

DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY: DIRECT CORRELATION

Muller, E. N. (1988) Democracy, economic development, and income inequality. Am. Sociol. Rev. 53: 50-68.

Democracy favors income equality and vice versa. "Democratic institutions, if maintained for a relatively long time, cause some gradual reduction of income inequality, independent of level of economic development. But if a democratic regime is inaugurated in a country with an extremely inegalitarian distribution of income, high inequality is likely to undermine the legitimacy of the regime and cause democratic institutions to be replaced by authoritarian rule. Thus, a high level of inequality will reduce a country's years of democratic experience. This vicious circle can be avoided if democracy is inaugurated (or restored) in a country with only intermediate or relatively low inequality. Otherwise, it seems that the only way to break out of this vicious circle is for a strong political party with redistributive goals

to develop during the early years of democracy and then hold office for a sufficiently long period of time to implement policies that significantly reduce income inequality" (p. 66).

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This/conclusion of a longitudinal study conducted on a sample of 55 countries.

Such empirical studies, rather than a priori speculations, can answer the question whether equality and democracy are compatible.