised.

This is not to say, though, that oppressed individuals and groups did not resist their distressing lack of life chances and their poverty and exploitation. They did indeed resist. However discriminatory ideologies were widespread and whatever level of violence those in power were willing to use to suppress certain groups, the fact is that resistance to inequality and exploitation has existed since time immemorial. However, the rise of modern natural law in the seventeenth century is widely considered a major turning point in thinking about social inequality as something inevitable. Thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and, later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau formulated the postulate that people were in fact equal. This postulate of equality, or more precisely of moral equality (the argument that the interests and needs of every person matter) was given extra weight when it was included in the universalist discourses of the Enlightenment and in thinking about political and social relations in important democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, such as the independence struggle waged by the English colonies in North America (1773-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1795). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there arose in this way a fundamental critique of *social inequality* and unequal distributions of life chances, but also of *political inequality* and the lack of democracy. Both were powerfully articulated at the end of the eighteenth century in a way that is still inspiring. In 1776 the American Declaration of independence read in part: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' In the following decade, the French revolutionaries proclaimed, in the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* of 1789: 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.'

Modern natural law, the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions converged in a fundamental criticism of feudal society, in which social and political privileges were fully intertwined with one's lineage. At the same time, a fundamental change of economic and social relations took place in modernising Europe. The rise of capitalism, modern science, the formation of nations and modern states, later followed by industrialisation and the rise of imperialism, meant that the world at the end of the nineteenth century looked very different than it had 100 years earlier. The new forms of social and political inequality that emerged could be critically questioned again from the postulate of moral equality. The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who travelled throughout the United States in 1831 and 1832 to investigate social relations in American society, wrote that in democratic societies there was an inexhaustible passion for equality: 'People and forces who set themselves against equality will be destroyed by it' (Tocqueville 2000: 212-213). But, despite the lofty ideals of many Enlightenment thinkers, there was a world of difference in Europe and the United States between the recorded ideals of equality and the elaboration of those ideals in people's everyday lives. Marxists, socialists and liberals criticised various forms of inequality, and in social movements and revolutions a struggle was waged for more-equal civil, social and political rights for all groups in society. This social criticism, these social revolutions and this fight against social inequality continued well into the twentieth century and remain relevant to this day.

Against the background of the horrors of Nazism and fascism, in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human rights was adopted by the United Nations. In it, the postulate of universal 'moral equivalence' as a foundation for a just and decent world was formulated once again. The Declaration spoke of the 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family'. The rise of the modern welfare state can be considered an illustration of the institutional attempts to correct unjust social inequalities and to rearrange the distribution of prosperity and life chances (see Chapter 4).

The dialectical movement between, on the one hand, developing social structures that are characterised by the unequal distribution of life chances and political power and, on the other, political-theoretical and

political-ideological criticism of existing inequalities linked to social movements and political struggle, is also continuing in the twenty-first century.

2.3 Social inequality

If it is not 'natural' or inevitable that life chances are so unevenly distributed, questions arise about what types of social inequalities there are, how their existence can be explained and what might possibly be done, and what must be done. From the middle of the nineteenth century on, questions of this kind became the subject of what we now call the 'sociology of social inequality', where all kinds of schools and theories arose, often closely associated with political and social movements. The work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is extremely influential in this context. In this section, we will briefly discuss a few basic concepts that these and other sociologists developed to describe and analyse patterns of social inequality.³ We will then look at further approaches within political science.

A first conceptual distinction is that between *diversity* and *inequality*. Both concepts are relative: they have meaning only if we compare two or more entities (for example, individuals, groups, neighbourhoods, cities, countries, and regions). We speak of diversity or variety when we want to say that entities are not the same, that they are 'different'. A neighbourhood with blue houses is different from a neighbourhood with red houses, curls are different from straight hair, tennis is different from judo, and so on. On the other hand, we speak of inequalities if in a comparison there is more versus less, better versus worse, safer versus more unsafe, healthier versus more unhealthy, and so on. A similar discussion on the distinction between 'different' and 'unequal' has to do with the delimitation of the concepts of social differentiation and social inequality. Modern, complex societies are differentiated in all kinds of ways: people do various things and have various roles, and there are various professions (dentist, university instructor, baker and so on). We can imagine that all of these different activities, roles, functions and professions might be valued quite equally, for instance because all professions paid exactly the same and also had the same status. In that hypothetical situation, a society would indeed be differentiated, but there would not necessarily be any inequalities. The reality is, of course,

3 We make good use of the standard work of Bader and Benschop (1988), which offers a really thorough overview of the development of theories on social inequality.

different. We see social differentiation go hand in hand with inequalities, some significant, which are expressed in unequal evaluations in the form of salaries, status or privileges. The sociology of inequalities focuses, as its name suggests, on inequality and not so much on diversity or 'social differentiation'.

