

Social stratification and electoral behaviour

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13.1 Introduction

Concomitantly with the end of Fordism in the 1970s, the transformations of the economic and labour market structure of Western countries substantially impacted social stratification and, consequently, “*class politics*” – that is, the presence of systematic links between the class of voters and the party they support (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018).

This chapter analyses the main changes of social stratification that took place between the beginning of the 2000s and the end of the 2010s. It also explores how such transformations correlate with the changes in the electoral behaviour of different occupational classes, with particular reference to voting for left-wing parties. We preferred to adopt a post-Fordist schema, recently used widely in the literature (Oesch, 2006; 2012; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013; Beramendi et al., 2015; Häusermann, 2020) instead of Erikson and Goldthorpe’s traditional class schema (1993).

The analysis is constructed around two interconnected analytical dimensions. The first looks at the electoral behaviour of the different social groups in the four growth models. The aim is to show whether, and to what extent, the voting behaviour of social groups for left-wing parties follows a common trend or whether, on the contrary, specificities can be identified within the various models. Particular attention will be given to the electoral behaviour of the group of *production workers* – the historical constituency of the Western left-wing parties¹ – and to that of the new social groups created by the process of tertiarisation of the economy, namely *service workers* and *sociocultural professionals*. In the second dimension, the focus of the analysis shifts to changes in the constituencies of left-wing parties. Two aspects will be addressed. The first concerns the weight of the production worker class within the left-wing electorate and its change over time. The second regards the new configurations of social class coalitions supporting left-wing parties and their stability. The aim is to understand whether in the four growth models there has been a process of “*middle-classisation*” of the electorate or, on the contrary, *inter-class alliances* have formed in support of the left-wing parties.

From a theoretical and empirical perspective, the chapter links up with the final part of this volume (Chapter 14), which deals with the analysis of the policy proposals of left-wing parties and their change over time. The aim is thus to illustrate the changes in class politics in the post-Fordist era, considering both the demand and supply sides.

The chapter is divided into two parts.

In the first, after quickly referring to the debate in the literature concerning social stratification schemata, we will briefly expound on the new post-Fordist class scheme presented by Daniel Oesch and its main features. In this respect, through a quantitative analysis, we will show a change in production structure and social stratification between the Fordist and post-Fordist periods. Finally, relying on the well-informed literature in the field, we will develop hypotheses regarding the electoral behaviour of post-Fordist social groups, and in particular on their propensity to vote left parties.

In the second part, on the basis of longitudinal data provided by two international mass survey – the European Social Survey (ESS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISPP) – we will empirically apply our theoretical framework and test the hypotheses.

13.2 New prerequisites for class politics

In the last decades, and more evidently since the 1990s, the concept of class – as well as that of “*class vote*” – has given rise to wide and heated debates in the comparative politics literature. The positions have been polarised among those who advocate for the end of class politics – the *dealignment thesis* (Dalton, 1996; Clark & Lipset, 1991) – on the one hand, and those who continue to emphasise the importance of the class variable in post-industrial societies, on the other (Pisati, 2010).

The first position can be traced back to the dealignment thesis, which argues for the downsizing of class voting in all advanced democracies (Rose & McAllister, 1986; Franklin, 1992). According to this thesis, citizens’ electoral behaviour in post-Fordist societies is based mainly on their positions towards specific issues – changing over time and not linked to predetermined beliefs – and on the degree of liking for individual candidates. Several factors have determined this change in the voting behaviour: primarily, the development of a new *cultural* dimension of political conflict – responsible for obscuring the purely *economic* dimension – and the related post-materialist claims (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012), as well as the fragmentation of public spaces and the detachment of citizens from trade unions and parties.

Inversely – while acknowledging that social class has become a less accurate predictor of voting intention – the second position argues that social class remains a relevant concept, since it continues to affect – positively or negatively – citizens’ opportunities throughout their lives. In this regard, class

inequalities – in terms of income distribution – not only persist but have increased in recent decades, particularly with the economic and financial crisis that began in the late 2000s. Therefore, social class would remain a key factor to explain electoral behaviour and its change over time (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1993; Breen, 2005; Evans & Mills, 2000).

