

are somewhat larger when applied to the party system as a whole, but the distance to the preferred party shows similar class differences.

Overall, the book gifts its reader valuable insights into unequal government responsiveness and into the complexities of explaining redistribution. It also underscores the necessity to bring parties and interest groups into these types of analyses. Only the chapter by Hacker et al. directly addresses the question of why preferences, or in their case interests, are not translated into effective pressures, pointing to the failure of political elites to represent the interests of their parties' constituencies. The chapter by Elkjaer and Iversen also examines interests rather than preferences and links them directly to distributive outcomes, but the mechanisms through which the interests are linked to outcomes remain unexplored. Mathiesen et al.'s finding regarding left governments as less unequally responsive on socioeconomic issues prior to 1998 drives home the importance of parties, while also drawing our attention to structural constraints on government responses, such as European integration and international financial markets.

The book leaves us with an array of insights into the reasons why citizens may or may not demand redistribution, and the ways in which governments may or may not respond to these demands. Like any good book, it leaves questions in its wake. For example, what were the structural, economic, and political constraints on governmental policy choices? To what degree did the rise of new parties and coalition constraints prevent redistributive responses by governments? Further, we are left wondering how government policies have shaped the strength of organized labor and labor market institutions and how those, in turn, have shaped inequality. From a comparative lens, it is also interesting to ask which policies governments implement to make the welfare states less redistributive. Indeed, this text makes a necessary contribution to the field, not only through its content but by the questions it provokes in its audience.

**Response to Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens'
Review of *Unequal Democracies: Public Policy,
Responsiveness, and Redistribution in an Era of
Rising Economic Inequality***

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We are grateful to Professors Huber and Stephens for their generous review of our volume. Prompted by the arguments in the book, they end with a series of questions that raise important issues. We address some of these issues in our recent publication "Reflections on *Unequal Democracies* and Where We Go from Here" (APSA's Democracy &

Autocracy newsletter, 2024), where we called for further work on, among other things, the role interest groups play either in pressuring governments to respond to public demands for redistribution or in undermining public pressure. Huber and Stephens' questions—along with their new book—invite us to consider the specific role of organized labor.

As Huber and Stephens highlight in their book, organized labor played a key role in reducing economic inequality in the postwar decades. Unions reduced wage inequality through collective bargaining and pressured governments to adopt redistributive social programs. In some countries, they worked with center-left parties to create pathways for working-class people to enter politics directly.

But across OECD countries, the labor movement has declined since the 1980s. Although economic factors are partly to blame, political choices have also hastened the decline of unions: governments have privatized state-owned enterprises and public services, allowed temporary employment to expand, and reduced the direct influence of unions in policymaking. In many cases, left-leaning parties with historical ties to organized labor were implicated in these decisions. Their leading factions and elites embraced many elements of the neoliberal consensus of the 1990s and reoriented their parties rightward, often weakening or severing their direct union ties. As the chapter in our volume by Mathiesen and his coauthors shows, center-left parties have been just as unresponsive to the preferences of low- and middle-income citizens as their center-right rivals in the domain of economic and social policy since the mid-1990s.

This partisan convergence is among the central causes of the rise of right-wing populist parties and, in particular, their appeal to less-affluent voters, who feel they are no longer represented by the mainstream parties. With populist alternatives gaining political strength, mainstream leftist parties have often been forced to govern in coalition with center-right parties, limiting their ability to adopt redistributive policies and reduce inequality. There are indeed differences in recent government action on inequality across the OECD countries, but Huber and Stephens' book demonstrates that these differences are likely legacies of past policies.

At least in Western Europe, center-left parties have responded to the populist challenge by featuring redistribution and class politics more prominently in their electoral programs, but these efforts have not paid off so far. In our view—a view Huber and Stephens presumably share—these parties must rebuild their relations with organized labor and regain the support of working-class voters in order to reverse their electoral decline; and to do so, they must change not just what they promise to do in office, but also the way they practice politics.