This ambitious collection tackles a set of timely questions about the interplay of political cleavages and social inequalities—including multidisciplinary social scientists, political actors, and social activists. “This monumental book presents the first international and historical analysis of political cleavages and social inequalities—modules of the study of voting patterns and political preferences and electoral behavior, and voters’ demographic and economic characteristics. Ideally, the volume will shed light on the limits of diverse audiences concerned with political polarization and social inequalities—including multidisciplinary social scientists, political actors, and social activists.”

—MIKE DAKU, author of The Return of Inequality

“Combining ambition with humility, this volume explores cross-national and temporal variation in the structure of political cleavages with an eye to explaining the conditions under which income and wealth inequality becomes a topic of political contention (or not). Refreshingly, the authors long-standing debates among political scientists and illustrates how looking for patterns in macro data can yield new insights. The database assembled by Piketty and his collaborators itself represents a major contribution.”

—JONAS PONTUSSON, University of Geneva

This book is a breakthrough in the existing literature on the politics of social inequality. Not merely is the analysis intensively data-based, it goes beyond the usual confines of a small number of western democracies to a set of fifty democracies (or semi-democracies) in different continents over many decades. The analyses throughout this book are informed, informative, and insightful.”

—LARRY M. BARTELS, author of The Return of Inequality

“This ambitious book tells us how to map the central reference point for systematically charting trends in voting alignment across the globe. By including voters from the global South alongside established liberal democracies, Gethin and his collaborators challenge endemic Western biases in political research and reveal the multiplicity of political and social identities across the globe. This book is a must-read book for anyone interested in understanding electoral politics in today’s democracies—the rise of ‘identity politics’ in some countries but not others, and the multiplicity of possible futures for the dynamics of inequality.”

—AMORY GETHIN, Director, Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality

—JANET C. GORNICK, Senior Scholar, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

—GABRIEL ZUCMAN, Professor of Economics, University of California, Berkeley

—MIKE SAVAGE, Director of the World Inequality Lab

—Sylvain Riffe, Co-Director of the World School of Economics and Politics (EHESS) and the Paris Études en Sciences Sociales, and Professor at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS)

—CLARA MARTÍNEZ-TOLEDANO, Assistant Professor at Imperial College London and Wealth Distribution Coordinator at the World Inequality Lab

“Who votes for whom and why? Why has growing inequality in many parts of the world led to renewed class-based conflicts, seeming instead to have come with the emergence of new divides over identity and integration? News analysts, scholars, and citizens interested in exploring these questions inevitably lack relevant data, in particular the kind of data that establishes historical and international context. Political Cleavages and Social Inequalities provides the missing empirical background, collecting and examining a treasure trove of information on the dynamics of polarization in modern democracies. The chapters draw on a unique set of surveys conducted between 1948 and 2020 in fifty countries on five continents, analyzing the links between voters’ political preferences and socioeconomic characteristics, such as income, education, wealth, occupation, religion, ethnicity, age, and gender. This analysis sheds new light on how political movements succeed in coalescing multiple interests and identities in contemporary democracies. It also helps us understand the conditions under which conflicts over inequality become politically salient, as well as the similarities and constraints of voters supporting ethnonationalist politicians like Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro, Marine Le Pen, and Donald Trump. Bringing together cutting-edge data and historical analysis, editors Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano, and Thomas Piketty offer a vital resource for understanding the voting patterns of the present and the likely sources of future political conflict.”

—AMORY GETHIN, Professor Fellow at the World Inequality Lab at the Paris School of Economics

—THOMAS PIKETTY, Professor at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and the Paris Études en Sciences Sociales, and Co-Director of the World Inequality Lab

POLITICAL CLEAVAGES AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

A Study of Fifty Democracies, 1948–2020

EDITED BY AMORY GETHIN, CLARA MARTÍNEZ-TOLEDANO, AND THOMAS PIKETTY

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