A second important conceptual delimitation lies in the distinction between 'natural' and 'social' differences and inequalities.⁴ There are several natural differences between people, such as hereditary differences (skin color, hair color, eye shape and so on), congenital differences (some physical and mental handicaps, for instance) as well as individually acquired traits, such as body strength and mental faculties (Bader & Benschop 1988: 52). Social and historico-social conditions jointly contribute to 'natural' differences between people. Consider, for instance, how environmental conditions in a country, a social class or a family affect health and physical growth (including of children before they are even born). People do differ from each other in a natural sense, but that does not yet determine whether these differences also lead to unequal life chances. Whether natural differences are evaluated – and if so, how – does not, in and of itself, depend on these differences. Rather it 'is determined by common interpretations and social power relations that are predominant at a given moment' (1988: 51). This social evaluation is partly determined by what type of activity or social role someone plays and in what context they play it (sometimes someone's being tall is valued greatly, sometimes it's being strong, and sometimes being fat or thin). Broader social evaluations are also of great importance, for example with regard to natural differences such as skin colour, sex, weight, disabilities, and so on. Inequality occurs only when certain evaluations are applied to these 'natural' traits.⁵

Now that we have more fully delimited the concept of social inequality from closely related concepts such as natural inequalities, diversity, and social differentiation, it is important to define more precisely what we mean when we say that social inequality concerns the distribution of life chances among people and groups in a society. We outlined above that life chances are the opportunities that people have to realise in their lives certain goals, ambitions and expectations, individually but also with others.

4 Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755) is a classic in this regard. He argues that there is no necessary or natural relationship between natural and 'social inequalities'.

5 Today, moreover, people rightly question the casualness with which people were categorised on the basis of quasi-objective 'natural' differences such as race, gender (m/f) or 'physically impairment'.

We can now be a bit more specific and say that life chances are formed by having a combination of resources and of freedoms at one's disposal.⁶ We can interpret 'resources' broadly to mean material resources (money, property, food, and power), qualifications (a degree), capacities and talents, but also, for example, a social network you can call on, an organisation that can help you, a school you can go to, and so on. It can mean resources that you yourself can really claim as your own (that you can possess), but also resources you have, or can get, access to, such as healthcare and public transport. In addition, your life chances are linked closely to the freedoms you have. This includes both formal freedoms that are often enshrined in civil, social and political rights, and freedoms and restrictions that are often socially determined, for instance because of a prevailing norm.

In order to get a clear picture of the way in which having resources and freedoms, in their mutual relations, at one's disposal determines one's life chances, three other factors should be mentioned here. First, there is the value of a given resource – that is, exactly what you can do with it, which depends, among other things, on the social arena or the social interaction within which you want to do something. If you want to purchase something in a supermarket, money is a really useful resource, while good education and good physical condition, for instance, are not resources you can use directly to pay at the checkout. The meaning and the value of certain resources also depend on where and for what purpose you want to use them. Second, there are what is known as transformation or conversion factors. This has to do with whether and how you can in fact convert a certain object or resource into something that can help you realise your goal or ambitions. That can depend on many factors. If you have a car at your disposal as a resource but you live in a country where there are no roads and no petrol, you still cannot realise mobility as a capability. It could also be that you have a car but cannot use it, either because you have no driver's license or because you should have a specially adapted car since you have a physical handicap. Another example: as a woman, you could have a good education, for instance, but the social norm could be such that women do not work outside the home but care for their children. And as we shall see, income can be a resource in the political arena when you live in a country where you can buy influence by donating to a politician's campaign, but converting money into political

6 This conceptualisation of life chances as having at one's disposal a combination of resources and freedoms, corresponds to how the concept of the quality of life is defined in the so-called capability approach developed by the economist Amartya Sen (2001) and the political philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011).

power is a lot less straight forwards in a system where political donations are highly regulated. To get a good picture of the relationship between having resources and opportunities at one's disposal on the one hand and having chances on the other, we must also look at conversion factors of this sort. Third, the concept of life chances expresses the idea that someone doing research on inequality is primarily interested in distribution issues and the chances that people have. This is important because, in describing and assessing someone's social life situation, we also want to take into account what this person wants. We think there's a relevant difference between whether someone does not go on vacation because he does not want to, and whether he does not go because there are financial barriers in the way. Your social life situation is different depending on whether the reason you're not going to study is that there is no money for it, or that your parents and those around you do not think it is appropriate for girls to go to university, or that you yourself would rather do something else.

