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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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# Turning off the base: Social democracy's neoliberal turn, income inequality, and turnout

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## Abstract

Greater party system polarization has recently been shown to influence voter turnout under conditions of higher income inequality. This article builds on these findings by introducing into the framework the policy positions of social democratic parties. It does so through multilevel regression on a sample of 30 advanced democracies in 111 elections, from 1996 to 2019. In doing so, it contributes to the identification of party policy offerings as a mechanism moderating inequality and turnout. It finds that income inequality significantly reduces voter turnout, which is substantially magnified when social democratic parties adopt rightward welfare state positions. It also finds that social democratic parties can largely mitigate the negative effects of inequality on turnout for low-income individuals by offering leftist welfare state positions. The findings carry important implications for understanding the electoral consequences of both party positioning and rising inequality in advanced democracies.

**KEYWORDS**

income inequality, right-wing welfare state positions, comparative political economy, inequality, neoliberal turn, party identification, party system polarization, political parties, social democratic parties, turnout, turnout decline, voting behavior, welfare

## Related Articles

Simon, Christopher A., and Raymond Tatalovich. 2022. "The Turnout Myth and Referendum Voting in the United States." *Politics & Policy* 50(3): 472–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12483.

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Wilford, Allan M. 2020. "Understanding the Competing Effects of Economic Hardship and Income Inequality on Voter Turnout." *Politics & Policy* 48(2): 314–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12344.

Voter turnout has been on the decline in many advanced democracies. While scholars point to a range of causes—such as generational value change (Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Kostelka & Blais, 2021), party system convergence (Callander & Wilson, 2007), declining satisfaction with democracy (Foa et al., 2020), and increasing elective institutions (Kostelka & Blais, 2021)—mounting evidence points to rising income inequality as a culprit (Anderson & Beramendi, 2008; Jaime-Castillo, 2009: Jensen & Jespersen, 2017; Lancee & Van de Werfhorst, 2012; Macdonald, 2021; Polacko, 2022a; Polacko et al., 2021; Schäfer, 2013; Schäfer & Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008, 2010; Steinbrecher & Seeber, 2011; Szewczyk & Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Wilford, 2020). Simultaneously, the once-ascendent social democratic party family has experienced pronounced electoral decline. Explanations point to socio-economic structural changes, such as the decline of their working-class base stemming from de-industrialization and globalization (Benedetto et al., 2020; Beramendi et al., 2015; Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt, 1994; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986), but also policy changes, such as their embrace of market liberalism (Arndt, 2013; Horn, 2020; Karreth et al., 2013; Loxbo et al., 2021; Polacko, 2022b; Schumacher et al., 2013; Schwander & Manow, 2017; Snegovaya, 2022).

Turnout decline is particularly pronounced among lower-class individuals (Dalton, 2017; Elsässer et al., 2022; Gallego, 2015; Rennwald, 2020), which is exacerbated under greater inequality (Jensen & Jespersen, 2017; Polacko, 2022a; Schäfer & Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008). Some evidence shows that the electoral fate of leftist parties is reliant on turnout more so than other parties because their natural constituency is lower-class individuals who are significantly less likely to vote than upper-class individuals. All else being constant, higher turnout should then translate into a greater vote share for leftist parties if they attain the support of the lower class (Bartolini, 2000; Fauvelle-Aymark et al., 2000; Lee & Hwang, 2012; Pacek & Radcliff, 1995). However, the lower class has been gradually moving away from social democrats over the past generation (Arndt, 2013; Bremer & Rennwald, 2022; Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Polacko, 2023; Rennwald, 2020), which some attribute to the party family's rightward economic movement since the 1990s (Berman & Kundnani, 2021; Piketty, 2020). These associations among turnout decline, social democratic positions, and income inequality raise important questions. Can the general rightward shift of social democratic parties in economic policy account for any declines in turnout? Does inequality, moderated by the positions this party family takes on the economy, have any influence on turnout, especially among lower-income individuals?

To answer these questions, I test whether the effect of income inequality on turnout is conditioned by the policy programs of mainstream left parties. I do so by building on recent research finding that inequality has a negative impact on turnout, especially in depolarized party systems at both the aggregate level (Polacko et al., 2021) and individual level (Polacko, 2022a). However, as party system polarization increases on matters of redistribution, the negative impact of inequality on turnout is mitigated, and the income gap in turnout is significantly reduced. Therefore, this study continues this line of research by probing further, through an investigation into the policy changes that have occurred specifically among social democratic parties over the past generation. Social democratic parties provide the focus, as they are typically expected to represent the interests of citizens in the bottom half of the

income distribution on economic issues and provide the primary conduit for this constituency to exercise demands for redistribution to curb inequality.

This analysis is situated at the intersection of the comparative political economy literature on the political consequences of inequality, as well as the electoral behavior literature on party programmatic shifts and voting. It finds that income inequality significantly reduces voter turnout, which is significantly magnified when social democratic parties adopt rightward welfare state positions. It also finds that social democratic parties can largely mitigate the negative effects of inequality on turnout for low-income individuals by offering leftist welfare state positions. Thus, this article contributes to the causal identification of party policy offerings as a key mechanism moderating inequality and turnout. It also fills three important gaps in the literature. First, there exists very little comparative work linking income inequality to both voting and social democratic party positions. Second, previous research on social democracy has been heavily focused on Western Europe, so the incorporation of Asia, Eastern Europe, and North America greatly expands analysis and our knowledge beyond the usual regional scope.[1] Last, the study helps to address the pronounced party supply and voter demand imbalance that exists in the turnout inequality literature.

The next section reviews the state of the existing literature on turnout and inequality, providing the basis for the key hypotheses incorporating social democratic parties into the relationship, which are discussed in the subsequent section. The research design is then outlined, followed by a test of the expectations utilizing multilevel models on a sample of 30 advanced democracies in 111 elections from 1996 to 2019. The study concludes with a discussion of the key implications and avenues for future enquiry.

## TURNOUT AND INEQUALITY

Although a diverse range of factors drive voter turnout, the results are somewhat mixed from over a decade of work examining income inequality as an explanatory factor. Studies have found inequality and turnout to exert either a negative or null relationship, with scant evidence of a positive relationship. Fully two-thirds of studies find a negative and statistically significant effect (Anderson & Beramendi, 2008; Jaime-Castillo, 2009: Jensen & Jespersen, 2017; Lancee & Van de Werfhorst, 2012; Macdonald, 2021; Polacko, 2022a; Polacko et al., 2021; Schäfer, 2013; Schäfer & Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008, 2010; Steinbrecher & Seeber, 2011; Szewczyk & Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Wilford, 2020) but the absence of any effect or, indeed, a positive effect in the other studies (Fumagalli & Narciso, 2012; Horn, 2011; Persson, 2010; Stockemer & Parent, 2014; Stockemer & Scruggs, 2012), both indicate that the relationship between inequality and turnout is complex. These academics have developed two principal theories attempting to explain the effects of inequality on turnout, namely "power resource" and "conflict" theory.

Power resource theory (PRT) posits that participation in the political process depends on the amount of resources available to individuals, such as time, money, and cognitive abilities (Verba et al., 1995). Thus, greater inequality is positively related for high-income earners and negatively related for low-income earners, as greater inequality causes the poor to accordingly become less politically active, in contrast to increasingly wealthy high-income earners (Jaime-Castillo, 2009, p. 6). This "rational abstention" occurs gradually, as individuals discover from experience that regardless of their inputs into politics, policies simply favor the rich, leading to their disengagement from politics (Schäfer & Schwander, 2019). This tends to lead to overall declining turnout as well as greater turnout inequality.

[1]Countries included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Cross-national support for PRT can be found in multiple studies at the individual level. Using data from the 2006 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), Lancee and Van de Werfhorst (2012, p. 1176) demonstrate that "inequality seems to isolate low-income individuals from civic and social life," while simultaneously promoting "the social integration of the rich." Anderson and Beramendi (2008) find in a World Values Study that inequality suppresses turnout across national contexts because individuals living in more unequal countries are less likely to vote, with a consistent pattern for all income groups. However, they rely on a very short timescale (1999–2001) and sample only 18 Organization for Economic Development (OECD) countries. Schäfer (2013, p. 188) expands on their analysis by including 23 OECD countries from 1970 to 2008 and finds additional inequality effects, as it "reduces citizens' propensity to vote as well as their confidence in parliament and government."

In contrast to PRT, conflict theory posits the opposite effect for turnout. It builds on Meltzer and Richard's (1981) median voter model and predicts that increasing inequality leads to demands for a more generous redistributive policy because the median voter has more to gain from redistribution under rising inequality. However, the model is challenged in practice because countries with the highest market inequality tend to redistribute the least and countries with the least market inequality redistribute the most, resulting in the so-called "Robin Hood paradox" (Lindert, 2004). The model also predicts that increasing inequality stimulates more engagement in the political process for all income groups, including the wealthy. This occurs because the increased redistribution generated from greater lower- and middle-class participation becomes costlier for the rich, who then become more politically engaged, so that they can counter the adoption of redistributive policies (Stockemer & Parent, 2014).

Evidence for conflict theory at the individual level is largely wanting. Utilizing the 2012 and 2016 American National Election Studies, Szewczyk and Crowder-Meyer (2022) find evidence that community-level inequality increases various forms of political participation, although predominantly for the affluent. Polacko (2022a) finds cross-nationally that when party systems are more polarized on offerings of redistribution in times of higher inequality, low-income earners are mobilized the most, resulting in a significantly reduced income gap in turnout. Thus, party offerings on redistribution appear to be a key mechanism moderating income inequality and turnout, since the greater demand for redistribution engendered via increased income inequality spurs mobilization if appropriate economic policy choices are offered to combat it.