Nevertheless, even those who defend the class politics thesis claim that the conceptualisation and measurement of social class is inadequate in the post-Fordist age. For example, the Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1993) class schema – which has been for many years a benchmark for the analysis of social stratification – still refers to blue and white collar workers as two homogeneous groups in mutual conflict. However, from the 1980s onwards, and increasingly so in the 1990s, the Fordist occupational system was significantly affected by structural changes in the economies and societies of Western countries. Broadly speaking, three interconnected adjustments have contributed to the transformation of the employment system.

The first adjustment concerns the process of de-industrialisation combined with the resulting tertiarisation of the economy (Freeman & Soete, 1994; Esping-Andersen, 1993; 1999; Pierson, 2001). The first phenomenon led to the massive decline of production workers, in particular, the unskilled ones. Development in production techniques also required an upgrading of the skills of industrial workers, and those who failed to do so have been pushed to the margins of the labour market. Tertiarisation has generated greater inequality in the employment system. The tertiary sector is highly polarised, with high-skilled and well-paid jobs at one end, and low-skilled and low-paid jobs at the other. These aspects will be further discussed below.

The second change involves the increase in the female employment rate in all advanced economies, primarily in the new service sector (Esping-Andersen, 1999; 2002).

The third change regards the expansion of tertiary education – no longer a privilege for a restricted segment of society – and the consequent updating and improvement of workers' skills – what is known as the *upgrading* of the labour market (Oesch, 2006; Beramendi et al., 2015). This upgrading of skills, however, was not generalised, but concerned a specific group of workers. Therefore, labour market polarisation has developed, with highly educated and skilled workers at the top of the hierarchy and low-skilled workers employed in low-paid jobs at the bottom. In short, the partial transition to a skills upgrade within the employment structure has not automatically improved working conditions (Oesch, 2012). On the contrary, the labour market is increasingly dualised, with growing inequalities in terms of income and job stability between high-skilled and low-skilled workers (Rueda, 2007; Crouch, 2010; Palier & Thelen, 2010).

The concept of class, therefore, needs to be reconceptualised through an “evolutionary” perspective that considers the paradigmatic changes in the

occupational system and how these have modified – or “problematised” – the categories of the “working” and “middle” classes. In this regard, two preliminary reflections are necessary here.

First, low-skilled jobs have not disappeared, but they are no longer concentrated in manufacturing. In the post-Fordist era, the proliferation of low-skilled jobs took place in the service sector. In contrast with unskilled production workers, new service workers are less represented in trade unions and have little capacity for mobilisation (Bonoli, 2006). The result is lower protection in job contracts and more limited access to welfare (Palier & Thelen, 2010). With the emergence of this new category, the traditional division between manual and non-manual workers, between blue-collar and white-collar workers, is less straightforward. Service workers with low qualifications and low levels of education are placed in a new grey area, belonging neither to the middle class nor the traditional working class (Oesch, 2006).

Second, the middle class has become even more heterogeneous than in the Fordist period. The upgrading of skills within the occupational system and the expansion of the service sector – which now requires skilled and highly educated workers – have made the middle classes even less compact. In other words, the “occupational salad”, as Wright Mills called the middle class, has become even more fragmented, with new interests and policy preferences to defend. A new class schema is needed to shed light on both the new grey area between the working class and the middle class, and the more composite nature of the latter. The new post-industrial class schema proposed by Daniel Oesch originates from these two points.

13.3 A new classification scheme

The *Fordist* social class schemata provided by the social stratification literature up to the 2000s are mainly based on a vertical type of stratification. For example, the aforementioned model proposed by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) was based on a hierarchical component that represents the rational behaviour of the employer: depending on the greater or lesser competitiveness of a worker’s skills in the labour market, the employer would offer more or less advantageous employment relationships.

The *post-Fordist* class schema proposed by Daniel Oesch maintains this perspective but broadens it. The vertical axis of his scheme is based on skills: the higher the level of skills that can be used in the labour market, the greater the advantages of employment in terms of income and work autonomy. These competences can be identified in a hierarchical order: *professionallmanagerial*, *associate professionallmanagerial*, *generally/vocationally skilled*, and *low/unskilled*. In Oesch’s schema, the skills criterion problematises the difference between blue-collar and white-collar workers, or between manual and non-manual work. Traditional Fordist class schemas assume that

Table 13.1 The 16-item post-Fordist occupational class schema proposed by Daniel Oesch