Sometimes social scientists are not primarily interested in describing the distribution of life chances at the level of individuals, but want to get a picture of social inequality at higher levels of aggregation, such as at the level of an entire society. An important concept in this context is the stratification structure or the structure of social inequality (also referred to as class structure). The concept of structure expresses the idea that the unequal distribution of freedoms and control over resources is not accidental, but that there is a pattern and a certain degree of coherence. Certain combinations of inequality occur together. Thus, someone with a higher education generally has a better-paying job and lives in a nicer house in a better neighbourhood. The concept of social structure also expresses the idea that there is a relatively enduring pattern of behavior that persists for quite some time. Finally, the concept of structure denotes that the actions of people and groups are shaped and bound ('structured') to an important degree by social patterns and relations.

The structuring of social inequality has two basic forms (Bader & Benschop 1988). First, the resources and freedoms that come with certain social positions are unequally distributed. This is called *positional* inequality, because the inequalities in question result from positions in the social structure. An important example of positional inequality is the various rewards and evaluations that come with different professions. Every social position has a certain combination of resources and freedoms. Individuals who land on such a position have that bundle of benefits at their disposal. In some cases, these are positive evaluations and relatively ample resources; in others, negative evaluations and few resources. The second basic form

concerns the criteria and mechanisms on the basis of which individuals land these unequally structured social positions or, on the contrary, are excluded from them. These are called *allocative* or ascriptive inequalities. Individuals can access social positions on the basis of strictly individual characteristics such as talents, achievements, diplomas, character, and so on.⁷ But in reality, the opportunities individuals have to get more or less access to social positions are determined to a large extent by characteristics that are attributed to them by others or by society as a whole. Characteristics of this kind are attributed, then, to certain individuals because they are seen as belonging to a particular social group or category (such as ‘female’, ‘Muslims’, ‘immigrants’). These forms of ascriptive inequality are quite widespread and are deeply embedded in all types of power structures and social and cultural norms in society, and they explain why ascriptive inequality is so persistent when it comes to outward appearance and gender (Young 1989; Anderson 2010).

With the help of these basic concepts and theoretical notions, it becomes possible to do research on social inequalities. This can be done by looking at how structures of inequality take shape in certain domains, such as income inequality, inequality in education, inequality in relation to health and life expectancy, or spatial segregation. Within the social sciences, a lot of attention is paid to ascriptive inequalities, for example on the basis of gender (consider the unequal distribution of care and labour between men and women, inequalities in the labour market, discrimination against women and their systematic subordination, or underlying gender norms that contribute to social inequality). Research on ascriptive inequality on the basis of skin color, ethnic origin and faith is also of considerable importance, for example when it comes to employment discrimination, racism and exclusion.

2.4 Political inequality

As noted earlier, social inequality is substantially connected to inequality in terms of power: individuals and groups have unequal opportunities to achieve their goals in situations of scarcity and conflict. In the rest of this chapter, we will focus on questions that political scientists pose about

7 The idea that people should be judged only on their talents and performance, and that the allocation of individuals must take place only on the basis of their strictly individual qualities, is sometimes described as the meritocratic ideal.

social inequality, and we will discuss examples of research on political inequality and political participation. Political scientists have always been interested in how all sorts of social inequalities and unequal distributions of income, rights, resources, privileges, capacity, and possessions constitute an 'inexhaustible breeding ground' for conflict. Historically, the work of Karl Marx and of researchers working in the Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions has been of great importance. For a long time, this was *the* paradigm for investigating how social and economic conditions meant that groups that were worse off came into conflict with the groups that, by contrast, benefited from a certain social and political order.

But many non-Marxists, too, define politics as essentially a battle over distribution issues, or as the American political scientist Harrold Lasswell wrote in 1936: 'Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How'. For many political scientists, conflict, broadly defined, is at the heart of politics. If social inequality underlies many political divisions and political conflicts, it should come as no surprise that a lot of research in political science deals with this issue. It is important to examine how social inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources relate to political inequality. For, as we noted above, it is true that, in democratic political systems especially, all citizens should be able to participate as equals in the decision-making process.