In sum, previous work into the turnout–inequality relationship is somewhat mixed and has not yet managed to pin down the precise mechanisms linking inequality to turnout. A major gap remains in the literature and the party supply factor in the relationship has not yet been fully explored. Consequently, this study builds on the previous literature by incorporating the programmatic offerings of social democratic parties, which is outlined in greater detail in the next section.

## HYPOTHESES: INTEGRATING SOCIAL DEMOCRACY INTO THE RELATIONSHIP

There are two expectations of how inequality should affect turnout. PRT and rational abstention predict withdrawal, while conflict theory predicts mobilization. This study advances insights into the relationship between turnout and inequality by integrating social democratic party policy offerings into the framework in a novel manner. It tests two main hypotheses: the first relates to the causal mechanisms underpinning PRT, and the second relates to conflict theory.

PRT emerged in the late 1970s with a focus placed on the differential policy success of Scandinavian social democracies (Esping-Andersen, 1985; Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1979). The scholars emphasized the possibilities for positive social change offered by social democracy that was illustrated by Scandinavia's "transition from capitalism to socialism" (Stephens, 1979).

Their state policies were understood to be the archetypical crystallization of the "democratic class struggle" (Korpi, 1983). Hence, PRT is based on a class analytical perspective, focusing on the strength of leftist parties and labor unions in organizing and supporting the working class. Traditionally, they are the primary actors actively promoting policies that favor labor through welfare state development and redistribution. In contrast, business and right-leaning parties tend to promote marketization and income concentration at the top while opposing redistribution and much of the welfare state (Huber et al., 2019).

Labor unions have traditionally been a strong base of support for social democratic parties, as the party family originally emerged from the labor movement, and there existed a large degree of overlap in labor union and party membership (Bartolini, 2000). Unions serve an important socialization function in influencing attitudes and voting behavior of its members. Unions stimulate political interest and are positively correlated with turnout through mobilization of its members around election time (Kerrissey & Schofer, 2018). Union members are also more likely to favor redistribution and the welfare state (Mosimann & Pontusson, 2017). However, this key base of social democrats and its relationship to the party family has changed over time. Union membership has been in pronounced decline for a generation and social democratic parties in their embrace of privatization and job market flexibility have increasingly distanced themselves from unions across the West, as well as becoming less rooted in lower-class constituencies (Mudge, 2018).

Like unions, a stronger welfare state also induces greater turnout. Welfare state promotion and expansion was a key part of the brand identity of social democrats and voters with pro-welfare attitudes have long been a key constituency for social democrats. By providing material support from unemployment and income shocks, higher quality education, and/or support for families with children, a more generous welfare state increases opportunities for political engagement and participation (Schneider & Makszin, 2014). Welfare state policies signal how much a political system values the groups and individuals who rely on it. Limiting the welfare state induces perceptions of unresponsiveness, which reduces political efficacy and, in turn, political participation (Shore, 2014; Wichowsky & Moynihan, 2008). Social democrats have weakened their emphasis on the welfare state through the pursuit of a "Third Way" strategy focused on economic moderation and greater austerity. The consequences of these changes have been exacerbated by rising inequality.

Initially, this party strategy seemed electorally successful, but it has had negative electoral consequences for the party family in the long run (Arndt, 2013; Horn, 2020; Karreth et al., 2013; Loxbo et al., 2021; Schwander & Manow, 2017), which has been shown to be magnified under higher levels of inequality (Polacko, 2022b). The negative consequences also likely have impact beyond just the fate of social democrats. The party family's economic moderation has effectively converged the economic dimension of party systems around a neoliberal pro-market center (Hopkin, 2020). Consequently, evidence shows that party system convergence can lead to increased voter indifference and reduced turnout (Callander & Wilson, 2007), which is also magnified under higher levels of income inequality (Polacko et al., 2021). Therefore, social democratic moderation has left many people vulnerable to the negative impacts of income inequality and without effective mainstream party representation to combat it.

According to PRT, the weakening of bases of support for social democrats such as unions, the working class, and welfare state, is exacerbated by rising income inequality, which in turn, is detrimental to turnout. PRT also predicts that inequality on its own is enough to depress turnout. Yet, social democratic moderation on its own is not necessarily enough to significantly depress turnout and has not been shown to be. However, social democratic moderation on the welfare state, combined with rising inequality, substantially magnifies the channels under which PRT can depress turnout. Therefore, it will be tested whether greater inequality leads to lower turnout, if social democratic parties restrict the welfare state in their election manifestos:

**Hypothesis 1.** When social democratic parties adopt welfare state limitation positions under higher income inequality, overall turnout decreases.

The second hypothesis relates to conflict theory, which predicts that greater income inequality leads to a more conflictual politics and greater welfare state support among the lower classes. Much of the social democratic party decline literature points to the reduction of the proportion of the working class as a key explanatory factor in their decline (Benedetto et al., 2020; Beramendi et al., 2015; Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt, 1994; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986). However, the party family's embrace of market liberalism has led some to argue that it has led to electoral de-mobilization and abstention for the lower classes (Berman & Kundnani, 2021; Piketty, 2020).

Lower-class turnout has indeed declined in recent decades (Dalton, 2017; Elsässer et al., 2022; Gallego, 2015; Rennwald, 2020), which becomes exacerbated under higher levels of inequality (Jensen & Jespersen, 2017; Polacko, 2022a; Schäfer & Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008). Rennwald (2020) finds using ESS data, that the working class now votes much less than in the past. For example, in the 2010s, when compared to the previous decade, the ratio of working-class turnout to the overall average fell substantially in all six northwestern European countries analyzed. Using the same data, Bremer and Rennwald (2022) find that demobilized nonvoting supporters of social democrats are more likely to come from the working class than the middle class. Elff and Roßteutscher (2017) show that this high degree of social democratic vote abstention for its working-class base in Germany is linked to the party family's mobilization efforts switching to the middle class, whereas the mainstream right party (Christian Democratic Union) has been unaffected by the same mobilization problems with its religious base.

While the manual working class has declined over time, when income is substituted as a measure, lower-income individuals as a constituency has actually grown over time with the transformation to largely service-based economies. Increased precarity, income inequality, and diminishing welfare protections and union density stemming from the embrace of market liberalism have led to declining living standards for many across the West (OECD, 2019b). The middle class is hollowing out as increasingly middle-income earners face a considerable risk of sliding down into a lower income group, as one-in-seven households in the broad middle 60% of the income distribution and one-in-five of those living in the second lowest income quintile slide into the bottom quintile (OECD, 2019b, p. 16).

Correspondingly, polling indicates that the public is very concerned about rising inequality. Four-in-five people in the OECD feel income disparities are too large in their country and concern has risen in line with the increase in income inequality in the last three decades (OECD, 2021, p. 11). This concern has translated into support for the welfare state, as supermajorities across the West are in favor of greater redistribution (OECD, 2019a). Lower-income earners are also much more in favor of redistribution than higher earners (Rueda, 2018), and inequality has been shown to matter most for the redistributive preferences of leftist voters (Pontusson & Rueda, 2010). Recent evidence also shows that when unions are stronger, higher levels of inequality lead to increased support for the welfare state through the promotion of "economically egalitarian attitudes among their members and increas[ing] opposition to economic inequality" (Macdonald, 2019, p. 1199).

According to conflict theory, increasing inequality activates the class concerns of lower-income earners in desiring a stronger welfare state. It is foremost up to social democrats to offer expansionist welfare state policies to capitalize on this increased political motivation and incentivize lower-income earners to vote. Social democrats are best placed to do so, due to their brand identity as proponents of equality, labor issues, and embrace of the welfare state, which historically offered policies designed to temper capitalism's more dangerous socioeconomic outcomes, such as inequality. Social democrats are also well placed as a traditionally

dominant mainstream party family in most party systems and they draw their electoral support disproportionately from lower-income earners. Thus, it will be tested whether the turnout of low-income earners increases during periods of higher inequality, if social democratic parties adopt welfare state expansionist policy positions:

> **Hypothesis 2.** When social democratic parties adopt welfare expansion positions under higher income inequality, turnout increases among low-income individuals, more so than high-income individuals.

# DATA AND METHODOLOGY

## Methodology

These hypotheses are tested on a dataset based on the five waves of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, 2019, 2022), merged with party level data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (MARPOR), and other country-level data. The merged dataset comprises 192,842 individuals, from 111 elections, 1996–2019, across 30 advanced democracies. Therefore, the temporal range covers the key periods of turnout decline, inequality increase, and social democratic moderation. The hypotheses specifically apply to established democracies where party policy offerings are perceived to matter to voters. Hence, case selection is based on a country's level of economic and democratic development (OECD membership; Freedom House rating of 1 or 2 on their 7-point scale).[2]

The dataset contains individuals nested within countries over time; therefore, multilevel models are applied to repeated cross-sectional data. Logistic regression is performed, due to the dependent variable being dichotomous. Mixed-effects models that include both fixed and random effects are specified, owing to the small number of elections per country in the CSES. Elections per country range between 1 and 6, which makes it unsuitable to include random effects for both levels in the multilevel models (Bryan & Jenkins, 2016; Park, 2019). Thus, observations are clustered by country to isolate the potential effects of country-specific factors on voting with year fixed effects. The mixed effect specification assumes that the effect for individual- and country-level variables is fixed across countries and that there is a random effect accounting for response variation across countries. As a robustness check, models are also estimated with country fixed effects and random effects at the year level (see Appendix A5; Freedom House, 2019).