Independent work logic		Technical work logic	Managerial work logic	Interpersonal work logic	
Large employers (>9)	Self-employed	Technical experts	Higher-grade managers and administrators	Sociocultural professional	Professional/ Manager
Small business owners with employees (CA)		Technicians	Lower-grade managers and administrators	Sociocultural semi-professionals	Associate/ Professional Manager
Small business owners without employees (CA)		Skilled manual	Skilled clerks	Skilled service	Generally/ Vocationally Skilled
		Low-skilled manual	Unskilled clerks	Low-skilled service	Low/Unskilled

Note: The dotted lines indicate how the classes are to be grouped in the eight-item version. Compared to the original version (2006), some social class labels were changed in Oesch's subsequent work (see also Häusermann, 2010). In particular, the group of *skilled manuals* was called *skilled craft* and the *low-skilled manuals* were divided into *routine operatives* (e.g. assemblers) and *routine agriculture* (e.g. woodcutters). For this reason, the "extended" version of the class schema included 17 items, not 16. In the present work we use the updated version of the schema.

white-collar, non-manual workers were necessarily more privileged than blue-collar, manual workers. However, this advantage is no longer automatic in a post-industrial economy, given the increasing heterogeneity of non-manual work. Contracts in the low-skilled service sector offer lower benefits in terms of wage, access to welfare and job protection compared to those offered in the low-skilled manufacturing sector (Oesch, 2006).

In addition to the vertical perspective, Oesch includes a second dimension of a "horizontal" nature, a sort of "employee" perspective, which complements that of the employer. This horizontal differentiation is based on the work logic of employees. A job can thus be based primarily on technical competence (technical work logic), managerial power (managerial work logic), face-to-face interaction with customers (interpersonal work logic) or on self-employment (independent work logic). Differences in work logic, in turn, influence people's preferences and values.

Combining the vertical and horizontal perspectives, Oesch obtains a scheme comprising 16 social classes (Table 13.1), which can be further aggregated into eight broader groups.

Table 13.2 shows the eight-class "post-industrial" scheme used in this study. In contrast to Oesch's scheme, we have decided to include higher grade managers and administrators within the upper class. Although their work logic is officially managerial, over time this group has *de facto* increasingly followed an independent work logic, given their broad leeway at the firm level.

Table 13.2 Oesch's collapsed eight-class schema

Large employers, self-employed professionals, and high-grade managers (traditional bourgeoisie)	Technical (semi-) professionals	Associate managers	Sociocultural (semi-) professionals
Small business owners (petty bourgeoisie)	Production workers	Official clerks	Service workers

Note: Throughout the text, we simplified some labels for clarity and stylistic reasons. Accordingly, *traditional bourgeoisie* and *petty bourgeoisie* are used as synonymous respectively for the “large employers, self-employed professionals and high-grade managers” and for the “small business owners”. Official clerks, technical (semi-) professional and sociocultural (semi-) professionals, and production workers are also referred as *clerks*, *technicians*, *sociocultural professionals*, and *blue-collar workers/working class*. Finally, similar to Häusermann (2010), to make clear that we are referring to unskilled workers, service workers are also labelled *low-skilled service workers*.

13.4 Changes in social stratification

We can now illustrate the main changes in the employment structure between the Fordist and post-Fordist periods, both in general terms and regarding the differences between the growth models used in our research framework.

As already pointed out, the long intersectoral transition from manufacturing to services had a considerable impact on the employment structure of the advanced economies. From 1970 to 2010, in the eight countries examined in this paper, the incidence of manufacturing employment halved, from 27.4% to 14% of the population. While the trend toward a shrinking manufacturing sector cuts across economies transversally, the phenomenon has been more robust in some countries in particular (Figure 13.1). Great Britain in 1970, for example, was the country with the second-largest share of manufacturing employment while, in 2010, only 8.7% of the employed worked in this segment of the labour market. Conversely, notwithstanding a decline, manufacturing employment continues to account for a significant share of the labour force in countries such as Germany and Italy, 22.4% and 18.6%, respectively.

In contrast, employment in services increased considerably, projecting the incidence of service sector workers from half the population to three quarters. Nevertheless, again, there are differences in employment levels achieved within growth models. In 2010, in the non-inclusive growth (NIG) countries, around eight out of ten workers were employed in services. Lower values are registered, however, in the neighbouring non-inclusive low growth (NILG) countries and Germany (Figure 13.2).

