

Laboratory for Comparative Social Research
of the National Research University Higher School of Economics
5th Summer School
July 25 – August 3, 2015
Voronovo, Moscow

Is Political Inequality Rising, Falling or Staying the Same? Towards a Cross-national Measurement

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Political equality is a foundation of democracy. Yet, in every democracy, there is political inequality.

Main research questions:

- a. How much political inequality is there?
- b. Over time, is political inequality rising, falling or staying the same?

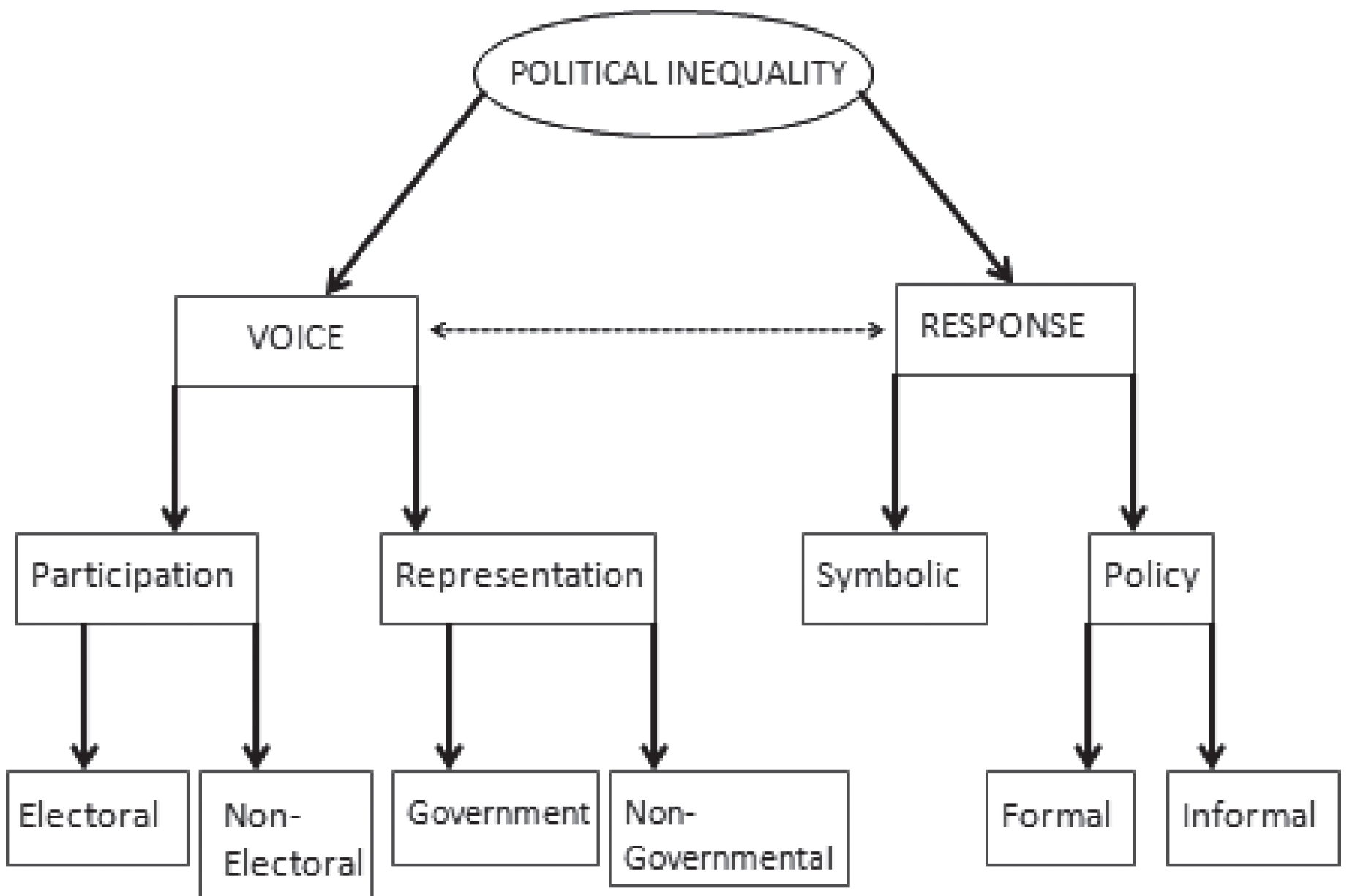
Empirically, we know a lot about various forms of inequality (e.g. economic, gender, education) and level of democracy because we have developed measures of them.

Empirically, we know very little about political inequality.

What is political inequality?

- Equality of political opportunities and equality of political outcomes
- Dimension of democracy and dimension of stratification
- A type of power inequality

Type	Political inequality is ...	Comment
Distribution	structured differences in the distribution of political resources.	Political resources can be almost anything
Sorokin	the existence of authority divisions.	Simplistic, one/zero
Equality of opportunities	when everybody's preferences are equally weighted in political decisions.	What about outcomes?
Synthesized definition	unequal influence over decisions made by political bodies and the unequal outcomes of those decisions.	Accounts for both opportunities and outcomes



Why not use measures of democracy, or quality of governance? They can be good enough, right?

We know that economic inequality is a fundamental feature of most modern economic systems. Yet, we don't equate -- or measure -- economic inequality with the economic system. Political inequality lives within democratic systems. We don't equate or measure political inequality with the democratic system.

Quality of governance (QoG) measures how well the government performs, and offers some insights into the extent that voice begets response. QoG is a useful literature, but political inequality involves different aspects.

Towards a cross-national measure of political inequality: some key issues

- measuring political influence is difficult
- range of potential “political resources” is extremely diverse and heavily context dependent
- measuring outcomes is difficult
- specifying the particular type and locus of political inequality
- whether political equality is a real, empirically visible end of a continuum
- valid and reliable data across time and space

Towards a cross-national measure of political inequality: some options

1. A single cross-national measure
2. Multiple measures based on type and locus of political inequality
3. Multiple measures based on social groups (e.g. women's political inequality)
4. Multiple measures based on type, locus and social group (e.g. women's political inequality of voice in national parliaments)

Towards a cross-national measure of political inequality: insights from the literature on...

Level of Democracy

Well-described methodology. Explicit link between concepts and measures; beware of ideological bias.

The choice between binary and continuous measures is a theoretical, not methodological choice.

Weighting of sub-components and aggregation rules must be theoretically driven.

“Small n” vs. “large n”?

Towards a cross-national measure of political inequality: insights from the literature on...

Measures of Inequality, and Economic Inequality

Well-developed methods; link between theoretical assumptions and measurement types (e.g. Allison 1978).

Seems more focused on statistical procedures than on normative concerns. There are many equations to try.

Why We Should Not Measure Political Inequality

From the project, “Indicators as a Technology of Global Governance:”

“The burgeoning production and use of indicators has not been accompanied by systematic comparative study of, and reflection on, the implications, possibilities and pitfalls of this practice.”

Their project asks important questions:

“How does the increasing use of indicators in global governance affect the distribution of power, and the power of the governed?”

How does it affect the nature of decision-making about the allocation of resources and efforts to monitor compliance with global standards?

What social processes surround the creation and use of indicators, and how do the conditions of production influence the kinds of knowledge that indicators provide?”

Concluding Remarks

This is an interdisciplinary project:

- The theoretical literature is in sociology, political science, law and policy, philosophy, and women's studies, among others.
- The methodological literature is mainly in political science, sociology and economics.

Data will come from multiple sources – official and NGO statistics and cross-national surveys, among others – and would need to be *ex post* harmonized.