## Individual-level variables

The individual-level variables are all drawn from the CSES. The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure indicating whether a respondent *voted* in their last national election.[3] The total household *income* of each respondent, divided into five quintiles (lowest to highest) provides the key independent variable at the individual level. Quintiles were chosen because they are the most commonly used form of measuring income in the literature and provide the best means of

[2]Freedom House methodology: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Methodology_FIW_2019_for_website.pdf.

[3]As is normally the case with surveys measuring turnout, there is a substantial discrepancy between the numbers of self-reported and actual votes administered due to "social desirability bias" and the difficulty in reaching typically low-turnout groups that tend to be transient. However, research has shown that models at the individual level relying on either reported or validated voting produce very similar estimates (Clarke et al., 2004). Moreover, Solt (2010, p. 291) has shown that over-reporting is positively correlated with income inequality, which should "obscure rather than magnify any negative effect of income inequality on electoral participation" in this analysis.

comparison between income groups across time.[4] Both *age* and *education* are included, which are positively correlated with turnout (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Education is measured as a categorical variable ranging from 0 to 4 (low to high). In the past, men typically voted more than women owing to the greater resources at their disposal. However, the gender gap has decreased in recent years with women surpassing men in many democracies (Kostelka et al., 2019). Married individuals and people living in rural environments are also more likely to cast a vote (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Therefore, *female*, *married*, and *rural* dummy variables are added.

## Country-level variables

Income inequality is the first key country-level explanatory variable. The most widely used measure is the *Gini*, which is operationalized as the Gini Index (range: 0 to 100; low to high). The adjusted after-tax Gini is employed rather than market income Gini because the main mechanisms leading inequality to affect turnout are most likely to operate via a person's disposable income after taxes and transfers, rather than their market income (Stockemer & Scruggs, 2012, p. 767). *Gini* rates are obtained from the commonly used Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID), which maximizes both accuracy and coverage (Solt, 2020).[5] To account for retrospective economic voting—as voters are typically backward looking with a memory of roughly one year when evaluating changes and impacts of the economy—the Gini is given a one-year lag (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013).

The next key explanatory variable of interest is a measure of social democratic party positioning on the welfare state. The ideological scores of social democratic parties are drawn from MARPOR (Volkens et al., 2020), which allows for the post-war comparability of party manifesto positions within and across countries (Ezrow & Xenokasis, 2011). It is the most popular dataset for the study of political parties and, with few exceptions, offers reliable estimates that correlate highly with expert and mass surveys (Benoit & Laver, 2006). MARPOR's research validity has been questioned by some (see Laver, 2014, for a review). However, the criticisms tend to focus on inter-coder reliability or the additive general left–right "RILE" position measure. While this study only employs party positions on the welfare state—items *per504 welfare state expansion* and *per505 welfare state limitation*—while also undertaking a robustness check utilizing 15 relevant economic items (see Appendix A6; Freedom House, 2019). Reassuringly, after examining the original hand-annotated and coded text for American and German manifestos from 2002 to 2014, Horn and others (2017, p. 412) find that the welfare items do in fact "measure what they are supposed to measure: emphasis on equality and welfare state expansion."[6]

To measure a party's position, we follow Lowe and others (2011). This method takes better account of the proportional changes on the left–right scale than the traditional Laver/Budge methodology.[7] A *SD wstate position* variable is constructed by subtracting *per504* from *per505* of the historically largest self-identified social democratic party or bloc for each election. The

[4]*Income* is absent for three elections: Belgium 2003, Latvia 2010, and the Netherlands 2017.

[5]Version 9.2 of the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (Solt, 2020) is used. It includes 100 separate imputations of inequality data, which allows for any uncertainty in estimations. For reasons of parsimony, the average estimate of these 100 imputed variables is taken from the *gini_disp* variable, which is an estimate of the Gini index in equivalized household market income.

[6]An important limitation of MARPOR is that it does not contain items that directly measure redistribution. Therefore, future research might better investigate the relationship between social democratic party positions, inequality, and turnout, with a more precise focus on redistribution.

[7]MARPOR position computations assume that the marginal effect of an additional sentence is constant. However, a shift from zero to one would matter more for a policy position than a shift from 9 to 10 due to the diminishing impact of repeated emphasis. Hence, Lowe and others' (2011) logged method addresses this by applying a ratio approach to the raw number of sentences, so that the relative balance and proportion of change on the left–right scale are accounted for, rather than just the quantity of sentences.

party/bloc chosen for each election is readily discernible, as it remains the same for every country included in the dataset (see Appendix A2).[8] The primary social democratic party/bloc position is chosen as opposed to the entire spectrum of parties on the left of a party system because small parties located on the fringes are unlikely to be considered by most voters, and the largest social democratic party is likely to represent the most attractive option for lower-income voters. Thus, this measure more accurately captures the ideological positioning and strength of parties within the party system, and as Wilford (2019, p. 67) shows, it exerts a significant positive relationship with turnout by "outperforming more commonly used aggregate measures of party systems."

A wide variety of institutional controls are included. A leading predictor of turnout is whether *compulsory voting* laws exist in a country (Stockemer, 2017). Hence, as the degree of enforcement varies where it is in place, the variable is measured on a 4-point scale ranging upward in harshness (0 to 3). Proportional representation systems increase turnout as compared to majoritarian systems (Blais, 2006), while post-communist countries tend to vote at lower rates than other Western countries (Pacek et al., 2009). Similarly, bicameral legislatures are expected to positively impact turnout (Stockemer, 2017, p. 706). Therefore, *majoritarian*, *post-communist*, and *unicameralism* dummy variables are added. Last, as cross-national evidence finds that the representation of low-income individuals is crucially dependent on the size and composition of electoral districts (Bernauer et al., 2015; Jusko, 2017), a measure of electoral *disproportionality* is introduced, which is the difference between the percentage of votes and seats each party receives in an election and is measured in the form of the Gallagher index.[9] Data for these variables are drawn from the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS; Armingeon et al., 2019).

In addition, the effective number of parties (*ENP*) is controlled for, and across most studies is negatively associated with turnout (Cancela & Geys, 2016), even though theory might predict a positive association (Blais, 2006).[10] Election competitiveness is also added, as measured by the electoral victory *margin*, which is the difference in total votes between the first- and second-placed parties. The variable is generally expected to have a negative association with turnout, as uncompetitive elections reduce the incentive to vote (Cancela & Geys, 2016). Both variables derive from MARPOR.

Turnout has also been shown to be positively affected by socio-economic factors, such as *union density*, due to the sizable influence labor unions have on mobilizing their members to vote (Kerrissey & Schofer, 2018). Data are taken from the ICTWSS (Visser, 2019) and OECD (2022). The level of a country's economic development is also controlled for, via a logged yearly measure of gross domestic product (*GDP)* per capita, measured at current U.S. dollars (Blais, 2006). It derives from the World Bank (2022) and is lagged one year.

# RESULTS

## Descriptive analysis

First, the trends in turnout are examined. The turnout rate across the sample is 84% and likelihood to vote increases with each income quintile. Turnout among the richest quintile is 89.8%,

[8]Party family classifications derive from MARPOR and are cross-validated against the CSES.

[9]The Gallagher index is calculated by taking the square root of half the sum of the squares of difference between the vote percentage and seat percentage for each political party, in the two most recent elections.

[10]*ENP* is calculated by first squaring the vote share of each party individually, then adding the sum of the individual parties together and finally dividing 1 by the new total sum.

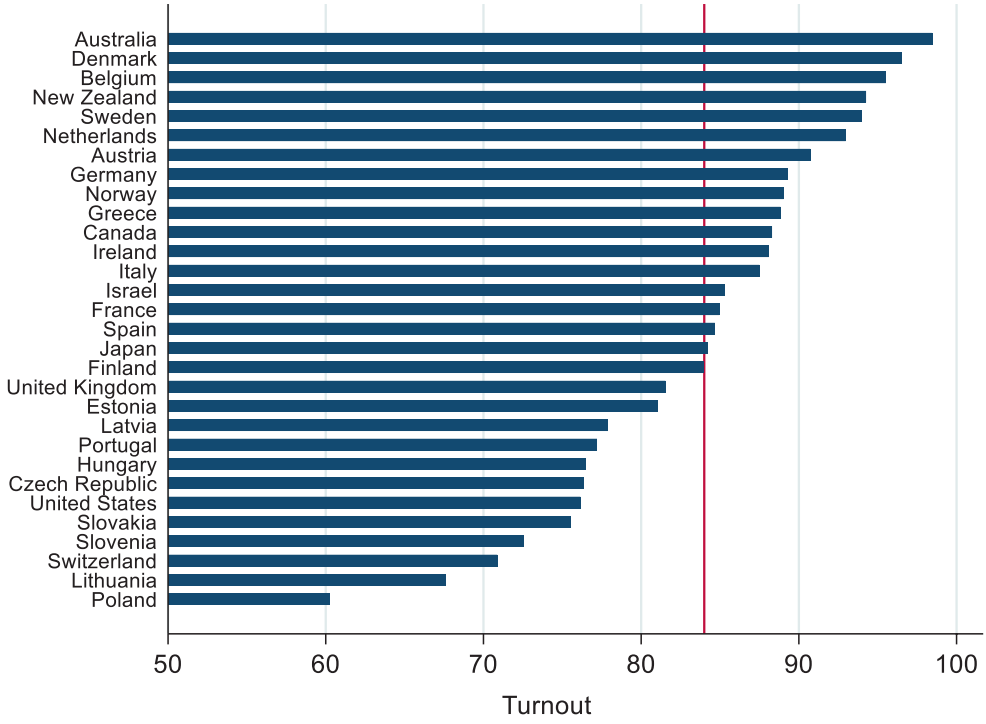


**FIGURE 1** Cross-national mean turnout by country in CSES.

compared to the bottom quintile at 78.8%, which is a substantial 11 percentage point difference. Turnout varies considerably cross-nationally. Figure 1 displays average turnout by country in the sample. Countries with compulsory voting regimes, such as Australia and Belgium, as well as Northern European countries, have the highest rates of turnout in the 90th percentiles, whereas Switzerland, the United States, and most Eastern European countries in the sample have the lowest rates, ranging between 60% and 75%.