Nevertheless, the expansion of services has not had a homogeneous effect on social stratification but a dual trait. On the one hand, highly skilled, generally well-paid jobs have increased; on the other, low-skilled, low-productivity occupational segments have grown, with low wages and little protection

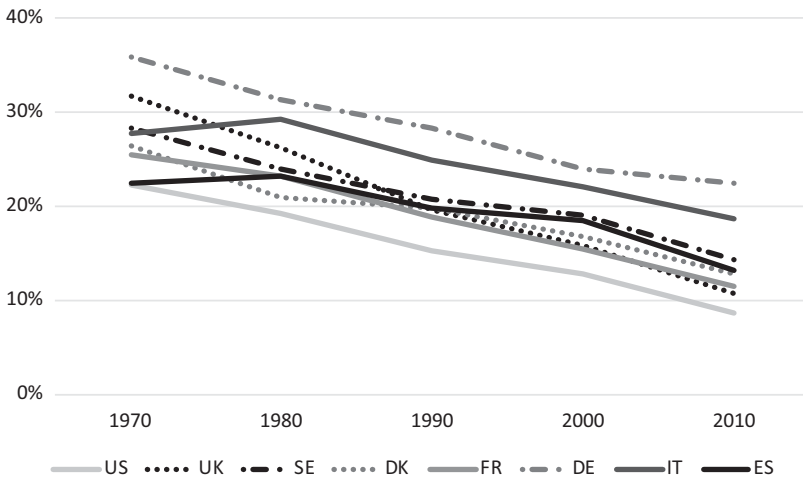


Figure 13.1 Share of workers in manufacturing sectors in the active population, percentage values (1970–2010).

Source: Our elaborations on GGDC I0-Sector Database. Timmer et al. (2015).

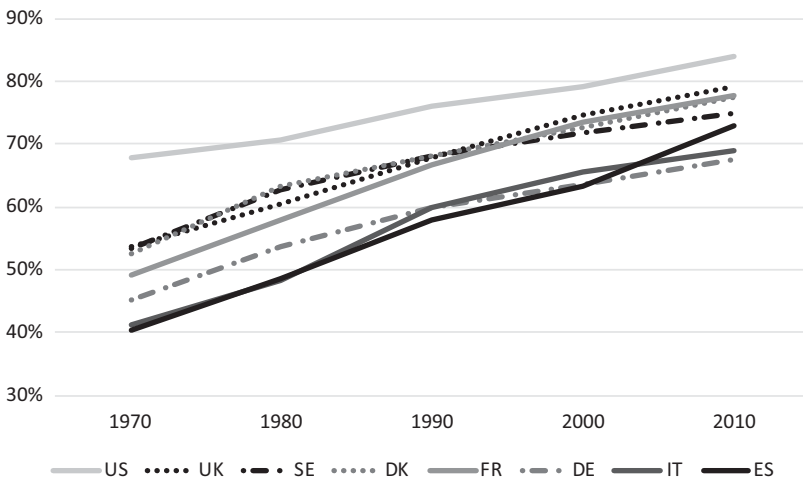


Figure 13.2 Share of workers in the service sectors in the active population, percentage values (1970–2010).

Source: Our elaborations on GGDC I0-Sector Database. Timmer et al. (2015).

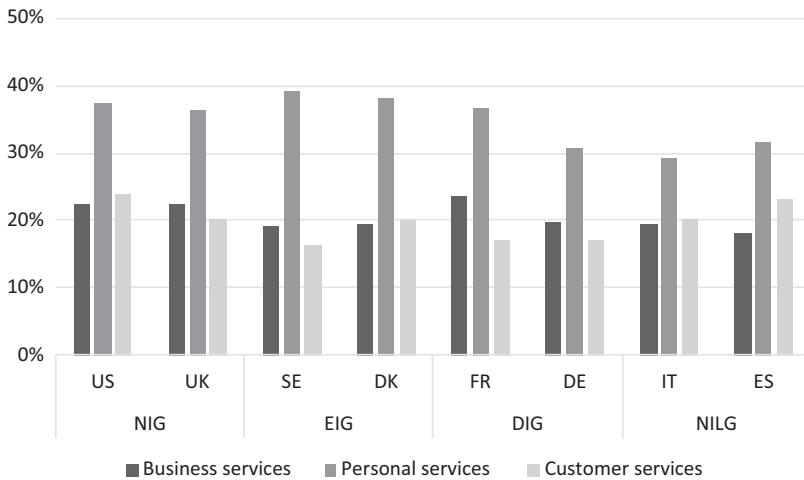


Figure 13.3 Incidence of service workers on the active population by type of service, percentage values (2010).

