



# Income Inequality in Capitalist Democracies: The Interplay of Values and Institutions

*Vicki L. Birchfield*

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**Income Inequality in Capitalist Democracies: The Interplay of Values and Institutions** Vicki L. Birchfield

There has been much concern about rising levels of income inequality in the societies of advanced industrial democracies. Commentators have attributed this increase to the impact of globalization, the decline of the welfare state, or the erosion of the power of labor unions and their allies among left-wing political parties. But little attention has been paid to variations among these countries in the degree of inequality. This is the subject that Vicki Birchfield tackles in this ambitious book.

Differences in political institutions have been seen by political scientists as one likely explanation, but Birchfield shows institutional variation to be only one part of the story. Deploying an original conceptualization of political economy as applied democratic theory, she makes the compelling case that cultural values—particularly citizens' attitudes about social justice and about the proper roles of the market and the state—need to be factored into any account that will provide an adequate explanation for the observable patterns. To support her argument, she brings to bear both multivariate statistical analyses and historical comparative case studies, making this book a model for how quantitative and qualitative research can be effectively combined to produce more complete explanations of political and socioeconomic phenomena.

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