Next, I investigate the relationship of turnout with the key aggregate level independent variables via a series of scatterplots. Figure 2 displays the average aggregated cross-national turnout plotted by income inequality on the left, and social democratic positions on the welfare state on the right. We can see a negative correlation between turnout and inequality but only a very slight negative correlation between turnout and social democratic welfare state positions. When moving from countries with the lowest to highest inequality, turnout declines from roughly 87% to 80%. However, there is only a couple of percentage-points decline in turnout when moving from the most leftist to rightist social democratic parties. There is a deducible pattern that many of the same low inequality and leftist social democratic countries vote at very high rates (Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden), but less of a pattern among the remaining countries.

One can delve further into turnout by examining the relationship of the income gap in turnout with the key aggregate independent variables. Figure 3 displays the average aggregated cross-national income gap in turnout plotted by income inequality on the left and social democratic positions on the welfare state on the right. The turnout income gap measure is utilized to better determine the voting propensity of the historical base of social democrats—lower income individuals. Here, we see much stronger correlations. Both variables are positively related to the income gap in turnout. When moving from countries with the lowest to highest levels of income inequality, the average turnout income gap increases from roughly 8 to 14

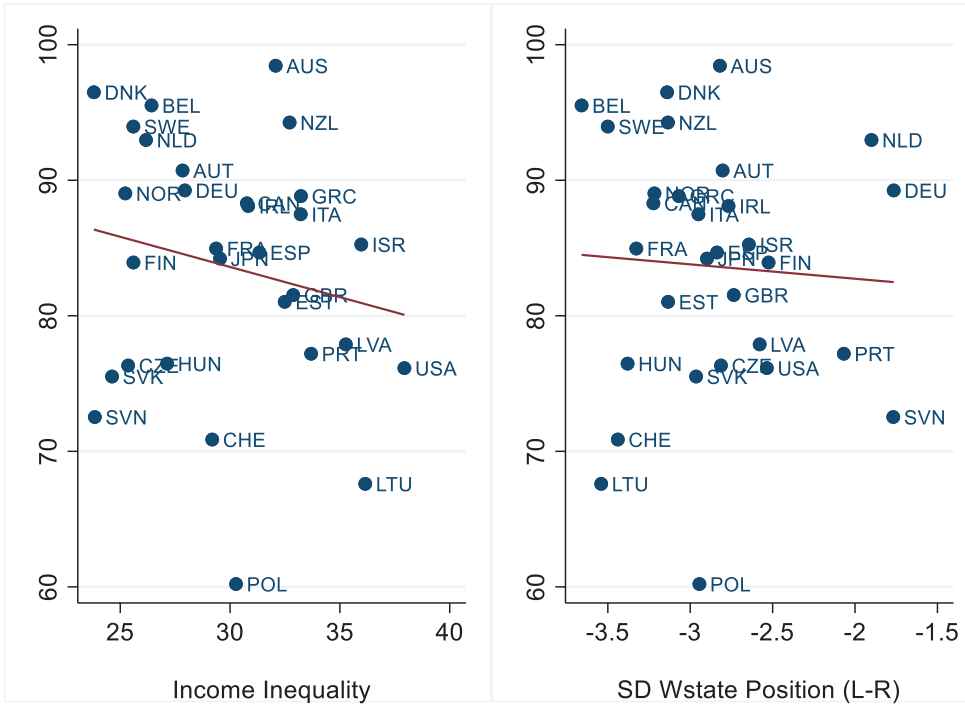


**FIGURE 2** Cross-national mean turnout plotted against mean income inequality (left) and mean social democratic welfare state position (right).

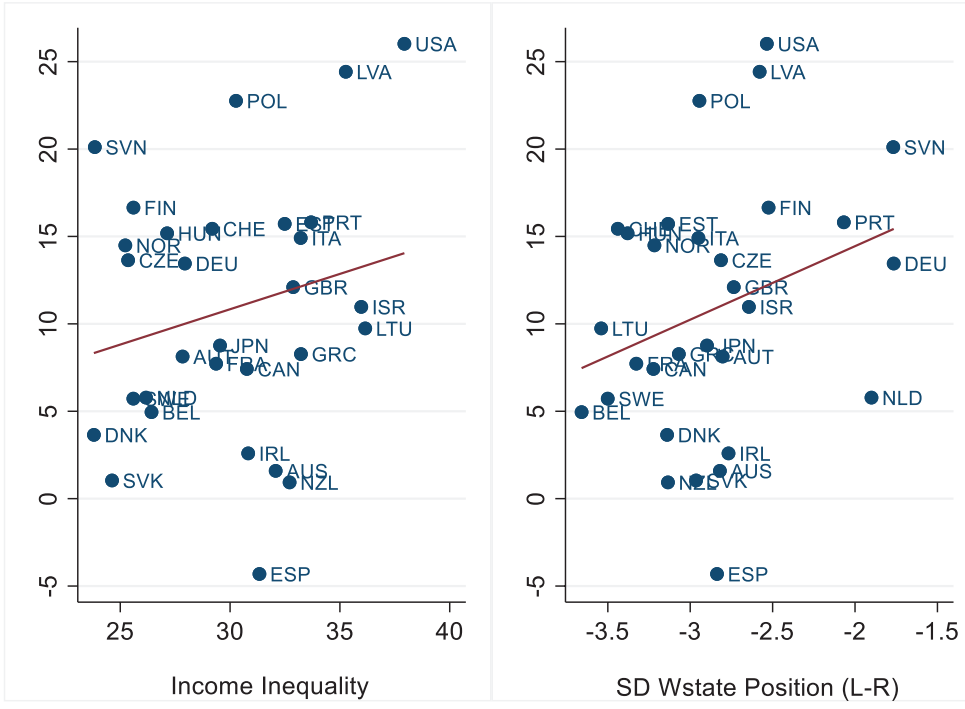


**FIGURE 3** Cross-national mean turnout income gap plotted against mean income inequality (left) and mean social democratic welfare state position (right).

percentage points. While the turnout income gap is more than twice as large in countries with the most leftist social democratic parties (7 percentage points) versus the most right wing (15 percentage points).

As for the time trends, mean *turnout* fluctuates substantially year to year but does not decline in the sample. *SD wstate position* moves slightly rightward until the 2010s before turning slightly leftward, while income inequality increases steadily and substantially from roughly 28.5 to 30.2.

In sum, these descriptive insights reveal that income inequality is negatively correlated with turnout but positively related to the income gap in turnout. There is also some initial support found for the notion that when social democratic parties offer welfare state restriction, the income gap in turnout increases.

## Estimation results

To test the hypotheses, mixed-effects logistic regressions are specified. Table 1 presents the results from three different models. Model 1 provides a baseline estimate and includes each of the individual- and aggregate-level variables. The variables largely perform as expected and they are almost all statistically significant. The demographic controls are all in the expected direction and significant at $p < .001$, except *rural*, as turnout is higher among women, the highly educated, *married*, and older people. Likelihood to vote also increases with each *income* quintile and those on high incomes are significantly more likely to vote than those on low incomes ($b = .188$; $p < .001$).

At the aggregate level, a greater number of political parties, electoral victory *margins*, and *union density* are significantly negatively related to voting. People living in *post-communist* countries are significantly less likely to vote, while people living in countries with unicameral, proportional, and/or *compulsory voting* systems are significantly more likely to vote. People are also significantly more likely to vote when social democratic parties are more right wing on the welfare state. Most importantly, Model 1 indicates that inequality does significantly depress turnout at $p < .001$, which is in line with PRT, rational abstention, and the majority of research.

Turning to the main hypotheses, Model 2 tests for Hypothesis 1—that as social democratic parties adopt weaker welfare state positions, turnout decreases during periods of higher income inequality. It does so via an interaction between *gini* $t-1$ and *SD wstate position*. The interaction is negative and statistically significant at $p < .001$. Figure 4 displays the average marginal effects of inequality by *SD wstate position* on turnout. It shows that the effect of inequality is close to 0 when social democratic parties are left wing in their welfare state position and that the likelihood to vote is substantially dampened the more right wing the parties become on the welfare state. To aid in interpretation of the substantive magnitude of the interaction, we standardize *gini* $t-1$ and *SD wstate position*, so that the variables have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. We see that at a left-wing *SD wstate position*, one standard deviation below the mean, a one standard deviation increase in inequality is associated with roughly a .3 percentage point decrease in turnout, whereas at a right-wing *SD wstate position*, one standard deviation above the mean, a one standard deviation increase in inequality is associated with roughly a .8 percentage point decrease in turnout. To put these effect sizes into context, over 10% of the elections in the sample were decided by margins of less than .5 percentage points, so even small changes in turnout can alter election results if the changes disproportionately benefit one party. The finding provides support for Hypothesis 1 and is in line with recent results that show greater economic policy polarization as mitigating the negative effect of inequality on turnout (Polacko, 2022a; Polacko et al., 2021).

