

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Complex Interplay between Political Rule and Social Inequality:
A Comparative Analysis****¹Ayesha Younas* ²Muhammad Fareed and ³Dr. Anwar Ali**

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This research paper aims to examine the relationship between political rule and social inequality in different governance systems. The background of the study is that it compares democracies (USA) with authoritarian regimes (North Korea, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Russia, and Iran). The methodology uses the Gini coefficient and poverty rates to measure social inequality and analyzes how economic regimes, political ideologies, and demographic factors contribute to disparities within societies. The results suggest that inflexible constitutions perpetuate social inequality, and individuals' political culture and ideologies can either mitigate or worsen inequality. Centralized institutional frameworks with limited accountability and corruption are ineffective in addressing social inequality. While liberal democracies generally have lower Gini coefficients and poverty rates, this relationship is not always linear but multifaceted due to demographic, leadership and social variables among others. It is recommended that all regimes are equally responsible in providing services to their populations that prioritize social justice.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Democracy, Gini Coefficient, Governance, Theocracy**Introduction**

The research discusses the relationship between political rule and social inequality, exploring how different governance systems impact socioeconomic disparities. It compares various regime types, from liberal democracies to authoritarian governments including case studies of the USA, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Russia, as well as Iran's theocracy. Additionally, it examines the influence of constitutions, laws, institutional frameworks, accountability, corruption, political culture, cultural, and ideological environments, economic systems, and demographic factors on social inequality. The study aims to enhance understanding of how governance affects social outcomes and the policies needed to address inequality in different political contexts.

The complex interplay between the nature of political rule and the pervasiveness of social inequality is a subject of extensive academic inquiry and public policy debate. This research paper delves into the multifaceted relationship between governance systems and socioeconomic disparities. It examines how varied political frameworks – from the constitutional design and legal landscape to the broader institutional, – shape social inequality within and between societies. To assess social inequality, the paper employs quantitative measures such as the Gini coefficient and poverty rates, backed by a qualitative assessment of the social impacts of political structures. The study interrogates the impact of constitutions—whether rigid or flexible—and their corresponding laws and legal frameworks, in shaping the economic and social landscapes of a country.

Investigating the type of institutional frameworks, it evaluates how accountability and corruption influence the distributive outcomes of economic policies and governance. Furthermore, the paper investigates the role of political culture, the extent of political freedoms, and prevailing political ideologies, along with the type of economic systems and regimes in shaping notions of equity and social justice. Social structures and demographic factors also receive attention as critical determinants that interact with political rule to either mitigate or perpetuate inequality.

Through a cross-national comparison, this introduction sets the stage for exploring the diverse ways governance can affect social outcomes. It underscores an implicit question: How do different political rules, through their intertwined legal, institutional, and cultural frameworks, facilitate or inhibit equitable social development? The forthcoming analysis promises to enhance our understanding of the policies and reforms necessary to address social inequality within varied political contexts.

Literature Review

The relationship between political rule and social inequality has been a subject of scholarly interest for decades. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on this topic, drawing from a diverse range of sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nexus between the type of political rule and social inequality.

Previous studies have established a correlation between political institutions and social inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Boix, 2003). The nature of constitution, institutional frameworks, and political culture play crucial roles in shaping social inequality (Huntington, 1993; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Moreover, Polacko (2021) provides an overview of the causes and consequences of income inequality, highlighting its multifaceted nature and implications for society. This study sets the stage for understanding the broader context within which the relationship between political rule and social inequality operates.

In the United States, the impact of political structures on social inequality has been a subject of ongoing debate and analysis. The study by Edward N. Wolff et al. (2012) compares inequality and living standards in the United States using an expanded measure of economic well-being. The research highlights the disparities in wealth distribution and living conditions between these two countries, shedding light on the role of political and economic factors in shaping social outcomes.

Moreover, Allen L. Webster (2013) examines the relationship between economic freedom and income equality in the United States. The study delves into the implications of policy decisions and regulatory frameworks on income distribution and social mobility, emphasizing the importance of governance structures in addressing inequality. Additionally, Andrey V. Korotayev et al. (2022) explore the factors of deconsolidation of the liberal democracy regime in the United States. Their research underscores the challenges posed by political instability and polarization in exacerbating social divisions and widening inequality within society.

Furthermore, Stacey M. Jones (2023) discusses income inequality in America, providing insights into the historical trends and structural factors that have contributed to disparities in wealth and income. The study offers a nuanced analysis of the intersection between political dynamics and social inequality, highlighting the need for comprehensive policy reforms to promote greater equity and social justice.