Democracy assumes the participation of citizens as equals. In 1863, in his Gettysburg Address, US president Abraham Lincoln spoke of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. More than 150 years later, during his speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2016, president Barack Obama emphasised that democracy requires citizens' involvement: 'Democracy isn't a spectator sport.' Political participation is not just about casting your vote at elections. It also encompasses a range of attitudes and behaviours, from political interest to political knowledge, from contacting politicians and lawmakers to participating in protests and rallies. That also includes running for elected office as a citizen. In empirical research on political behaviour, it is especially important to investigate whether social inequalities are linked to unequal levels of political participation, and the related questions of whether this leads to inequalities in political representation and unequal influence on decision-making and policy. In other words, we should look not only at normative principles such as political equality ('one person, one vote') and at the formal rules around political participation, but also at *actual* levels of participation by citizens. When some groups participate more often, the fact is that there is a big chance that only the voices of these groups are heard in the political arena.

In many established and stable democracies in Europe and the rest of the Western world, over the last 100 years the formal barriers that hampered the participation of certain social groups have been lifted. Up until then, the rights to vote and to stand as a candidate were reserved for male citizens with a certain amount of property and wealth. Women were also excluded for a long time. France granted women the right to vote only in 1944, while in Switzerland it would be as late as 1971 before women were granted the right to vote in federal elections (for elections at the regional level, the last canton, Appenzell Innerrhoden, came around only in 1990). In the United States, up until 1965 Black citizens in some Southern States had to take literacy tests to prove that they had enough knowledge before they were allowed to cast a vote.

In the Netherlands, too, it is not all that long ago that all adult citizens were granted the rights to vote and be elected. The 1917 amendments to the constitution introduced a number of far-reaching reforms, including the introduction of universal male suffrage, a system of proportional representation, and compulsory voting. Up to 1917, the Dutch Constitution stated that only male residents who had ‘the social characteristics of fitness and success’ were allowed to vote. The electoral law of 1896 included a number of financial criteria that these male residents had to meet. This was known as census suffrage. Women were granted the right to vote in 1919, with the introduction of a new election law (see Elzinga *et al.* 2012). The minimum age for voting and standing as a candidate was originally 25 and 30 respectively, but both were later lowered to 18 (only in 1972 to vote, and in 1983 to stand for election). In the Netherlands, thanks in part to political mobilisation by the workers’ and women’s movements, many formal, legal obstacles to participation have been removed. That does not mean, however, that there are no other – informal or non-legal – barriers that impede political participation by certain groups. The unequal distribution of all kinds of resources such as income, education and access to media continues to shape the political views and behaviour of citizens, and also has a considerable effect on the extent to which they participate in politics. We will look at this further in the next part of this chapter.

Unequal participation

One way to realise the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ is by obliging everyone to cast a vote in elections. Suffrage for men was introduced in the Netherlands in 1917, along with compulsory voting for men. Partly as a result of this requirement, turnout at elections was extremely high. About 95% of eligible voters

voted in elections for the Lower House of Parliament, and the turnout for local elections was not much lower. This is striking, because violations of this requirement almost never led to prosecution. People voted because it simply was the law of the land. But the requirement was controversial from the get-go. Opponents found it condescending to voters. Compulsory voting was abolished in 1970. The election for the Lower House of Parliament in 1971 was the first in which it was legal not to vote (see also Chapter 7).

The consequences of scrapping the requirement to vote were immediately clear. Turnout dropped from 95% in 1967 to 79% in 1971. But it did not fall equally among all groups of citizens. When the requirement to vote was still in force, differences in turnout, set against demographic factors such as education, social class, age and religion, were negligible. Everyone had to vote by law, and pretty much everyone did so. But as early as 1974, political scientist Galen Irwin observed a particularly large decline in the participation of less-educated voters of voters with little political interest. The abolishment of compulsory voting also led to decreased levels of political participation among young, non-religious, and lower income voters (Irwin 1974). This illustrates the fact that certain population groups are more likely to refrain from participating than others. By law there are certain opportunities for political participation, but that still does not mean that it will be evident for everyone to make use of them. Unequal participation was thus a reason for the famous Dutch political scientist Arend Lijphart to argue for reintroducing compulsory voting (Lijphart 1997).

One of the most important variables that affects political participation is education. Over the past few years, a lot of research has been done on this particular aspect of political inequality in the Netherlands. The participation gap between higher and lower educated citizens can be explained in at least two ways, if we think back to the discussion on social inequality earlier in this chapter. On the one hand, education produces more human capital, by which we mean primarily the cognitive skills needed to be active in the political domain. These include reading comprehension, expressing oneself verbally or in writing, and developing the capacity to engage in analytical reflection. Less-educated people themselves often indicate that they lack the necessary means to take part in political debate. On the other hand, training and education are not only coupled with the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The education someone receives enables people to join certain social circles where the same norms and values are cultivated. These social circles are quite resilient, and in the case of the higher educated this often means that participation in politics is valued and encouraged at a much higher degree than in lower educated circles.