**TABLE 1** Mixed-effect logistic regressions clustered by country with year fixed effects, predicting propensity to vote.

| Vote | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .027*** | .027*** | .027*** |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| Female | .076*** | .075*** | .075*** |
| | (.017) | (.017) | (.017) |
| Education | .342*** | .346*** | .346*** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Income | .188*** | .188*** | −.166 |
| | (.007) | (.007) | (.198) |
| Married | .259*** | .260*** | .257*** |
| | (.018) | (.018) | (.018) |
| Rural | .005 | .003 | .002 |
| | (.019) | (.019) | (.019) |
| Gini $t-1$ | −.095*** | −.324*** | −.366*** |
| | (.016) | (.026) | (.032) |
| Gini $t-1$ # Income | | | .015* |
| | | | (.007) |
| SD Wstate | .061** | 1.997*** | 2.410*** |
| | (.020) | (.166) | (.250) |
| SD Wstate # Income | | | −.151* |
| | | | (.070) |
| SD Wstate # Gini $t-1$ | | −.068*** | −.085*** |
| | | (.006) | (.009) |
| SD Wstate # Income # Gini $t-1$ | | | .006* |
| | | | (.002) |
| GDP per capita $t-1$ (log) | .211 | .267* | .271* |
| | (.115) | (.119) | (.120) |
| Union density | −.012*** | −.011** | −.011** |
| | (.003) | (.004) | (.004) |
| ENP | −.129*** | −.141*** | −.141*** |
| | (.015) | (.015) | (.015) |
| Margin | −.011*** | −.010*** | −.010*** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | (.002) |
| Majoritarian | −.654* | −.500 | −.511 |
| | (.326) | (.371) | (.373) |
| Unicameralism | .441*** | .474*** | .481*** |
| | (.085) | (.088) | (.089) |
| Disproportionality | −.001 | .023* | .024** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Compulsory vote | .573*** | .559** | .555** |
| | (.167) | (.191) | (.192) |

(Continues)

**TABLE 1** (Continued)

| Vote | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Post-communist | −1.101*** | −1.108*** | −1.108*** |
| | (.258) | (.288) | (.289) |
| Constant | 1.514 | 7.395*** | 8.319*** |
| | (1.512) | (1.639) | (1.716) |
| *Variance* | .234*** | .312*** | .315*** |
| | (.066) | (.091) | (.092) |
| *Log likelihood* | −47,910.71 | −47,841.39 | −47,831.72 |
| *AIC* | 95,905.42 | 95,768.79 | 95,755.44 |
| *BIC* | 96,316.6 | 96,189.76 | 96,205.79 |
| *Fixed effects* | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR |
| *Countries* | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| *N* | 131,937 | 131,937 | 131,937 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

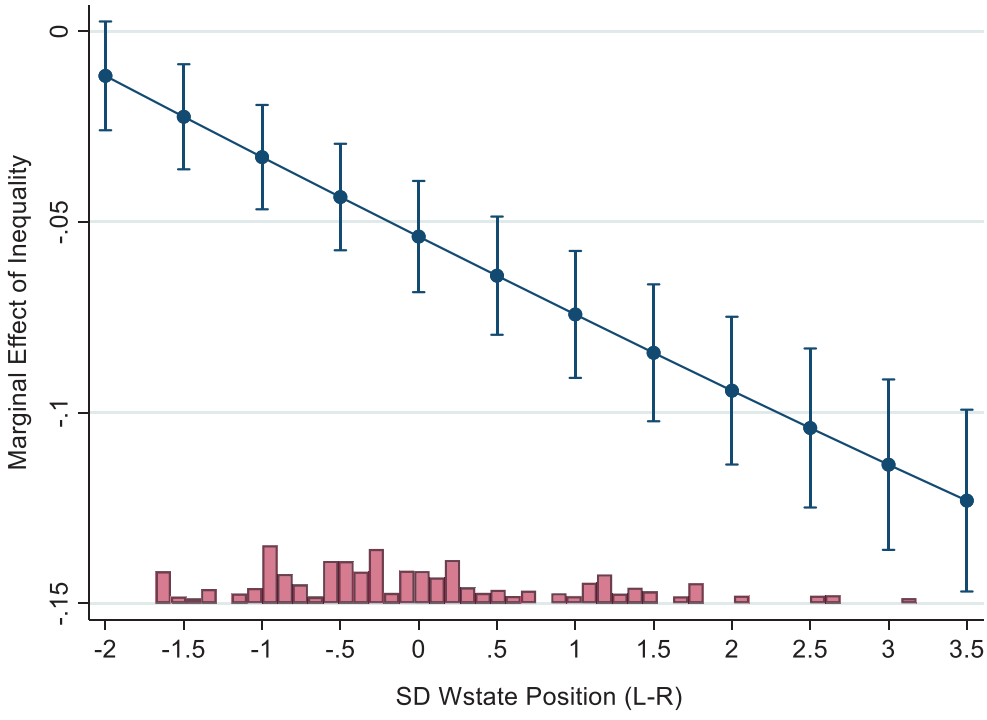


**FIGURE 4** Marginal effects of inequality by SD wstate position on turnout, with 95% CI (Model 2).

Model 3 investigates the income effects in this relationship via a three-way interaction between *gini t* − 1, *SD wstate position*, and *income*. The interaction is significant at the $p < .05$ level and is graphically presented in Figure 5. The graph presents the average marginal effects of inequality on turnout for the top and bottom income quintiles, at varying *SD wstate positions*. The interaction shows that for people on both low and high incomes, inequality has a negative impact on turnout as social democratic parties offer welfare state restriction,

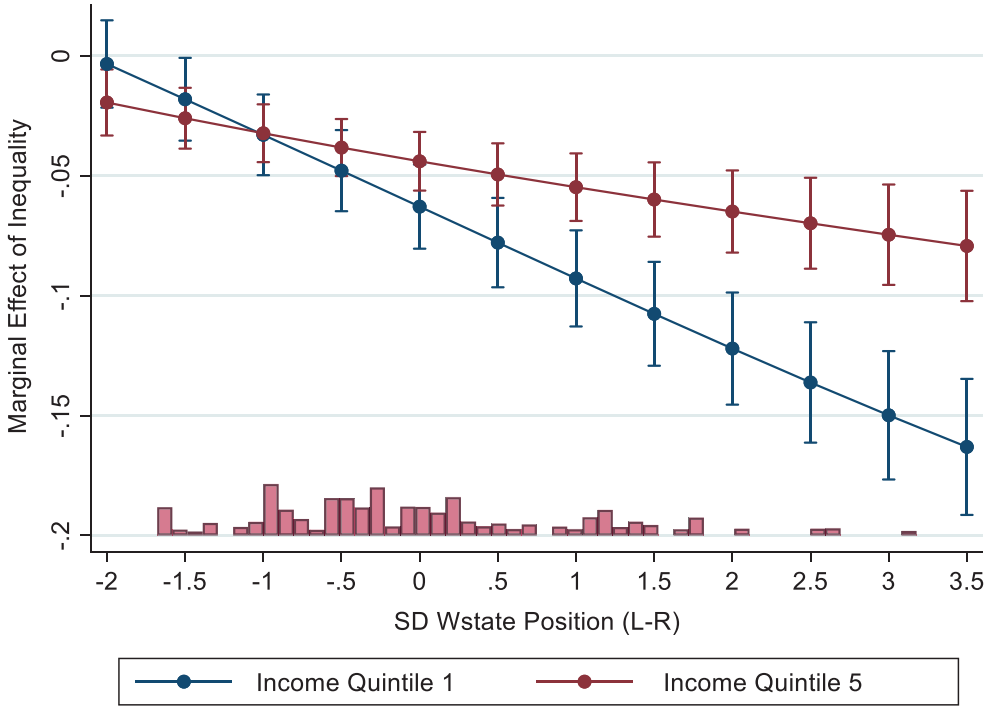


**FIGURE 5** Marginal effects of inequality by SD wstate position on turnout for top and bottom income quintiles, with 95% CI (Model 3).

but that the impact of inequality is much stronger for low-income earners. There is also the suggestion that when social democrats are extremely leftist on the welfare state, inequality reduces turnout more for high-income than low-income earners. However, when moving left to right on the welfare state, once one standard deviation from the policy mean is reached, then a switch occurs, and inequality reduces the turnout of low-income more than high-income earners, and the difference becomes statistically significant once one standard deviation right of the mean is offered. When standardized, we see that the difference between one standard deviation below and one above the mean, *SD wstate position* is associated with a .6 percentage point decrease in turnout for the bottom quintile, but only a .2 percentage point decrease for the top quintile. This suggests that although a rightward social democratic movement negatively affects turnout as inequality increases, people on low incomes are affected to a much greater extent (roughly three times), which increases the income gap in turnout and reduces the turnout of social democrat's primary base. Therefore, support for Hypothesis 2 is not found. However, the key finding here is that social democratic parties can largely mitigate the negative effects of inequality on turnout for low-income individuals by offering welfare state expansion.