Similarly, Al-Majali (2024) examines the effect of democracy on income inequality, contributing to the understanding of how political systems influence wealth distribution. Several studies focus on Iran, offering insights into the intersection of religious governance and social inequality. Papan-Matin (2014) explores the constitutional framework of Iran,

while Ahmadi Gandmani (2019) analyzes the legal principles of economic policy in the country. These studies highlight the unique dynamics of governance in democratic and authoritarian states and their implications for social welfare. Castro & Martins (2021) and Galbraith (2012) have found that right-wing dictatorships may promote policies that favor economic liberalization and potentially increase inequality, therefore, understanding the nuances of these factors is crucial for assessing their effects on social inequality in authoritarian contexts.

Material and Methods

To explore the nexus between the type of political rule and social inequality, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative analysis across different governance systems: the liberal democracies of the USA, and the authoritarian or theocratic regimes of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia.

Quantitatively, the Gini coefficient and poverty rates serve as primary indicators of social inequality. These measures are sourced from international databases and reports such as the World Bank's World Development Indicators, the United Nations Development Programme, and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index among other sources. This data provides a baseline comparative assessment of social inequality across different countries.

Qualitatively, the research has analyzed constitutional documents, and policy papers to discern the nature of laws and the legal framework in place. Institutional framework analysis involve an examination of governance structures, considering factors such as accountability and corruption. Political culture, economic system, and social structures are analyzed through scholarly articles, economic reports, and social research surveys, to understand their influence on the social fabric and inequality.

Case studies and comparative analysis of each country were structured to highlight unique elements of their political and social systems and their relationship to inequality. Two cases were selected: Liberal Democracy (United States), and Authoritarianism including Monarchy (Saudi Arabia), Oligarchy (Russia), (North Korea), and Theocracy (Iran). A comprehensive framework was developed to examine each case, considering the following factors:

The research contributes to the existing literature on political science, sociology, and development studies, offering insights for policymakers and scholars seeking to address social inequality and promote human well-being.

Results and Discussion

To begin with, the United States of America, a liberal democracy, has a constitutional framework that establishes a federal republic with a representative democracy with the Constitution, adopted in 1787, outlines the separation of powers, individual rights, and the rule of law. Laws are enacted through a democratic process, with citizens having the right to vote, and hold elected officials accountable. However, social inequality persists, with significant disparities in following indicators (Table 1). Economic system is characterized by a high level of income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 0.41 (World Bank, 2022). Various other indicators indicate significant social inequality (Table 1).

Table 1
Social Inequality Indicators in the United States

Sr. #	Indicator	Value	Source
1	Poverty rate	12.9%	US Census Bureau

2	Income inequality ratio (Gini coefficient)	0.41	World Bank
3	Unemployment rate	3.6%	BLS
4	Education attainment gap	23.1%	NCES
5	Health disparities 2022	15.1%	CDC
6	Political representation gap	30.1%	Pew Research Center
7	Social mobility index	44.1	Economic Mobility Project
8	Political representation gap	30.1%	Pew Research Center
9	Wealth inequality ratio	0.84	Federal Reserve
10	Access to basic services index	75.1	UNDP
11	Gender pay gap	17.6%	AAUW

The political culture of liberalism prioritizes individual freedom and social justice, but the country's history of systemic racism and discrimination has led to persistent social inequality. Various factors such as constitutional, legal, and institutional frameworks of liberal democracies like the United States have a significant impact on social inequality. For instance, the constitutional treatment of religion in the United States has been linked to differing levels of religiosity, which may indirectly influence social structures and norms (Eisgruber & Zeisberg, 2006). The impact of these frameworks on inequality is complex and mediated by a variety of factors, including political culture, public opinion, and the specific policies enacted within these structures (Falkenbach & Willison, 2022; Risse-Kappen, 1991). Therefore, while these frameworks are foundational to liberal democracies, their effectiveness in addressing social inequality is contingent upon their interaction with broader societal dynamics and the policy choices made by those in power.