For this and other reasons, it is troubling that the education system in the Netherlands fails to prevent the education level and the social class of parents from having a continued effect on the academic performance of children (Schools Inspectorate, 2017). According to many sociologists, education plays an important role in the reproduction of all kinds of social and thus political inequalities: the children of well-educated parents enjoy numerous benefits throughout their school career, something they will also eventually pass on to their own children. After all, not every child can fall back on a social environment in which things such as tutoring or examination training, whether by the parents themselves or by hired tutors, are among the possibilities. The fact that at a relatively young age in the Netherlands children are selected into different educational tracks also makes it quite difficult later in life to move to a higher level of education.

Descriptive representation

We can organise different forms of political participation based on how often people make use of them. Voting in elections is a fairly common form of participation that takes relatively little effort. Still, although a majority of the less educated vote in elections for the Lower House of Parliament, the discussion on compulsory voting shows that, in this form of participation, too, there may already be considerable inequalities. Taking part in everyday conversations about politics is also among the more common forms of political engagement, as is participation in organisations within civil society, such as trade unions and sports clubs. Membership in interest groups, or participation in citizens' initiatives, is less widespread. The most select form of political participation involves applying to and holding political office.

Let us take a look at the backgrounds of elected representatives. Today, virtually all members of the Lower House can be designated as higher educated more than 90% of them hold a bachelor's degree.⁸ We see similar percentages when we look at the educational level of cabinet ministers, members of the Upper House, and mayors (Bovens & Wille 2016). Nine out

8 Statistics Netherlands (CBS) uses a three-tier system to delineate educational attainment, whereby those in the highest tier have a bachelor's degree: either at the higher vocational (*hogere beroepsopleiding* [*hbo*]) or university level; those in the second tier hold a middle vocational degree of higher levels of secondary education (*middelbaar beroepsopleiding* [*mbo* or *hogere algemeen voortgezet onderwijs* [*havo*]), or a pre-university education diploma (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* [*vwo*]); and those in the third tier have completed lower vocational training (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsopleiding* [*vmbo*]) or less.

of ten members of parliament have a higher education, while this is true of only about three out of ten Dutch citizens. For local representatives, the percentage lies between that of members of parliament and citizens: about six out of ten municipal councillors are highly educated. This makes a big difference for the political representation of voters according to their level of education, at the local and national levels.

If we look at these percentages over a longer period of time, we can sum up the socio-economic background of representatives in a U-shaped chart. In the second half of the nineteenth century, when there was still no universal right to vote or stand for election, the percentage of those with a higher education in Parliament was almost as high as it is now. Democratisation, in the form of the extension of the rights to vote and to stand for election, subsequently meant that groups that had up to then been marginalised became more active politically. The average level of educational attainment among elected representatives was thus at its lowest between the two world wars. Since then, according to Bovens and Wille (2011), partly as a result of the 'professionalisation of politics', the percentage of those with a higher level of education in representative bodies rose steadily again to its current level.

Voter and representatives are quite dissimilar in terms of other characteristics too. Women have been allowed to stand for election in the Netherlands since 1917, and on 3 July 1918 Suze Groeneweg became the first (and at the time, the only) female member of Parliament, having been elected on the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) ticket. After the elections of 1922, the number of women increased to seven (of the then one hundred seats). While the proportion of female members of parliament has grown since then, gender parity has never been on the cards. In fact, since 1994 the proportion of female members of parliament has stagnated between 30% and 40%. And in the top echelons of politics, the situation is even more unequal. None of the three largest governing parties – the Labour Party (PvdA), Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) – has ever had a female leader. In the meantime, seventy countries around the world have, or have had, a female leader, but up to now the Netherlands has not been among them.⁹ The political elite in the Netherlands remains predominantly male.

Finally, let us turn to ethnicity. The percentage of members of parliament with a migration background is 12% – about equal to the percentage of

9 Monarchies and ceremonial heads of state are not included here. See www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/women-leaders-around-the-world/.

citizens belonging to that group. But two caveats are in order here. First, it took an awfully long time before there were any non-white members of parliament at all. The Indonesian Roestam Effendi was a member of parliament for the Communist Party of the Netherlands from 1933 to 1946. After that, it would take 40 years before John Lilipaly, who is of Moluccan origin, was elected on behalf of the Dutch Labour Party in 1986. In 1994 the first woman with a migration background was elected to the Lower House of Parliament: the Dutch-Surinamese Tara Singh Varma of GreenLeft. Since then, more and more Dutch people of Turkish or Moroccan origin have been elected to the Lower House. Second, it is important to note that the diversity within the groups of non-white parliamentarians has decreased drastically. Research by Liza Mügge shows that Dutch people with a Surinamese or Antillean background have all but disappeared from the Lower House, and that within the group of Dutch people with a migration background, those with Turkish or Moroccan background now dominate.