## ROBUSTNESS TESTS

The findings are robust to additional controls, and alternative data measurement and model specifications. First, an additional *union* membership dummy control is added to each of the estimations. This is undertaken to guard against omitted variable bias, since labor unions hold strong theoretical relevance for social democratic parties and PRT. The variable was left out of

the main models due to substantial missing values and elections[11] and because *union density* was included at the aggregate level. When added, the variable is positively related to turnout, but it is not statistically significant, and its inclusion has little effect on the main results (see Appendix A4, Table A4).

A robustness test is also administered with each of the models re-run with country fixed effects clustered by year instead of year fixed effects clustered by country. The new model specification changes the results minimally again and the main results hold (see Appendix A5, Table A5).

An alternative measure of social democratic party positions is also employed as a robustness check. Instead of relying on just the two welfare state variables in MARPOR, here we incorporate all aspects of the economy that impact income inequality, which includes 15 different policy domains (see Appendix A6, Tables A6.1 and A6.2). The new *SD economic position* variable correlates with *SD wstate position* ($r = .27$), and the main results once again all hold.

An alternative measure of inequality is also employed. The *Palma Ratio* addresses the Gini's over-sensitivity to changes in the middle of the distribution and insensitivity to changes at the top and bottom. This is accomplished through a ratio calculation of the national income share of the top 10% divided by the bottom 40% and is available from the World Inequality Database (Alvaredo et al., 2022). It correlates highly with the Gini ($r = .80$). None of the variables substantively perform differently and the main results all hold (see Appendix A7, Table A7).

Last, to ensure the results are not driven by the inclusion of any one country, this study also undertook a jack-knife analysis for the interaction from Model 2 and the three-way interaction from Model 3. Germany is an outlier in Model 2, although it is still statistically significant at $p < .001$. Otherwise, the estimated interactions for both models are all stable and remain significant whenever a country is excluded (see Appendix A8, Figures A8a and A8b).

## CONCLUSION

Turnout decline has been particularly pronounced among lower-class individuals (Dalton, 2017; Elsässer et al., 2022; Gallego, 2015; Rennwald, 2020), which has been shown to be exacerbated under greater income inequality (Jensen & Jespersen, 2017; Polacko, 2022a; Schäfer & Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008). This article investigates the effect of income inequality on voter turnout by testing whether the relationship is conditioned by the policy programs of social democratic parties. Social democratic parties provide the focus because they are the primary conduit for their traditional constituency to exercise demands on welfare state matters that can curb inequality.

The study seeks to address the pronounced supply–demand imbalance that exists in the turnout and inequality literature, as well as to further explore the inequality–social democracy relationship. Recent findings reveal the significant influence that greater economic party system polarization has on turnout under conditions of high inequality (Polacko et al., 2021). This study builds on these findings by focusing specifically on the policy movements of social democratic parties over the past generation and introducing them into the framework. Based on data from 30 countries and 111 elections between 1996 and 2019, this article finds that inequality significantly reduces turnout, which is significantly magnified when social democratic parties offer rightward welfare state positions. It also finds that social democratic parties can largely mitigate the negative effects of inequality on turnout for low-income individuals by offering leftist welfare state positions.

[11] *Union* status is absent for two elections: Denmark 1998 and Spain 2008.

By focusing on the policy offerings of parties, the present research also makes several important contributions. The rightward movement of social democrats since the 1990s is one of the most pronounced policy changes in the Western party system. The party family's economic moderation has effectively converged the economic dimension of party systems around a neoliberal pro-market center, which has occurred alongside increasing inequality (Hopkin, 2020). As party system convergence has been shown to increase voter indifference and reduce turnout (Callander & Wilson, 2007), this signals to the party family's traditional base that their preferences and voices do not really matter in meeting the challenge of inequality, which has likely contributed to their increased disengagement from politics.

Many scholars and commentators have questioned the health of Western democracy of late, with both declining turnout and reduced vote shares for traditional mainstream political parties forming key parts of the narrative. This study provides further support for the negative effect of inequality on turnout, which lends more credibility to the mounting concerns regarding the health of Western democracy.

The article's findings also provide notable ramifications for party strategy. The weakening of social democratic class voting has not only been a question of structural changes with workers representing a declining share of the electorate, as is commonly depicted (Benedetto et al., 2020; Beramendi et al., 2015; Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt, 1994). But importantly, the effect of structural change on social democracy has clearly also been reinforced by a weakening of working-class support, especially through electoral de-mobilization and abstention. Hence, the findings presented here show that, as turnout declines the most for lower-income individuals under high inequality when social democratic parties move rightward on the welfare state, the party family stands to benefit the most by reversing this position, especially since equality was a founding principle of social democracy and for so long the party family built its brand by focusing on expanding and defending the welfare state (Bartolini, 2000; Mudge, 2018).

This study provides a novel avenue of enquiry into both the social democratic story and the inequality–turnout conundrum. It sheds greater light onto the issues of political inequality that persist throughout the West and draws on evidence in support of greater representation. Its findings show that the policy choices presented to the electorate substantially matter for political behavior, especially so in this age of increasing inequality. As the findings point to a key interplay between inequality and the social democratic party family future work might adapt this framework to better investigate the causal mechanisms behind both reduced support and turnout for mainstream parties, as well as examining if this can account for any movements toward populism, especially by lower-income individuals.

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## APPENDIX A1

### List of countries and elections

| Country | Elections | Number of elections |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 | 4 |
| Austria | 2008, 2013, 2017 | 3 |
| Belgium | 1999, 2003 | 2 |
| Canada | 1997, 2004, 2008 | 3 |
| Czech Republic | 1996, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2013 | 5 |
| Denmark | 1998, 2001, 2007, 2019 | 4 |
| Estonia | 2011 | 1 |
| Finland | 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 | 5 |
| France | 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 | 4 |
| Germany | 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017 | 6 |
| Greece | 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b | 4 |
| Hungary | 1998, 2002 | 2 |
| Israel | 1996, 2003, 2006, 2013 | 4 |
| Ireland | 2002, 2007, 2011, 2016 | 4 |
| Italy | 2006, 2018 | 2 |
| Japan | 1996 | 1 |
| Latvia | 2010, 2011, 2014 | 3 |
| Lithuania | 2016 | 1 |
| Netherlands | 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2017 | 5 |
| New Zealand | 1996, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017 | 6 |
| Norway | 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017 | 6 |
| Poland | 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011 | 5 |
| Portugal | 2002, 2005, 2009, 2015 | 4 |
| Slovakia | 2010, 2016 | 2 |
| Slovenia | 1996, 2004, 2008, 2011 | 4 |

(Continues)

**TABLE A1** (Continued)

| Country | Elections | Number of elections |
|---|---|---|
| Spain | 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 | 4 |
| Sweden | 1998, 2002, 2006, 2014, 2018 | 5 |
| Switzerland | 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 | 4 |
| United Kingdom | 1997, 2005, 2015, 2017 | 4 |
| United States | 1996, 2004, 2012, 2016 | 4 |

## APPENDIX A2

### List of social democratic parties

| Country | Social democratic party/bloc | Abbreviation |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | Australian Labor Party | ALP |
| Austria | Austrian Social Democratic Party | SPÖ |
| Belgium | Flemish/Francophone Socialist Party | sp.a/PS |
| Canada | New Democratic Party | NDP |
| Czech Republic | Czech Social Democratic Party | ČSSD |
| Denmark | Social Democratic Party | SD |
| Estonia | Social Democratic Party | SDE |
| Finland | Finnish Social Democrats | SSDP |
| France | Socialist Party | PS |
| Germany | Social Democratic Party of Germany | SPD |
| Greece | Panhellenic Socialist Movement | PASOK |
| Hungary | Hungarian Socialist Party | MSzDP |
| Ireland | Labour Party | Labour |
| Israel | Israeli Labor Party | HaAvoda |
| Italy | Olive Tree > Democratic Party | L'Ulivo > PD |
| Japan | Democratic Party of Japan | DPJ |
| Latvia | Harmony Centre | SC |
| Lithuania | Social Democratic Party of Lithuania | LSDP |
| Netherlands | Labour Party | PvdA |
| New Zealand | New Zealand Labour Party | Labour |
| Norway | Norwegian Labour Party | DnA |
| Poland | Democratic Left Alliance | SLD |
| Portugal | Socialist Party | PS |
| Slovakia | Direction-Social Democracy | Smer |
| Slovenia | Social Democratic Party | SD |
| Spain | Spanish Socialist Workers' Party | PSOE |
| Sweden | Social Democratic Labour Party | SAP |
| Switzerland | Social Democratic Party of Switzerland | SPS/PSS |
| United Kingdom | Labour Party | Labour |
| United States | Democratic Party | Democrats |