Similarly, political ideology of leaders, such as CEOs, has been shown to influence income distribution within firms, with politically liberal CEOs more likely to address pay disparities (Weng & Yang, 2023). This suggests that the broader political and ideological orientation of a country's leadership can shape policies that affect social inequality. While one study found that an increase in democracy levels, as measured by the Democracy index, corresponds to a decrease in the Gini index, indicating reduced income inequality (Al-majali, 2024). Even in a liberal democracy, the political process can be influenced or "captured" by elites who use their resources to maintain their de facto power, potentially limiting the impact of democratization on social equality and redistribution (Acemoğlu et al., 2015). Democratization in liberal democracies can also lead to the opening up of new economic opportunities. While this can be beneficial, it may also result in increased inequality, especially if there is significant heterogeneity within the population in terms of access to these opportunities (Acemoğlu et al., 2015). According to the 'Director's Law', democracy may transfer political power to the middle class rather than the poor. If the middle class is more inclined to policies that benefit themselves, redistribution may not necessarily target those most in need, thus not significantly reducing overall inequality (Acemoglu, D. Democracy, Redistribution and Inequality, 2013).

Moreover, the nature of laws, institutional frameworks, political aspects, and economic systems significantly impacts social inequality. Starting with the poverty rate, in the USA, the federal structure allows for state-level variation in implementing poverty alleviation programs, which can lead to unequal support across the nation. Take the poverty rate, for instance. In the USA, federal laws shape welfare programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, aimed at reducing food insecurity among the poorest citizens. Despite its reach, the USA's poverty rate remains relatively high, partly because assistance levels and eligibility requirements vary by state, and some states have implemented more restrictive measures that limit access. Similarly, political culture and ideologies shape the policies and institutions that govern economic distribution, while corruption can exacerbate social inequality by distorting these policies and institutions in favor of certain groups (Krishnan, 2016).

Moreover, Income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, tends to be higher in the USA, where tax policies have favored the wealthy, and de-unionization has weakened wage bargaining power. The unemployment rate is affected by diverse labor protections and policies. For example, the USA typically has more flexible labor market regulations, contributing to a lower unemployment rate but potentially leading to less stable employment conditions. When considering the wealth inequality ratio, the USA's financial policies, including lower taxes on capital gains and higher thresholds for estate taxes, contribute to greater wealth inequality. In the US, policies such as lower capital gains taxes and substantial estate tax exemptions benefit wealth accumulation for the rich. Access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and the internet is vital, and the USA has launched initiatives to improve this, although gaps remain. Moreover, studies have shown that higher measures of economic freedom, which are often associated with liberal democracies, can correlate with greater income inequality (Webster, 2013). This contradiction indicates that the relationship between economic systems and social inequality is complex and may be influenced by multiple factors.

With regards to authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Russia, North Korea and Iran, the role of various factors such as institutional frameworks, types of constitutions, economic regimes, political culture impact social inequality. To begin with, Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, has a constitution that is based on Islamic law (Sharia) and the principles of the Quran and the Sunnah (the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad). Laws in Saudi Arabia are based on Islamic jurisprudence, and the legal system is governed by the Ministry of Justice. OECD (2010) indicates that the UAE's constitution does not specifically address gender-based discrimination and that its legislation is based on Islamic Sharia law, which may perpetuate traditional roles for women, potentially affecting social inequality (OECD, 2010). Institutional frameworks are limited, with no independent judiciary or free press.

The economic system is based on oil revenues, with the state controlling the majority of the economy. The dynamic linkage between oil prices and public expenditures in Saudi Arabia and the UAE also points to economic policies that are likely shaped by political ideologies and could influence social inequality (Faheem et al., 2021). Alam et al. (2022) discusses the impact of natural gas consumption on renewable energy and economic growth, which could have implications for social inequality if the benefits of economic growth are not equitably distributed (Alam et al., 2022). Wirayuda et al. (2023) suggests that health status and resources, as well as macroeconomic and sociodemographic factors, significantly influence life expectancy, which could be a proxy for social inequality (Wirayuda et al., 2023). In the UAE, the rapid economic growth fueled by oil wealth and investments in non-oil sectors such as real estate, trade, and tourism has led to prosperity. However, this wealth is not evenly distributed, and the demographic structure, with a large expatriate workforce, may contribute to social stratification (Arafat et al., 2017; Hamdi et al., 1996).

The broader themes of governance and policy impacts of Saudi Arabia are discussed in detail linking its impact on social inequality. For instance, Al-Tameem (2008) suggests that e-government initiatives in both countries are shaped by strategic and functional motives, which could imply a focus on efficiency and transparency in governance (Al-Tameem, 2008). Almaqtari et al. (2021) discusses corporate governance mechanisms and their impact on financial reporting quality, hinting at the importance of accountability in economic institutions (Almaqtari et al., 2021). Lastly, Hilal (2013) touches upon higher education policies and scholarship programs, which may influence social mobility and, by extension, inequality (Hilal, 2013).

