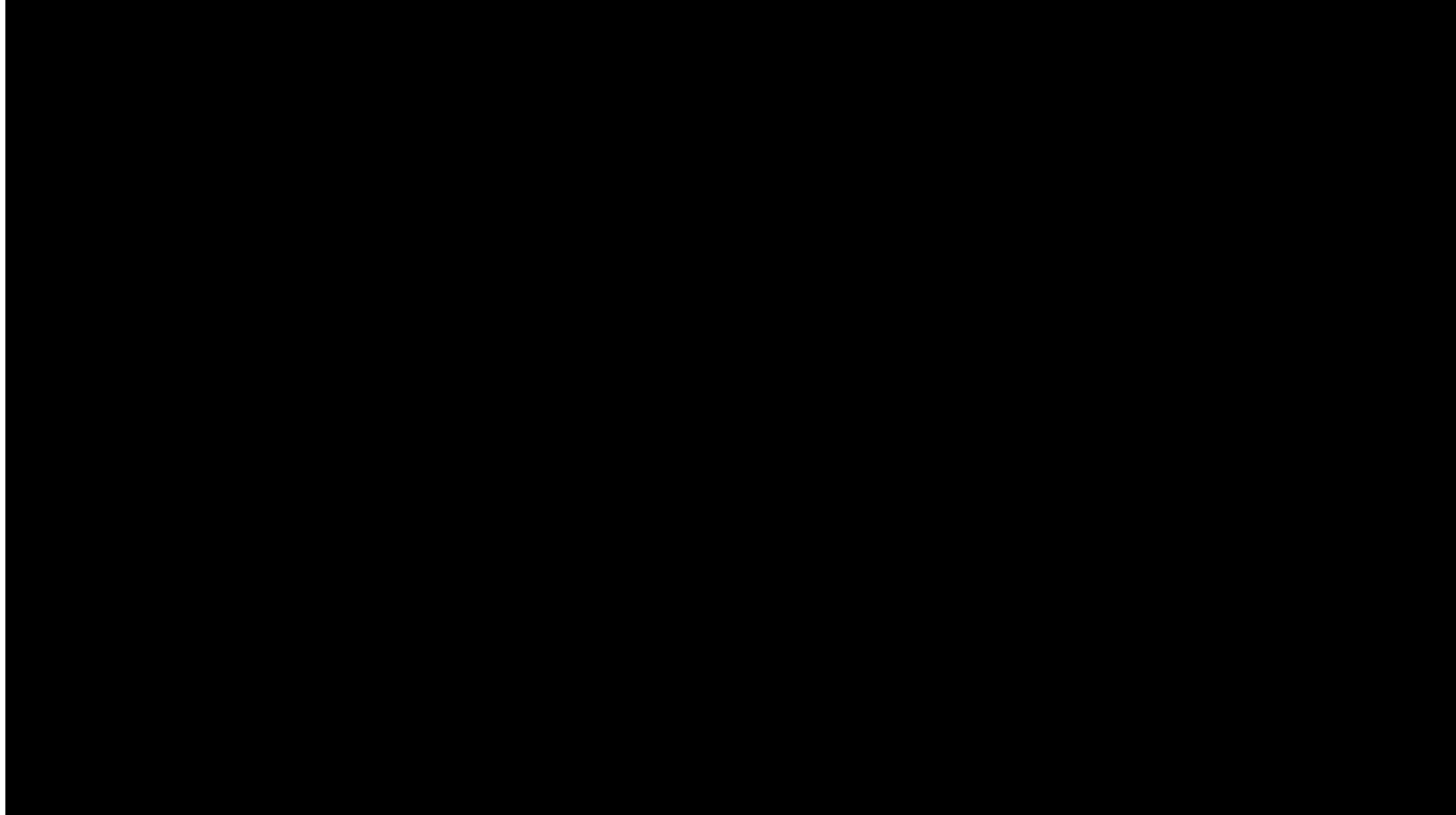


ESOn4022: Inequality and Society

04. Inequality and politics





Politics and inequality

- Ruling classes use government-controlled means and resources (money, weapons, food, transport ...) to extract surplus value from the efforts of **categorically** excluded subject populations
- They redirect some of the surplus to activities from which the subject population does not benefit, although the ruling classes do – reinforcement of existing inequalities
- Taxes , conscription, de-segregation, compensatory aid...
- Democracy – more inclusive way of exploitation
- Both democracies and autocracies – based on distinctions between inclusion and exclusion
- Typically: property, ethnic divisions, licensing, certification of interest/service/advocacy groups, marriages...

Politics and inequality

- Government generates inequality
- Inequality impacts on government
- intervention of governmental agents makes a large difference to inequality
- So people regularly struggle over state control of major resources to get the at the expense of others (pensioners, owners, veterans, parents, ...)
- Typically categorial **distinctions**: legitimate vs. Illegitimate, deserving vs. underserving, ...

Social movements and inequality

- social movement is a kind of campaign, parallel in many respects to an electoral campaign
- WUNC (Worthy, Unified, Numerous, and Committed)
- Articulation of inequality as unjust
- Advocating weaker side of inequality
- We vs. Them
- Social movements challenge the exploitation by the elites and threaten drastic collective action by members of their own constituency
- Worker's movements, NSMs, OWS, BLM...



Social movement repertoire

- creating associations and coalitions, organizing marches and demonstrations, circulating petitions, attending public meetings, shouting slogans, wearing badges, writing pamphlets, ...
- essentially symbolic, cumulative, and indirect
- implicit threat to act in adjacent arenas: to withdraw support from public authorities, sustenance to a regime's enemies, to ally with splinter parties, to move toward direct action or even rebellion
- Social movements take place as conversations—not as solo performances but as interactions among parties
- The most elementary set of parties consists of an actor making a claim, the object of the actor's claim, and an audience having a stake in the fate of at least one of the first two



Conditions of acting collectively

- Typically: the presence of solidarity, the construction of shared identities, the sense of grievance, the creation of sustaining organizations...
- But most social movements remain far more contingent and volatile
- Social movements center on the construction of **categorical** identities
- Identities in general are shared experiences of distinctive social relations and the representations of those social relations: workers become workers in relation to employers and other workers
- Construction and enforcement of unequal, paired categories

Political identities

- Political identity = shared (collective) social relation in which one of the parties is a coercive authority (state, owner ...)
- Most political identities are also **categorical** rather than specific to a tie between two particular actors.
- Political identities therefore alter as political networks, opportunities, and strategies shift.
- The validation of political identities depends on contingent performances to which other parties' acceptance or rejection of the asserted relation is crucial.
- That validation both constrains and facilitates collective action by those who share the identity.
- Deep differences separate political identities that are embedded in routine social life from those that appear chiefly in public life (embedded and disjointed collective identities)



Why inequalities persist and when they change?

- Exploitation and opportunities as effective means of control of members of subordinated categories
- Distinctions and categories become naturalized and normal
- Exploited groups adapt to the structure of exploitation
- Inequalities change when members of subordinate categories mobilize broadly and gain power

Inequality and collective action

- Politically active individuals and organizations - huge investments of time, energy, and money to influence politics
- Unions, professional associations, trade associations, and citizens groups, as well as organizations like corporations, hospitals, and universities
- Some groups and individual citizens underrepresented in political system
- Democracy is marred by deeply ingrained and persistent class-based political inequality
- The well educated and affluent are active in many ways to make their voices heard, while the less advantaged are not
- Political advantage is handed down across generations, recruitment to political activity perpetuates and exaggerates existing biases