Source: Elaborations on GGDC 10-Sector Database. Timmer et al. (2015).

associated with them (Bonoli, 2006; Palier & Thelen, 2010). Moreover, especially in more recent years, intermediate positions have decreased due to the technological development of ICT (Wright & Dweyer, 2003; Autor, Katz, & Kearney, 2008; Goos & Manning, 2007).

In order to empirically evaluate these different types of service, we divided them into business services, which generally show the highest productivity and wage growth (e.g. finance, insurance, transport, telecommunications, etc.) and consumer and personal services,² i.e. occupations that generally show lower productivity and lower wages (Michaels, Natraj, & Van Reenen, 2014).

In this respect, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France show a high incidence of both high and low productivity services (Figure 13.3). In the Scandinavian countries, employment in personal services is the highest among the countries considered, also due to the central role of the public sector. On the other hand, Italy, Spain, and Germany show reduced employment shares in services, mainly personal services.

The post-Fordist transition has thus had influent effects on the productive structure in all advanced economies while, at the same time, also shaping their social framework. A recent picture of those effects is presented in Table 13.3, which applies the class scheme described in the preceding pages to some international surveys (the ESS and the ISSP). Significant differences in social stratification across countries emerged.

Table 13.3 Social stratification in some advanced democracies, percentage values (second half of the 2010s)

	NIG		EIG		DIG		NILG	
	UK	USA	DNK	SWE	GER	FRA	ITA	SPA
Traditional bourgeoisie	4.5	14.0	2.8	4.6	4.1	3.2	5.1	2.9
Petty bourgeoisie	11.0	9.8	5.2	6.1	5.8	8.0	17.1	13.4
Technical (semi-)professionals	9.2	9.7	11.6	12.7	11	11.2	7.1	7.5
Production workers	14.4	13.7	18.0	15.4	21.6	19.0	21.8	22.2
Associate managers	17.9	8.2	14.5	16.6	9.9	15.0	8.0	7.1
Office clerks	11.9	10.2	11.3	8.6	17.2	11.9	13.2	12.4
Sociocultural (semi-)professionals	12	11.7	16.1	15.5	14.5	11.8	9.7	10.5
Service workers	19.2	22.8	20.5	20.6	16.0	19.9	18.0	24.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: elaborations on ESS round 9 (Italy, Germany, United Kingdom, France) and ISSP 2017 (Denmark, Spain, Sweden, United States).

Note: Survey years vary between 2016 and 2018.

In the Scandinavian countries, transformations due to de-industrialisation have significantly strengthened the class of service workers. However, alongside this class, some social groups that have now become characteristic of the post-Fordist era, like sociocultural workers, low-level managers, and technicians, have significantly grown.

Unlike the Scandinavian countries, the United States and the United Kingdom show a more polarised class structure: at one extreme, a very high share of service workers, at the other, the traditional bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are comparatively over-represented, especially in the United States.

In other cases, the post-Fordist transition seems to have been weaker. Traditional Fordist classes, such as clerks and blue collars, still represent a significant share of the social distribution. Nevertheless, social configurations vary from country to country. In Germany, production workers, office clerks and sociocultural semi-professionals are over-represented. The Italian class structure is distinguished by the remarkable of the petty bourgeoisie of self-employed workers and by a weaker role of the most qualified service workers, such as sociocultural semi-professionals, technicians, and associate managers. The case of Spain is quite similar to the Italian one, except for a more pronounced presence of low skilled service workers, who represent about a quarter of the Spanish population. Finally, France has a peculiar class structure, halfway between more post-industrial societies, such as those of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries, and more traditional societies, as those of Italy and Germany. While production workers still account for

almost a fifth of the population, there is a particular proportion of associate managers, technical semi-professionals, and low-skilled service workers.

13.5 How post-industrial social classes vote

The new post-Fordist social class schema allows us to undertake a proper investigation of more recent electoral behaviour and to assess the persistence or decline of class voting.