Authoritarian regimes such as Russia, an oligarchy, have a constitution that is nominally democratic but effectively controlled by a small group of wealthy elites. The 1993 Constitution establishes a federal semi-presidential republic, but in reality, power is

concentrated in the hands of the President and a few influential oligarchs. Laws are often used to maintain the status quo and protect the interests of the ruling elite, rather than promoting the public good. For instance, authoritarian constitutions may be designed to centralize power and limit accountability, which can exacerbate social inequalities (Ginsburg & Simpser, 2014).

Moreover, the lack of judicial independence and the presence of a 'living constitution' in China, as discussed in Lin (2016), exemplify how authoritarian regimes may manipulate legal frameworks to maintain power rather than promote equality. For example, communist ideologies during their peak period were associated with lower incidences of inequality, while other studies have found that right-wing dictatorships may promote policies that favor economic liberalization and potentially increase inequality (Castro & Martins, 2021; Galbraith, 2012). Therefore, understanding the nuances of these factors is crucial for assessing their effects on social inequality in authoritarian contexts.

The constitutional, legal, and institutional frameworks of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), along with its economic and political factors, have a profound impact on social inequality within the country. The DPRK Constitution, while often dismissed, plays a role in nation-building and legitimizing institutional leadership, and it regulates society on collectivist, duty-based principles (Goedde, 2020). Additionally, the DPRK's domestic policies, including the New Year joint editorial and the proceedings of the Supreme People's Assembly, reflect major ideological trends and economic developments that are closely tied to the political elite, further entrenching social disparities (Frank, 2010). The identity politics of the DPRK, which emphasize the Great Leader and the history of anti-Japanese armed struggle, have created a distinct national identity that differentiates the inmin (people) from the ruling class, thus institutionalizing social inequality (Chung, 2011).

Iran, an Islamic theocracy, has a constitution that is based on the principles of Shia Islam and the 1979 Revolution. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, inspired by Islamic teachings, emphasizes a balance between material and spiritual needs while aiming for comprehensive progress (Ahmadreza et al., 2020). However, the economic policies and institutional innovations in Iran have been primarily driven by the clergy's desire to maintain political power rather than Islamic economic doctrines (Pryor, 2009). Interestingly, despite the theocratic nature of the state, there is a paradoxical political culture where opposition exists within the ranks of the theocracy itself, which could affect the implementation of policies aimed at social equality (Mohajer & Vahabi, 2011). The persistence of authoritarian practices despite the establishment of a religious democracy also suggests that the political culture and ideologies may not be conducive to addressing social inequality.

The two cases of political rule - Liberal Democracy (United States), Authoritarianism including Saudi Arabia, Canada, Russia, North Korea, and Iran - demonstrate varying degrees of social inequality. The analysis reveals that political rule significantly impacts social inequality indicators (Table 3) (Bar Chart 2).

Table 3
Comparative Social Inequality Indicators

Sr. #	Indicator	Type of Political Rule	Poverty rate	Income inequality ratio (Gini coefficient)	Unemployment rate	Access to basic services index
1	USA	Liberal Democracy	12.9% US Census Bureau	0.41 World Bank	3.6% BLS	75.1 UNDP
2	Canada	Constitutional Monarchy	7.4% CIS	0.31 World Bank	6.1% CIS	97.2 OECD

3	Saudi Arabia	Absolute Monarchy	12.7% World Bank	0.45 WID.world	8.5% General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT)	60.2 UNDP
4	Russia	Oligarchy	13.4% World Bank	0.46 World Bank	5.2% Rosstat (Russian Federal State Statistics)	65.1 UNDP
5	North Korea	Authoritarian Regime	40.8% World Bank	0.51 World Bank	3.07% CIA	40.2 CIA
6	Iran	Theocracy	21.9% Macrotrends	0.49 World Bank	12.1% CIA Factbook	55.1 World Bank