# APPENDIX A3

## Descriptive statistics

| Variable | Observations | Mean | Std. dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Voted | 190,467 | .8399408 | .3666619 | 0 | 1 |
| Age | 191,379 | 48.60533 | 17.35424 | 16 | 106 |
| Female | 192,283 | .4828924 | .4997085 | 0 | 1 |
| Education | 188,459 | 2.271682 | 1.173117 | 0 | 4 |
| Income | 156,445 | 2.947707 | 1.389461 | 1 | 5 |
| Married | 187,577 | .6289044 | .4830993 | 0 | 1 |
| Rural | 167,053 | .2600312 | .4386527 | 0 | 1 |
| Gini $t-1$ | 192,842 | 29.38128 | 3.855247 | 22.17531 | 38.24817 |
| SD Wstate position | 192,842 | −1.520925 | 3.1834 | −9.713303 | 6.020761 |
| GDP capital $t-1$ (log) | 192,842 | 10.28348 | .6546154 | 8.328689 | 11.52947 |
| Union density | 192,842 | 30.10414 | 18.81925 | 6.88847 | 92.57 |
| ENP | 192,842 | 4.965137 | 1.784571 | 2.116739 | 12.84043 |
| Margin | 192,842 | 7.247141 | 6.34392 | .0209999 | 28.357 |
| Majoritarian | 192,842 | .1167018 | .3210654 | 0 | 1 |
| Compulsory vote | 192,842 | .2665809 | .8281156 | 0 | 3 |
| Post-communist | 192,842 | .1730173 | .3782632 | 0 | 1 |

# APPENDIX A4

## Union control robustness check

**TABLE A4** Mixed-effect logistic regressions clustered by country with year fixed effects, predicting propensity to vote.

| *Vote* | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .027*** | .027*** | .027*** |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| Female | .068*** | .067*** | .066*** |
| | (.017) | (.017) | (.017) |
| Education | .351*** | .354*** | .354*** |
| | (.010) | (.010) | (.010) |
| Income | .186*** | .186*** | −.167 |
| | (.007) | (.007) | (.203) |
| Married | .265*** | .267*** | .265*** |
| | (.019) | (.019) | (.019) |
| Rural | .009 | .005 | .005 |
| | (.020) | (.020) | (.020) |
| Union | .025 | .021 | .021 |
| | (.024) | (.024) | (.024) |
| Gini $t-1$ | −.095*** | −.324*** | −.366*** |
| | (.016) | (.026) | (.032) |

(Continues)

**TABLE A4** (Continued)

| *Vote* | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gini $t-1$ # Income | | | .016* |
| | | | (.007) |
| SD Redistribution | .076*** | 2.290*** | 2.695*** |
| | (.022) | (.175) | (.262) |
| SD Redistribution # Income | | | −.147* |
| | | | (.072) |
| SD Redistribution # Gini $t-1$ | | −.078*** | −.095*** |
| | | (.006) | (.009) |
| SD Redistribution # Income # Gini $t-1$ | | | .006* |
| | | | (.003) |
| GDP per capita $t-1$ (log) | .248* | .374** | .381** |
| | (.120) | (.126) | (.126) |
| Union density | −.012*** | −.008* | −.008* |
| | (.004) | (.004) | (.004) |
| ENP | −.133*** | −.146*** | −.146*** |
| | (.015) | (.015) | (.015) |
| Margin | −.012*** | −.013*** | −.013*** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | (.002) |
| Majoritarian | −.694* | −.521 | −.538 |
| | (.331) | (.382) | (.384) |
| Unicameralism | .445*** | .533*** | .542*** |
| | (.092) | (.096) | (.096) |
| Disproportionality | .001 | .027** | .028** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Compulsory vote | .554** | .550** | .544** |
| | (.170) | (.197) | (.198) |
| Post-communist | −1.033*** | −.924** | −.922** |
| | (.264) | (.299) | (.300) |
| Constant | .932 | 6.609*** | 7.488*** |
| | (1.594) | (1.720) | (1.795) |
| *Variance* | −.712*** | −.556*** | −.549*** |
| | (.143) | (.145) | (.145) |
| *Log likelihood* | −44,048.23 | −43,966.76 | −43,956.1 |
| *AIC* | 88,182.47 | 88,021.52 | 88,006.2 |
| *BIC* | 88,599.43 | 88,448.18 | 88,461.95 |
| *Fixed effects* | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR |
| *Countries* | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| *N* | 120,189 | 120,189 | 120,189 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

# APPENDIX A5

## Country fixed effects clustered by year robustness checks

**TABLE A5** Mixed-effect logistic regressions clustered by year with country fixed effects, predicting propensity to vote.

| Vote | Model 7 | Model 8 | Model 9 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .027*** | .027*** | .027*** |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| Female | .076*** | .075*** | .075*** |
| | (.017) | (.017) | (.017) |
| Education | .342*** | .347*** | .347*** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Income | .187*** | .187*** | −.160 |
| | (.007) | (.007) | (.198) |
| Married | .259*** | .260*** | .257*** |
| | (.018) | (.018) | (.018) |
| Rural | .006 | .003 | .002 |
| | (.019) | (.019) | (.019) |
| Gini $t-1$ | −.090*** | −.337*** | −.378*** |
| | (.019) | (.029) | (.034) |
| Gini $t-1$ # Income | | | .015* |
| | | | (.007) |
| SD redistribution | .070*** | 2.035*** | 2.442*** |
| | (.020) | (.166) | (.250) |
| SD redistribution # Income | | | −.149* |
| | | | (.070) |
| SD redistribution # Gini $t-1$ | | −.069*** | −.086*** |
| | | (.006) | (.009) |
| SD redistribution # Income # Gini $t-1$ | | | .006* |
| | | | (.002) |
| GDP per capita $t-1$ (log) | .193 | .330** | .332** |
| | (.111) | (.114) | (.114) |
| Union density | −.018*** | −.015*** | −.015*** |
| | (.004) | (.004) | (.004) |
| ENP | −.136*** | −.143*** | −.143*** |
| | (.015) | (.015) | (.015) |
| Margin | −.011*** | −.010*** | −.010*** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | (.002) |
| Majoritarian | .124 | 1.026*** | 1.015*** |
| | (.226) | (.244) | (.244) |
| Unicameralism | .417*** | .417*** | .425*** |
| | (.096) | (.097) | (.097) |

(Continues)

**TABLE A5** (Continued)

| Vote | Model 7 | Model 8 | Model 9 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Disproportionality | .003 | .029** | .030** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Compulsory vote | 1.490*** | 1.608*** | 1.590*** |
| | (.184) | (.186) | (.186) |
| Post-communist | .015 | −.332 | −.332 |
| | .193 | .330** | .332** |
| Constant | −.078 | 5.246*** | 6.166*** |
| | (1.434) | (1.540) | (1.618) |
| *Variance* | −1.031*** | −.924*** | −.924*** |
| | (.157) | (.158) | (.158) |
| *Log likelihood* | −47,894.11 | −47,823.12 | −47,813.31 |
| *AIC* | 95,874.21 | 95,734.23 | 95,720.61 |
| *BIC* | 96,295.18 | 96,165 | 96,180.75 |
| *Fixed effects* | COUNTRY | COUNTRY | COUNTRY |
| *Years* | 24 | 24 | 24 |
| *N* | 131,937 | 131,937 | 131,937 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

## APPENDIX A6

### Alternative economic policy measure robustness check

**Social democratic economic policy positions were constructed using the state-market dimension, which comprise the following components from MARPOR (Volkens et al., 2020):**

**TABLE A6.1** Mixed-effects logistic regression predicting propensity to vote (with *SD Economic position* measure).

| SD economic position | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Left wing** | | **Right wing** | |
| per403 | Market regulation | per401 | Free market economy |
| per404 | Economic planning | per402 | Incentives: Positive |
| per405 | Corporatism/Mixed economy | per407 | Protectionism: Negative |
| per406 | Protectionism: Positive | per414 | Economic orthodoxy |
| per409 | Keynesian demand management | per505 | Welfare state limitation |
| per412 | Controlled economy | | |
| per413 | Nationalization | | |
| per415 | Marxist analysis | | |
| per416 | Anti-growth economy: Positive | | |
| per504 | Welfare state expansion | | |

**TABLE A6.2** Mixed-effect logistic regressions clustered by country with year fixed effects, predicting propensity to vote.

| Vote | Model 10 | Model 11 | Model 12 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .027*** | .027*** | .027*** |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| Female | .076*** | .075*** | .075*** |
| | (.017) | (.017) | (.017) |
| Education | .343*** | .347*** | .347*** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Income | .187*** | .187*** | −.124 |
| | (.007) | (.007) | (.198) |
| Married | .260*** | .260*** | .258*** |
| | (.018) | (.018) | (.018) |
| Rural | .005 | .002 | .001 |
| | (.019) | (.019) | (.019) |
| Gini $t-1$ | −.123*** | −.344*** | −.381*** |
| | (.016) | (.026) | (.031) |
| Gini $t-1$ # Income | | | .014* |
| | | | (.007) |
| SD Economic | .052** | 1.869*** | 2.234*** |
| | (.019) | (.161) | (.246) |
| SD Economic # Income | | | −.135 |
| | | | (.070) |
| SD Economic # Gini $t-1$ | | −.064*** | −.079*** |
| | | (.006) | (.009) |
| SD Economic # Income # Gini $t-1$ | | | .006* |
| | | | (.002) |
| GDP per capita $t-1$ (log) | .380*** | .459*** | .458*** |
| | (.107) | (.108) | (.108) |
| Union density | −.013*** | −.012*** | −.012*** |
| | (.004) | (.004) | (.004) |
| ENP | −.145*** | −.159*** | −.159*** |
| | (.015) | (.015) | (.015) |
| Margin | −.011*** | −.010*** | −.011*** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | (.002) |
| Majoritarian | −.718 | −.432 | −.439 |
| | (.370) | (.411) | (.412) |
| Compulsory vote | .545** | .582** | .580** |
| | (.191) | (.213) | (.213) |
| Post-communist | −1.123*** | −1.147*** | −1.149*** |
| | (.289) | (.315) | (.316) |
| Constant | 3.600* | 10.016*** | 10.876*** |
| | (1.477) | (1.609) | (1.691) |