2.5 Inequality and political representation

An important question is whether and to what extent it is *undesirable* for higher educated white men to dominate politics. Unequal participation would not particularly be problematic, if there were a broad consensus among all kinds of groups in society regarding political matters such as the tax system, European integration, sustainability, immigration and integration, and so on. In that case, it doesn't matter whose preferences are heard, because those preferences would be almost identical between participants and non-participants. But this is by no means the case.

A long and rich tradition in survey research has shown that the political preferences of citizens, can to a certain degree be traced back to their material and non-material interests. Social class and occupations matters for views on the redistribution of wealth. Educational attainment continues to shape cultural attitudes of citizens, and ensures that people have a variety of opinions on issues such as immigration and integration, with the higher educated holding multiculturalism to much higher regard than the lower educated. Attitudes towards European integration are also related to differences in educational attainment. Whether we look at voting behaviour in European elections or referenda, or at attitudes as they emerge from survey research, those with a higher level of education are much more positive about numerous aspects of European integration than those with an intermediate level of education or less. The religious

background of citizens is reflected in their views on ethical issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia. On average, men and women differ in the degree to which they find certain topics important for political decision-making, such as maternity leave or childcare. In short, when certain social groups are more inclined to participate in politics and these groups also hold diverging ideological views, the possibility of unequal political representation of interests and preferences is always lurking. Not only are some groups able to make their voices heard more often and more loudly, but, as is often said, their voices are also radically different from those whose voices are more muted.

Moreover, it is a mistake to assume that the connection between people's social characteristics and their political positions and attitudes disappears when they become politicians or lawmakers. Male elected representatives often behave differently from their female counterparts. Elected representatives with a higher education have different values and opinions than do less-educated representatives. This is the main reason why citizens from underrepresented groups advocate making representative bodies such as the parliament a reflection of the electorate in all its diversity. The direct presence of members from within these underrepresented groups can lead to different political outcomes than if these groups remain absent (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Young 1989). A decision-making body that consists only of men will take different decisions and adopt a different policy agenda than a body that consists solely of women. And the same goes for some of the other variables that have been discussed above. Following Bovens and Wille (2011), Armen Hakhverdian and Wouter Schakel (2017) focus on the political dominance of the higher educated in Dutch politics. They compare the political views of citizens and elected representatives (both at the national and local level) in order to get a clearer picture of the oft-mentioned 'gap' between politicians and voters. All these authors call upon parties to take greater care of the recruitment of lower and middle educated citizens when selecting candidates for elected office

Take the topic of integration, for instance. Table 1 shows, on the basis of representative surveys conducted among citizens and members of parliament, that the views of voters and elected representatives are not always fully in sync. Citizens are much more likely than members of (the lower house of) parliament to feel that so-called 'minorities' have to 'adjust' to Dutch culture. On other important policy matters, too, both groups turn out to have different opinions. For example, citizens are more concerned about income inequality than are members of parliament, and they are more likely to feel that European integration has gone too far.

Table 1 Member of parliament and citizens on integration

	1 (‘preserve own culture’)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (‘adapt’)	
Members of parliament	3.6%	7.2%	13.5%	27.0%	24.3%	19.8%	4.5%	100% (N=114)
Citizens	3.2%	3.6%	7.9%	16.5%	19.8%	21.2%	27.8%	100% (N=2790)

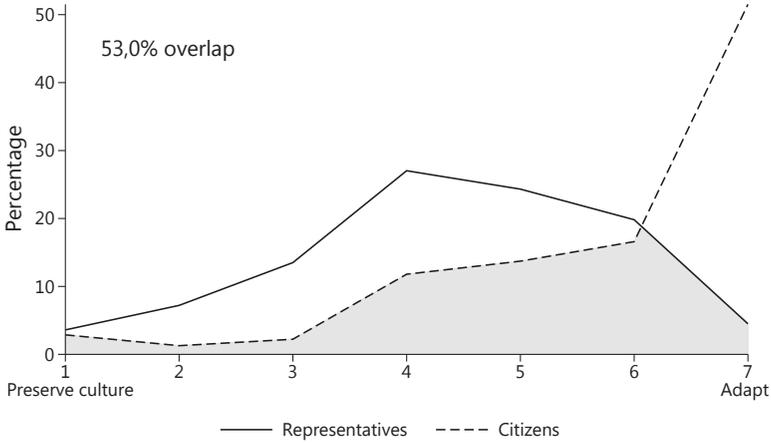
Note: The wording of the full question is as follows: ‘In the Netherlands, some people feel that immigrants should be able to live here while preserving their own culture. Others feel they must adapt fully to Dutch culture. Where would you place yourself on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means immigrants can preserve their own culture, and 7 that they must adapt fully?’

