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Representing the rich

Economic and political inequality in established democracies

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Does money buy power? There has always been a tension between the economic inequality produced by capitalism and the political equality that is central to the idea of democracy. Though it is commonly assumed – or hoped for – that all citizens are roughly equal in the influence they can exert in the political sphere, such ideals are rather brittle when some citizens can use large amounts of money to amplify their political voice. Recent years have seen a surge of empirical research investigating this link between economic and political inequality. While this research has provided many answers, it has also left us with questions about the scope and causes of inequality in representation.

This dissertation takes up these questions by investigating whether and why government policy in established democracies is biased towards the preferences of the rich. Through a range of empirical studies, which combine comparative and single-country analysis, as well as quantitative and qualitative methods, a clear picture of unequal representation emerges. Across advanced democracies, policy is more responsive to the rich than to middle- and low-income citizens. Furthermore, the available evidence suggests that the causes of this unequal representation are multiple, with biases in organized interests, political participation, party politics, and dominant ideologies all likely to play a role in its creation.

In short, *Representing the Rich* expands on our knowledge of where and why economic inequality produces political inequality. It shows that, contrary to popular ideals, the political system is an important part of the process through which economic inequality reproduces and, in some cases, magnifies itself. To all those who care about political equality, this should provide an impetus to further understand how this value is currently undermined and what can be done to level the playing field.

REPRESENTING THE RICH

Economic and Political Inequality in Established Democracies



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REPRESENTING THE RICH

Economic and Political Inequality in Established Democracies

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
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door

Wouter Schakel
geboren te Graafstroom

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CO-AUTHORSHIP

Chapter 2 is based on a co-authored article with Brian Burgoon and Armen Hakhverdian which has been published in *Politics & Society* (Schakel, W., Burgoon, B. and Hakhverdian, A. (2020) 'Real but Unequal Representation in Welfare State Reform', *Politics & Society*, 48(1), pp. 131–163). I had the idea for the article, prepared and analyzed the data, and wrote much of the text. Brian Burgoon assisted in the data analysis, and both Brian Burgoon and Armen Hakhverdian contributed to the text.

Chapter 3 is based on a single-authored article that has been published in *Socio-Economic Review* (Schakel, W. (2019) 'Unequal Policy Responsiveness in the Netherlands', *Socio-Economic Review*, online first).

Chapter 4 is based on a co-authored article with Brian Burgoon. I had the idea for the article, prepared and analyzed the data, and wrote much of the text. Brian Burgoon contributed to the text.

Chapter 5 is based on a single-authored article.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

This dissertation contains a brief appendix after the main text. Many additional analyses are presented in online appendices. These appendices can be found at Harvard Dataverse, along with replication materials for the quantitative studies (<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/D7ZOG0>).

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We have a tendency to see social life through an individualistic lens. In this lens, any achievement is interpreted as owing mostly to the effort of single individuals, while the institutions and communities behind it disappear from view. As is true in general, however, it would be completely misleading to interpret this dissertation in this way. This study is as much a reflection of my environment during my time at the University of Amsterdam as it is of myself, if it is even possible to separate the two. As a result, it seems inadequate to thank people for what was really a collective effort, though I will happily do so here.

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In November of 2019, I co-organized a workshop on the topic of unequal representation, which proved a fitting end to my PhD trajectory. I want to thank the Amsterdam Centre for Inequality Studies (AMCIS) for sponsoring this workshop. I also want to extend my gratitude to Jonas Pontusson, Noam Lupu and Brian Burgoon for organizing it with me, as well as to the people who participated in it.

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