

# Foreword

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**T**he importance of social class and of race and ethnicity as powerful forces in political systems is broadly recognized and frequently studied. The structures of each phenomenon, the particular configurations—class patterns and distributions, racial patterns or “orderings”—vary across and within countries (and even within specific groups and regions and in other ways), as well as over time. Their contours and possible or actual interconnections are influenced by internal and external factors—however rapidly or slowly—over time. The particular conditions of both class and race typically are linked to and legacies of social and political histories, racial and economic formations, and political economies, among other phenomena. Based on these assumptions, a major premise of this task force report is that political science research can and should undertake analyses that provide broader and deeper insights warranted by the interaction of racial and class inequalities. Understanding whether, in what ways, how much, why, and with which implications the two sets of social forces are present and interact—including as identified and applied in political science scholarship on these issues—is a central goal and focus of this task force. Moreover, we engage these issues as they occur in “the Americas.” In several respects, then, we sought to advance a new—or at least underdeveloped—research agenda and focus on the social aspect of politics and on countries not often compared and contrasted by political scholars.

We framed the efforts of the task force around a number of questions and asked the contributing scholars to address them. Are race and class generally understood to be linked in actuality in a society, or are they viewed as largely separate, within and across societies? How are race and class understood and socially constructed—separately and/or jointly? How systematically is each examined and examined in relation to the other, in societies, and in political science research on these issues (to the extent that research has been undertaken)? To the extent that they are analyzed separately in political science research, why is that? Is it

because the adoption of a particular analytical standpoint (i.e., focusing on race or class) imbeds and emphasizes or implicitly primes that, or are there other reasons? There seem to be numerous examples in the study of US politics and in other countries, where *prima facie* both race and class appear to be significant social cleavages; however, political science research seems to ignore one or the other with some frequency. Why is that and what are the implications?

To what extent is inequality acknowledged initially as a relatively ongoing, prominent issue and a part of public understanding and discourse in the society? What is, or are, the narratives in public discourse about forms of

inequalities? Of course, this is difficult to assess because agreement about appropriate benchmarks, metrics, and how and where in a society inequality is or is not discussed (e.g., “mainstream” or other media) is not easy. How are the sources of inequality perceived—and, if so, how much—as interrelated (i.e., overlapping, derivative, or distinct)? Are the causes and consequences of class status and of racial and

ethnic status framed or explained similarly or differently? Is there a discernible difference in emphasis on economic or social structures or on cultural group or individual-level attributes of those of lower status in the class and (or) racial categories?

Recognizing that considering separately each of the two sets of social factors is tremendously complex, a major issue is the form(s) and the extent of each as well as their interrelationships in contemporary societies in the Americas as they exist and as they are (or are not) studied in political science research. These issues are significant across the globe, but their particular structures and implications vary immensely. However, the undertaking of this task force report, already significantly large, is limited (from necessity) to a selection of countries only in North, Central, and South America. Thus, it is confined primarily because attempting a more extensive analysis is infeasible for practical reasons and beyond resource and time constraints. Moreover, the theoretical and conceptual complexity, as well as the substantive findings of the project as designed, demonstrates the formidable challenges faced by scholars and the scholarship on these topics and the polities studied. ■

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