Source: Hakhverdian & Schakel (2017), on the basis of the 2006 National Voter Survey and the 2006 National Parliamentary Survey

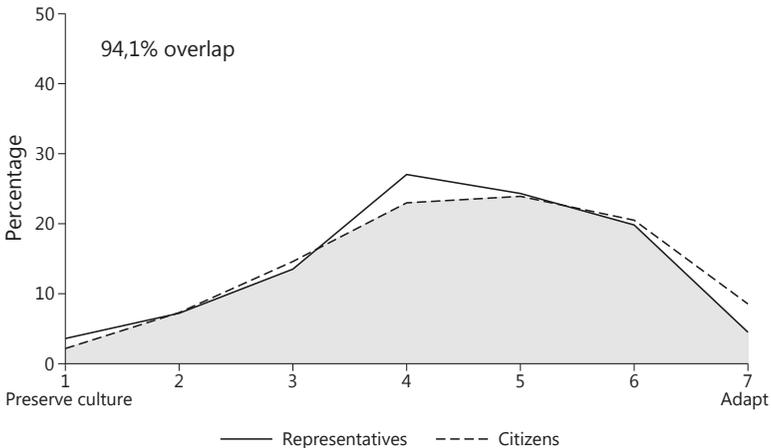
If we then divide up the electorate by level of education, we see just how distorted political representation can become. Figure 1 gives a visual rendition of the same percentages that were displayed in table 1. Figure 1a shows that less-educated citizens envisage a much stricter integration policy than members of parliament. At the same time, we see from Figure 1b that the preferences of members of parliament and those with a higher education are just about fully in sync. Hakhverdian and Schakel show that, in almost every policy area they looked at, the Lower House reflects the views of those with a higher level of education. Those with an intermediate level of education or less are getting left out in the cold, at least in this important regard. The unequal reflection in educational level that Bovens and Wille pointed to translates to an unequal reflection in terms of ideology. And education is not the only source of inequality – far from it. When it comes to views on the economy, Hakhverdian and Schakel show that the opinions of members of parliament reflect especially the views of citizens with a *higher income*. The same study shows, by the way, that the process of ideological representation works a good bit better at the local level. The economic preferences of municipal councillors are much more congruent with the preferences of citizens. And even though those with a higher education are also better represented by councillors, the inequalities are a lot smaller than at the national level. Hakhverdian and Schakel maintain that these results arise due to the presence of more local representatives that hold lower and intermediate levels of education.

Figure 1 Members of parliament and those with high and low levels of education on integration

(a) Lower educated



(b) Higher educated



Source: Hakhverdian & Schakel (2017)

It is by no means straightforward to prove that the unequal representation of lower and middle incomes and education groups is the result of disparities in educational attainments between citizens and representatives. To test this, we would have to check whether less-educated members of

parliament hold political views that are more congruent with the views of less-educated citizens than do members of parliament with a higher education. In practice this cannot be investigated, because pretty much all members of parliament are higher educated. The data on which table 1 and figure 1 are based are from 2006, when Remi Poppe of the Socialist Party was the only lower educated member of parliament. When there is insufficient variation within a variable, we cannot make meaningful statements about group differences. Fortunately, there is enough variation within the educational level of municipal councillors to map out whether educational level brings about a similar sifting out of political attitudes among both elected representatives and voters. Even though those with a higher level of education are also over-represented among councillors, about a third of councillors do not have a higher education. We can thus get a reliable picture of group differences between higher and lower educated representatives at the local level. Table 2 shows that, particularly when it comes to attitudes towards multiculturalism, European integration, and law and order, the educational differences between councillors come noticeably to the fore. It is therefore not surprising that citizens with a higher education bear closer resemblance, in terms of the political views they hold, with councillors who also have a higher education. The same holds for less-educated citizens and less-educated councillors. Education simply leaves a comparable mark on the ideology of representatives and the represented.

