

Inequality, Mobility and the Transformation of Electoral Politics over the Long Run

Democratic politics is widely believed to be growing more contentious, reflected in a rise of hyper-partisan politics, in-group out-group polarization, and growing support for the populist right. But how does this shift compare to electoral politics in previous eras, and how can we explain long-run changes in voting patterns? We propose a theoretical model that focuses on the strategic interplay between government policies and voter value orientations, and we examine trends in voting behavior in light of the model using nearly the entire corpus of election studies for 21 democracies since 1948. We find that sociotropic voting, class voting, and ideological voting are closely linked to changes in inequality and intergenerational mobility. The model implies a tipping point which allows for the possibility that the postwar shift towards more inclusive and solidaristic politics is being replaced by a gloomy "status defense" equilibrium, but the long-run evidence suggests a more benign interpretation of a Polanyian "second movement" that may eventually drive democratic politics back towards a more consensual equilibrium.



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Philipp Rehm's work revolves around the causes and consequences of income dynamics. At the micro-level, his research explores how income dynamics shape individual preferences for redistribution, social policies, and parties. At the macro-level, his work analyzes the impact of labor market and income dynamics on polarization, electoral majorities, and coalitions underpinning social policy.

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Oettingenstraße 67 • 80538 • Room 151