Based on the analyses conducted by Oesch and other scholars (e.g. Häusermann, 2010; 2020; Beramendi et al., 2015), we can formulate a series of hypotheses regarding the possible electoral behaviour of new classes in the post-Fordist period. Only those social classes in which voting for left-wing parties has been crucial in the past, or maybe relevant in the present, are debated.³

13.5.1 The “contended” class of production workers in the post-Fordist era

In the Fordist era, production workers were the key constituency of the left-wing parties. Accordingly, the Left pursued economic and social policies designed to defend the interests of this specific social class, particularly in the areas of labour regulation, access to welfare and education. However, since the 1990s, the policy proposals of the left-wing parties have gradually evolved, moving towards the centre of the political spectrum to broaden their consensus among the new social classes and compensate for the erosion of their historical working-class constituency (see Chapter 14). Moreover, the emergence of the new “cultural” dimension of political conflict has pressured left-wing parties to support liberal-oriented positions on civil rights, multiculturalism, globalisation, and environmental issue (Inglehart, 1990). The literature on comparative politics has illustrated that these two phenomena – the shift towards the centre in the economic dimension and the support for culturally liberal positions – have probably contributed to the alienation of left-wing production workers. As the transformations of the economic structure took effect, this group began to fear losing its status, perceiving itself as the real “loser” of the process of globalisation and modernisation (Lefkofridi & Michel, 2014). For these reasons, this social class, formerly more left-wing oriented, has become as a “contested stronghold” by the populist parties of the radical right. These latter ones have indeed developed a strategy based mainly on welfare chauvinism, in defence of the old social rights and benefits typical of the Fordist era (see Chapter 10). It is to be noted that in Germany, Spain, and Italy – but also in other Mediterranean countries, for example, Greece – there are also new radical left-wing formations that attract the consensus of a share of production workers dissatisfied with the representation of left-wing parties.

Our first hypothesis is therefore the following:

H1: *In the post-Fordist era, the vote of production workers for left-wing parties has decreased while their support for populist parties of the radical right has increased.*

13.5.2 The new area of possible influence of left-wing parties: the sociocultural (semi-)professional class

Comparative literature has revealed that the process of tertiarisation and skill upgrading of the labour market has increased the number of the sociocultural (semi-) professionals in most advanced economies. This social class represents a new type of middle class, culturally liberal and, at the same time, in favour of expanding welfare policies. Regarding this last point, the positions of sociocultural professionals represent an alternative to those of both the traditional bourgeoisie and managers, on the one hand, and those of the production workers, on the other. Indeed, the former tend to support more welfare cuts in exchange for tax cuts, while the latter would be more inclined to defend the *old social policies* (e.g. early retirement schemes, generous pensions and unemployment benefits), typical of the industrial period (Armingeon & Bonoli, 2006; Häusermann, 2010; 2012; 2018; Garritzmann, Häusermann, & Palier, 2019). In contrast, sociocultural professionals – referred in the literature as the new highly educated outsiders (Häusermann, Kurer, & Schwander, 2014) – are likely to be more supportive of expansions of *new social policies*, particularly social investment policies, even if this may imply cutting back on old social policies, such as, for example, an increase in retirement age (Häusermann, 2010; Garritzmann, Häusermann, & Palier, 2019). In terms of electoral behaviour, the literature has shown that this group has become the new key constituency of left-wing parties, although not exclusively the mainstream ones. Indeed, both New Left and the Greens have gained an increasing consensus from this new post-Fordist social class (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018).

Our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: *Sociocultural (semi-) professionals represent left-wing parties' new possible area of influence.*

13.5.3 The new grey area between blue-collar and white-collar workers: the service workers

The manufacturing sector's decline has not led to the disappearance of low-skilled jobs. On the contrary, such jobs have generally increased sharply in most advanced economies but have been concentrated in the new grey area represented by the service sector. The status of service workers is uncertain. On the one hand, they do not enjoy the same protection as production

workers. They have been mainly entitled to need-based social policies while being excluded from the more generous social insurance programs (Palier & Thelen, 2010). On the other, while they are not negatively affected by the globalisation process – because they are employed in the sheltered sectors of the economy – they are not labour market insiders, given the precariousness of their job contracts (Häusermann, 2020). Moreover, in the low-skilled service sector, productivity cannot grow at the same level as in the manufacturing sector, which necessarily implies lower wages (Baumol & Bowen, 1966; Pierson, 2001). Furthermore, their degree of mobilisation and unionisation tends to be lower than that of blue-collar workers, given the fragmentation of preferences and interests to be defended and the more dispersed working conditions (Bonoli, 2006). In this regard, the literature shows that the poor unionisation of the service sector has made service workers' representation marginal for the trade unions (Rueda, 2007). In other words, unions in Western countries are less inclined to represent the fragmented interests of this group. Hence, service workers can be considered the new unskilled outsiders (Häusermann, 2010).

