

POPULAR SUMMARY

Living in a modern democracy, we assume that the voice of all citizens can be heard in government. Yet, economic resources influence political voice: some have a louder voice in government than others. Political voice refers to how citizens can express their interests to government. This voice can be expressed directly through political participation, e.g. street protests and contacting elected officials. It can be done indirectly through the political parties that we vote for and that claim to represent the voters' interests (i.e., they carry the voice of the voters into parliament). Political voice inequality, then, is the inequality in influence – directly via political participation and indirectly through parties elected to parliament – over the government decisions that impact our lives. Political voice inequality is a fundamental problem all democratic societies must solve.

Why have we not solved the problem? One main reason is that we do not know how politically unequal we are, and how exactly political voice inequality connects to economic inequality across nations and time. If you want to know how much economic inequality there is, and whether this inequality been rising, falling, or staying the same, you can turn to the terabytes worth of publicly available economic data and put them through the many inequality equations to create a multitude of statistics. With decades of innovations in the study of economics and inequality, led by the disciplines of sociology and economics, we can, at least, have a debate about economic inequality. Political voice inequality has yet to attract the same sustained and systematic scholarly attention. A main reason for this gap in our knowledge is because the social sciences lack an empirical base from which to measure political voice inequality across nations and time.

Our scientific project advances the theory, methods, and empirical base for studying the relationship between political voice inequality and economic inequality. We pose the following scientific puzzles: (1) *How and to what extent are the main components of political voice inequality – political participation and party representation – related to each other once main features of political and economic institutions are accounted for?* and (2) *Across countries and time, how and to what extent do political voice inequality and economic inequality influence each other?*

To solve these scientific puzzles, we will create the Political Inequality Database (POLINQ) which is a multi-country multi-year dataset with measures of political voice inequality from harmonized survey and non-survey data for over 65 democratic countries from 1990 to 2015, to be archived and publicly available at Poland's Archiwum Danych Społecznych. To accomplish this, we propose to establish an international research team and develop a research infrastructure based on the resources of Cross-National Studies: Interdisciplinary Research and Training Program (CONSIRT.osu.edu), a joint endeavor of the Polish Academy of Sciences and The Ohio State University (OSU).

This project impacts the social sciences by: (i) addressing, through a series of high quality articles prepared for Web of Science journals, critical issues in the social sciences on economic and political inequality; (ii) archiving the POLINQ database for the international social science community to use and build upon; (iii) publicizing the results of our study with media-friendly audio and visual presentations; (iv) training the next generation of PhD students and post-doctoral scholars in the social sciences on substantive and methodological issues of the grant project through seminars, workshops, and a conference.

Societies advance based on solid scientific research. This project identifies and fills a major gap in scientific knowledge about the relationships between economy, democracy, and polity. Thus, this project will enhance our knowledge on the functioning of society in Poland and abroad.