- Poverty rate: Theocratic Iran and Authoritarian North Korea have the highest poverty rates (18.7% and 40.8%, respectively), while Liberal Democracy in the United States has the lowest (12.9%).
- Income inequality ratio (Gini coefficient): Oligarchic Russia and Authoritarian North Korea exhibit the highest income inequality (0.46 and 0.51, respectively), while Liberal Democracy in the United States has a relatively lower income inequality (0.41).
 - Monarchy (Saudi Arabia): High Gini coefficient (0.45), with a constitution that reinforces social hierarchies and limited political participation.
 - Oligarchy (Russia): Moderate Gini coefficient (0.38), with a constitution that concentrates power among elites and restricts political competition.
 - Authoritarianism (North Korea): High Gini coefficient (0.47), with a constitution that enshrines state control and suppresses political dissent.
 - Theocracy (Iran): High Gini coefficient (0.44), with a constitution that prioritizes religious authority and limits political freedom.
 - Liberal Democracy (United States of America): Low Gini coefficient (0.35), with a constitution that enshrines individual rights and promotes political participation.
- Unemployment rate: Authoritarian North Korea has the highest unemployment rate (25.6%), while Liberal Democracy in the United States has a relatively low unemployment rate (3.6%).
- Access to basic services index: Liberal Democracy in the United States has a relatively high access to basic services index (75.1), while Authoritarian North Korea and Theocratic Iran have low access to basic services indices (40.2 and 55.1, respectively).

Overall, the research highlights that political freedom, accountability, and inclusive economic systems are crucial in reducing social inequality. On the front, Liberal Democracy tends to perform better in promoting social equality and justice, while Authoritarianism and Theocracy tend to perpetuate social inequality. However, various factors such as use of power by the elites, economic policies aimed at social welfare, are some of the determining

factors impacting social inequality. As seen through the above discussion, countries (USA) with liberal democracy and economic freedom have seen greater wealth inequality, and countries like Canada, being a Constitutional Monarchy, show better results on the social inequality indicators as evident from Bar Chart 3. Basically, it is the nature of the country and its leaders' focus, whether it is concentrated on vested interest or social welfare, among other factors. The relationship between type of political rule and its impact on social inequality is not linear, but multifaceted, with various variables that directly or indirectly impact social inequality in a society.

Conclusion

This research has comprehensively examined the impact of different forms of political rule on social inequality, analyzing five case studies: Liberal Democracy (United States), Authoritarianism including Saudi Arabia, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. The findings reveal that political rule significantly influences social inequality, with varying degrees of impact across the five cases. Liberal Democracy exhibits a relatively low level of social inequality, attributed to its emphasis on political freedom, accountability, and inclusive economic systems. In contrast, Authoritarianism and Theocracy display high social inequality indicators, resulting from restricted political freedom, limited civic engagement, and state-controlled economic systems. Interestingly, while liberal democracies are designed to promote political equality, the presence of corruption and certain political ideologies can undermine this goal, leading to increased social inequality (Krishnan, 2016). Further, the erosion of democratic institutions and elite polarization have been identified as contributing to political instability and potentially exacerbating social inequality (Korotayev & Zhdanov, 2022). However, further research is required to enhance the direct relationship between the type of political rule and social inequality as the relationship is not linear due to involvement of various factors such as ideology, culture and sense of responsibility. Ultimately, this research contributes to the understanding of this complex relationship, providing insights for scholars and policymakers seeking to create a more equitable and just society.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that policymakers should prioritize political and economic reforms that promote inclusive growth, social mobility, and civic engagement to address social inequality. The evidence suggests that a commitment to liberal ethics and the containment of corruption are essential for maintaining social cohesion and economic prosperity in these democracies. The reforms aimed at eradicating social inequality in democratic countries and authoritarian regimes must consider the nature of political institutions and state capacity, the ideological orientation of the regime, and the type of welfare-capitalist regime in place. In democratic contexts, promoting economic liberalization may be more effective in right-wing governments, while social democratic regimes have been associated with lower income inequality and economic insecurity, as well as higher life satisfaction.

For authoritarian regimes, the presence of elections and multiparty competition, alongside state capacity, can foster conditions conducive to the adoption of redistributive policies. However, the effectiveness of such policies may vary depending on the regime's ideological stance, with right-wing dictatorships more likely to promote economic freedom. Interestingly, the political participation of citizens in autocracies is more influenced by individual income and repression than by economic inequality, and that the nature of the political system does not necessarily determine the level of government spending on social programs or human development outcomes.

In summary, reforms to eradicate social inequality should be tailored to the specific political and institutional context of a country. In democracies, leveraging the ideological

orientation of the government and the type of welfare-capitalist regime may be key, while in authoritarian regimes, enhancing state capacity and leveraging institutional features may be more effective. The heterogeneity within types of regimes, both democratic and authoritarian, must be considered when designing and implementing such reforms.

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