The electoral preferences of this group are therefore unclear. Recalling Oesch and Rennwald (2018) hypotheses, we can say that the vote of this class is fluid, open to possibilities of being gained by both left-wing and Christian-democratic or conservative parties, but also by the new radical right.

Our third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: *The vote of unskilled service workers tends to be fragmented, with all major parties in open competition.*

13.5.4 The traditional bourgeoisie: area of influence of right-wing parties or new basin of the left?

The comparative party politics literature has consistently highlighted that the traditional bourgeoisie group constitutes the area of influence of centre-right-wing parties (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). However, in the post-Fordist era, the emergence of a new dimension of conflict of a cultural kind has opened up the competition for the vote of this social class to other political actors. In other words, the traditional bourgeoisie may continue to have more market-oriented preferences in the economic dimension of political conflict but, at the same time, may support liberal positions on cultural issues, such as a multi-ethnic society and new civil rights. Given the realignment of left parties towards the centre, it is possible to hypothesise an increase in support from this group. However, empirical data have shown that a reconfiguration of preferences has also occurred in the centre-right pole, which, in any case, is not a heterogeneous bloc. Liberal parties have further accentuated their libertarian positions, while conservative or Christian-democratic parties have blunted their more authoritarian aspects, to use Herbert Kitschelt's

terminology (2004). In view of this reflection, the chances of the traditional bourgeoisie vote being contended by left-wing parties are still low.

Our final hypothesis is the following:

H4: *The bourgeoisie group remains the area of influence of the right-wing parties, and their support for left-wing parties is marginal.*

13.6 The electoral behaviour of the social classes

In this section, we will empirically test the previous hypotheses. The analysis is based on two international mass survey datasets, the European Social Survey (ESS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISPP). Concerning time frame, the work compares the first round of surveys that took place in the early 2000s with the most recent rounds of surveys, held in the late 2010s, between 2017 and 2019.⁴

Table 13.4 shows the evolution of the vote of the eight post-Fordist social classes for left-wing parties between the early 2000s and the late 2010s. It highlights the sharp decline in the production worker vote for left-wing parties in all countries. Therefore, the downturn in support of the historical electorate of left-wing parties seems to be a generalised phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify different patterns of decline among the four models.

In the NIG countries, the electoral fall is less marked. In the UK, the loss stands at less than six percentage points (hereinafter, pp), and the Labour Party managed to retain over 43% of the production worker vote in the late 2010s. In the US, blue-collar support for the Democrats remained relatively stable over the two decades under review, with only a slight decline (-3.5 pp) compared to the NILG and the dualistic inclusive growth (DIG) countries. However, it is essential to clarify at this point. The figures for these countries are strongly influenced by the majority voting system, which provides the electorate with fewer “political” alternatives. The majoritarian system thus indirectly helps left-wing parties to retain a larger share of votes, especially from historical constituencies, and to limit electoral losses (Lijparth, 1990). Two phenomena, however, are worth noting. On the one hand, the level of abstentionism in these countries (especially in the United States) is very high. In other words, in the absence of alternatives, those disappointed tend to take refuge in abstention (Plane & Gershtenson, 2004; Häusermann, 2020). On the other hand, the majoritarian system has fostered a re-polarisation of the party system, above all in the United States (see Girton, Adams, & Horne, 2018; Rodden, 2019). In other words, while curbing the formation of new parties, and their chances of entering parliament, the majoritarian system provides strong incentives for the transformation and radicalisation of the traditional parties⁵ (Kriesi et al, 2008).