The political science research agenda on unequal representation goes far beyond analyses of distortions in how governing bodies and parliaments reflect the views of citizens. As a crucial next step, the question must be asked whether different demographic or socio-economic groups in society have more or less influence on *policy outcomes*. Many American political scientists have explored this theme in terms of the unequal influence of income groups. The seeds for these studies were already sown in the 1950s and 1960s, with the fierce debates on pluralism versus elitism (see Chapter 1, section 4). More recently, two books in particular have revived the debate: *Affluence and Influence* by Martin Gilens, and *Unequal Democracy* by Larry Bartels. Gilens (2012) and Bartels (2008) show that a disproportionate amount of attention is paid in American politics to the preferences and interests of wealthy Americans. Such a stark conclusion needs to be backed by strong evidence. Gilens's study is extremely impressive in this regard. He gathered nearly 2,000 survey questions from 1981 to 2002, and then broke down the answers that were given by income level. Because all survey questions were about concrete policy measures, Gilens was able to figure out whether the policy each question was about was actually implemented in the years that followed.

Table 2 Political views of Dutch local representatives by level of education

Subject	Level of education		
	Low	Middle	High
Differences in income 1 (increase) to 7 (decrease)	4.8	4.9	4.8
European integration 1 (even farther) to 7 (gone too far)	4.7	4.0	3.5
Military missions 1 (no military lives on the line) to 7 (always send in troops)	4.7	4.3	4.3
Asylum seekers 1 (let more in) to 7 (send them back)	4.6	4.1	3.8
Crime 1 (government is too tough) to 7 (government needs to get tougher)	5.6	5.4	4.9
Integration 1 (immigrants can preserve their own culture) to 7 (they must adapt to Dutch culture)	4.8	4.6	4.2
Nuclear power stations 1 (build more) to 7 (do not build)	5.0	4.9	4.9

Note: Entries are average scores by educational group.

Source: Hakhverdian & Schakel (2017) based on the Survey of Councillors by Mathilde van Ditmars (2012)

This research is in many ways ground breaking, but it remains to be seen whether US results generalize to non-US settings. That is, the factors that can explain unequal influence in the political arena are highly dependent on the institutional structures of a given country. For the United States, income is an important political resource, because money plays a much greater role in American politics than it does in the politics of many European countries. Americans donate large sums of money to candidates and to political action committees (PACs), as they are called, which, although they are not officially affiliated with a candidate, still campaign for them and, not unimportantly, go after their opponents in various ways. Although donations to candidates are limited, the US Supreme Court has ruled that curbing PACs would go against the constitutional right to freedom of expression. As a resource, income can thus be converted directly into political influence on policy. This is much less so in the Netherlands.

Dutch elections are run on a relatively low budget, and American style PACs just do not enter into the picture. In addition, recruitment for elected office takes place in a completely different way. The American system has primaries in which party members compete against each other, and

this process, too, involves huge amounts of money. In the Netherlands, the responsibility for recruiting candidates lies with the political parties themselves, which use candidate committees to draw up provisional lists of candidates, who are then presented to the party conference for approval. It is not clear how wealthy citizens could shape this process directly and legally, such as is possible, and permitted, in the United States. Hakhverdian and Schakel's research (2017) shows that the economic preferences of citizens with a higher income better fit those of members of parliament than those of citizens with a lower income, but it remains to be seen whether or not policy outcomes are therefore also more in line with the preferences of wealthier citizens.

2.6 Conclusion

Social and political inequality characterises all societies and political systems. For political scientists, research on inequality has always been important. The democratic revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century took the postulate of moral equality as a starting point and bore the promise that the modern era would lead to a more equal distribution of life chances and democratic citizenship for all. It was also thought that both trends would reinforce each other: the less fortunate would acquire the political power, through democracy, to reform society, so that life chances would be more equally divided, and because all citizens had more-equal opportunities for income, education, status and recognition, they would also be able to take part in politics as equal. It is one thing to postulate equality, and quite another to realise it in practice. Although many formal barriers were removed, and although the prohibition on discrimination was enshrined in European law and in many a constitution, modern societies are still characterised by inequality in every way, shape and form.

Despite this apparent continuity, it is quite important to keep researching the continuing tension between the promise of equality and the inequality that actually exists. Not every difference in life chances is socially or politically relevant in every period and every context. The question of how social inequalities are related to political inequalities and particularly to unequal political participation, is still really important, as is evident from the research done in the Netherlands and cited above on 'diploma democracy', and from the empirically result that groups with different levels of education hold different political views and also differ in their political

participation. At the same time, it is clear from a lot of sociological research that unequal chances in education mean that children from lower social classes generally end up with a lower exit qualification and a lower level of education. The strong correlation between level of education and political inequality underscores the need to tackle inequality in education for the sake of the quality of democracy. It is certain in any case that research and discussion on social and political inequality will continue to be of considerable importance in the coming years, both in public and academic debates.

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