(Continues)

**TABLE A6.2** (Continued)

| Vote | Model 10 | Model 11 | Model 12 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Variance* | .316*** | .393*** | .396*** |
| | (.090) | (.112) | (.113) |
| *Log likelihood* | −47,923.72 | −47,859.03 | −47,850.02 |
| *AIC* | 95,927.43 | 95,800.06 | 95,788.0 |
| *BIC* | 96,319.04 | 96,201.45 | 96,218.79 |
| *Fixed effects* | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR |
| *Countries* | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| *N* | 131,937 | 131,937 | 131,937 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

## APPENDIX A7

### Alternative income inequality measure robustness check (*palma ratio*)

**TABLE A7** Mixed-effect logistic regressions clustered by country with year fixed effects, predicting propensity to vote.

| Vote | Model 13 | Model 14 | Model 15 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .027*** | .027*** | .027*** |
| | (.001) | (.001) | (.001) |
| Female | .076*** | .076*** | .076*** |
| | (.017) | (.017) | (.017) |
| Education | .342*** | .345*** | .345*** |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Income | .188*** | .188*** | .084 |
| | (.007) | (.007) | (.089) |
| Married | .258*** | .256*** | .255*** |
| | (.018) | (.018) | (.018) |
| Rural | .004 | .003 | .003 |
| | (.019) | (.019) | (.019) |
| Palma Ratio $t-1$ | −.152*** | −.918*** | −1.106*** |
| | (.043) | (.093) | (.127) |
| Palma Ratio $t-1$ # Income | | | .071* |
| | | | (.034) |
| SD Wstate | .076*** | .662*** | .755*** |
| | (.019) | (.065) | (.105) |
| SD Wstate # Income | | | −.034 |
| | | | (.031) |
| SD Wstate # Palma Ratio $t-1$ | | −.243*** | −.308*** |
| | | (.026) | (.041) |

**TABLE A7** (Continued)

| Vote | Model 13 | Model 14 | Model 15 |
|---|---|---|---|
| SD Wstate # Income # Palma $t-1$ | | | .024* |
| | | | (.012) |
| GDP per capita $t-1$ (log) | .377*** | .534*** | .541*** |
| | (.114) | (.117) | (.117) |
| Union density | −.010** | −.005 | −.005 |
| | (.004) | (.004) | (.004) |
| ENP | −.133*** | −.159*** | −.160*** |
| | (.015) | (.015) | (.015) |
| Margin | −.012*** | −.009*** | −.009*** |
| | (.002) | (.002) | (.002) |
| Majoritarian | −.892* | −.883* | −.903* |
| | (.378) | (.410) | (.412) |
| Unicameralism | .570*** | .630*** | .632*** |
| | (.083) | (.085) | (.085) |
| Disproportionality | .001 | .022* | .023* |
| | (.009) | (.009) | (.009) |
| Compulsory vote | .496* | .482* | .478* |
| | (.196) | (.213) | (.214) |
| Post-communist | −.984*** | −.821** | −.815** |
| | (.293) | (.314) | (.315) |
| Constant | −2.767* | −2.600 | −2.402 |
| | (1.306) | (1.330) | (1.345) |
| *Variance* | −.554*** | −.467*** | −.462** |
| | (.143) | (.142) | (.142) |
| *Log likelihood* | −47,921.18 | −47,877.1 | −47,869.28 |
| *AIC* | 95,926.35 | 95,840.2 | 95,830.56 |
| *BIC* | 96,337.54 | 96,261.18 | 96,280.9 |
| *Fixed effects* | YEAR | YEAR | YEAR |
| *Countries* | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| *N* | 131,937 | 131,937 | 131,937 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

# APPENDIX A8

## Country outliers robustness check

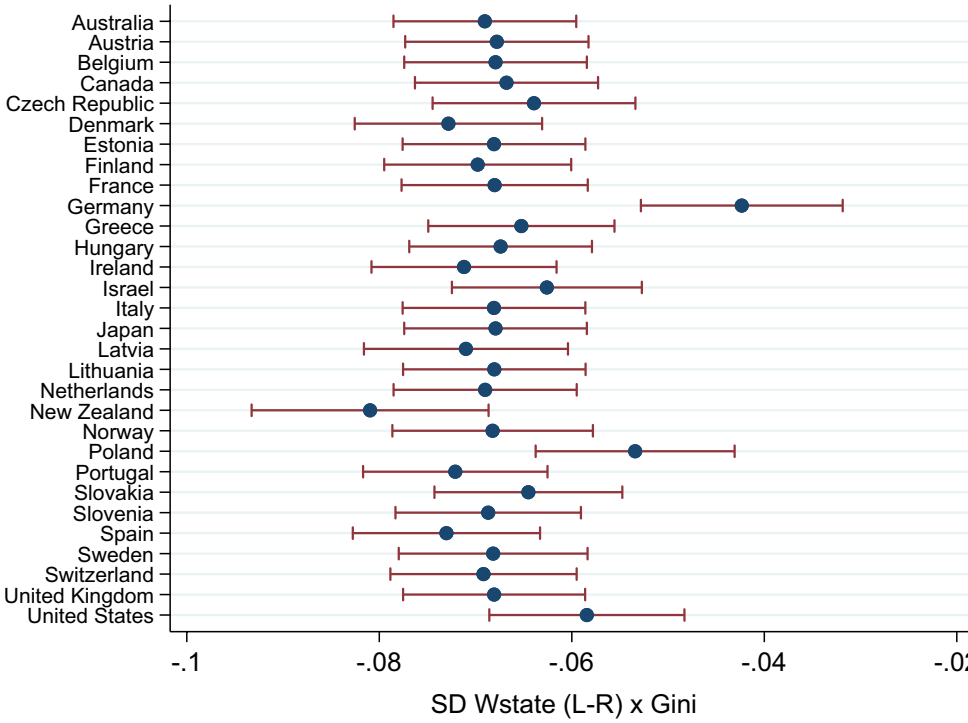


**FIGURE A8A** Jackknife estimates for Model 2 interaction. Estimates from 30 different regression models, replicating Model 2 excluding 1 country at a time. Excluded country is indicated on the *y*-axis. Estimates and 90% confidence intervals are plotted.

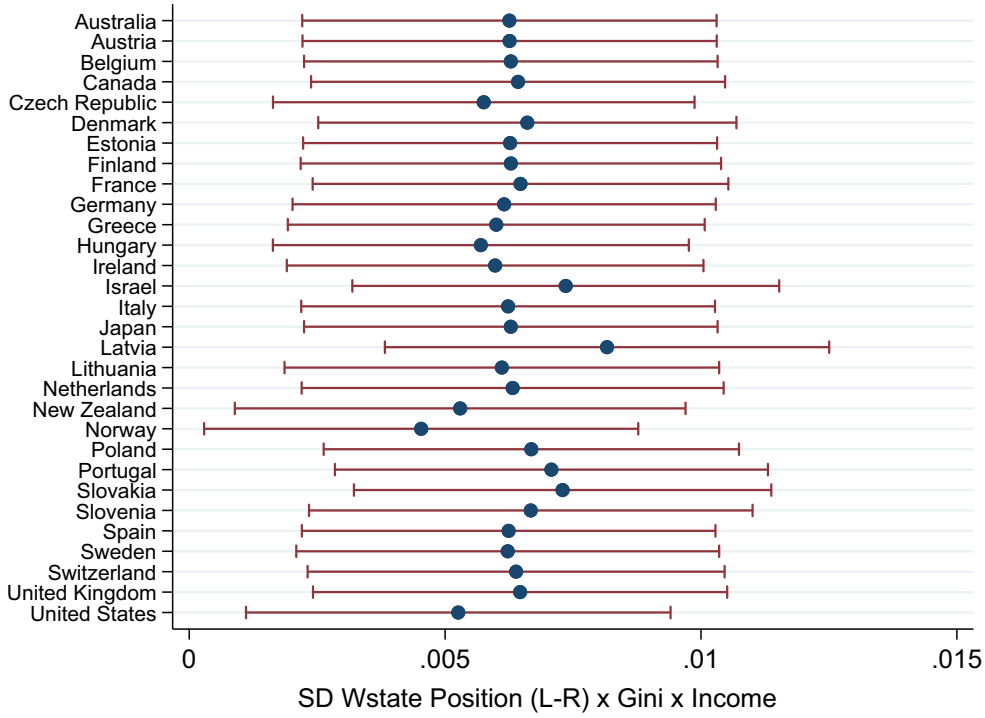


**FIGURE A8B** Jackknife estimates for Model 3 three-way interaction. Estimates from 30 different regression models, replicating Model 3 excluding 1 country at a time. Excluded country is indicated on the *y*-axis. Estimates and 90% confidence intervals are plotted.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Matthew Polacko** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Political Science at the Université du Québec à Montréal. His research lies at the intersection of comparative politics, political economy, and political behavior, with a particular interest in the consequences of economic inequality on political behavior. His articles have appeared in *Party Politics*, *Political Studies*, *European Political Science Review*, *West European Politics*, *Electoral Studies, Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Statistics, Politics & Policy*.