Shifting the focus to the DIG and NILG countries, the decline in the working-class vote is particularly pronounced. In Germany and France, there

Table 13.4 Voting for left-wing parties of the post-Fordist social classes (early 2000s and late 2010s)

	NIG			EIG			DIG			NILG														
	UK			USA			Sweden			Denmark			Germany			France			Italy			Spain		
	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.
Traditional bourgeoisie	26.1	27.9	1.8	49.9	41.6	-8.3	26.3	16.5	-9.8	14	19.4	5.4	14.7	17.2	2.5	20.6	9.4	-11.2	32	27.1	-4.9	20.6	13.3	-7.3
Petty bourgeoisie	30.4	24.9	-5.5	47.9	42.4	-5.5	18.1	25.2	7.1	12.6	18.6	6	25.1	14.5	-10.6	8.7	3.1	-5.6	24.9	16.2	-8.7	32.2	16.6	-15.6
Technical (semi-) professionals	28	41.5	13.5	42.7	52.2	9.5	36.2	21.6	-14.6	25	24.9	-0.1	60.4	24.4	-36	21.2	9.8	-11.4	38.5	20.1	-18.4	28.4	19.6	-8.8
Production workers	49.8	43.9	-5.9	55.4	51.9	-3.5	55	41.4	-13.6	36.7	36.5	-0.2	47.4	23.5	-23.9	41.3	7.6	-33.7	37.4	17.6	-19.8	47	32.6	-14.4
Associate managers	31.3	35.7	4.4	51.8	47.1	-4.7	39.2	20.3	-18.9	19.4	12.2	-7.2	34.1	19.2	-14.9	22.9	4.3	-18.6	34.7	15.9	-18.8	32.5	15.2	-17.3
Office clerks	24.9	36	11.1	63.3	56.8	-6.5	42.9	36.3	-6.6	26.5	30.9	4.4	24.7	21.4	-3.3	26.1	10.9	-15.2	33.5	22.9	-10.6	47	16.7	-30.3
Sociocultural (semi-) professionals	31.3	51.9	20.6	58.5	56.2	-2.3	33.2	33.4	0.2	24	32.8	8.8	42	16.9	-25.1	25.8	10.2	-15.6	47.1	32.3	-14.8	33.5	19.9	-13.6
Service workers	51.2	48.1	-3.1	57.6	58	0.4	47.4	42.4	-5	30.1	22.3	-7.8	52.4	18.1	-34.3	18.1	7.8	-10.3	39.9	17.1	-22.8	44.2	29.8	-14.4

Source: European Social Survey (ESS): round 1 (2001) and round 9 (2019); International Social Survey Programme: 2002 for France, 2002–2004 and 2014–2016 for the United States, 2017 for Denmark, Sweden, and Spain. Data are weighted.

Legend: t1=early 2000s; t2= late 2010s; Dif.: difference in percentage points.

was a decrease of 24 and 34 pp, respectively; in Italy and Spain, the value is slightly smaller (around -18 pp).

The downturn in production worker support for left-wing parties is evident if we look at the data from the late 2010s. In the last French elections, only 7% of workers voted for the French Socialist Party (PS), and in Germany only 23.5% chose the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Similarly, in Italy, working-class support for the Democratic Party (PD) was reduced by half in two decades, standing at below 20% in 2018.⁶ In Spain, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) has maintained a broader consensus than in other countries (32.6%) but still much lower than at the beginning of the 2000s.

The decline in working-class consensus for the left is evident though less pronounced in the egalitarian inclusive growth (EIG) countries. In Sweden, the downtrend in production worker support for the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SAP) has been more significant compared to that of the production workers for the Danish Social Democrats (SD). Nevertheless, the latter has limited its losses considerably over the last two decades. It should be noted that in both countries the percentage of production workers voting for the two social democratic parties has remained high – above 30%. In other words, notwithstanding a loss of support, both the SAP and the SD managed to contain their losses among their historical electorate.

Where did the production workers' votes go in the late 2010s?

Table 13.5 shows the first four parties voted for by this social class at the end of the 2010s. Left-wing parties continue to be the first choice in the NIG and EIG countries. On the contrary, in the DIG countries, the SPD is the third choice in Germany, after the CDU-UDC, while the PS in France is not included in the ranking. The situation in the NILG countries is more heterogeneous. In Spain, the PSOE continues, despite its decline, to be the most voted party among production workers. At the same time, while the PD in Italy is only the fourth choice, overtaken – as in Germany – by a centre-right party, Go Italy (FI).

It is interesting to note the degree of support of production workers for radical right-wing parties. In the DIG model, Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the National Front (FN) are the parties most voted by this group in Germany and France, respectively. In the Scandinavian countries, despite the resilience of the social-democratic parties, the Radical Right is the second choice in both Sweden and Denmark. Similarly, in Italy, the League is the second most voted party by the production workers. Finally, UKIP is the third most popular party among the working class in the UK.

These results would support the thesis that the Left has failed to maintain the loyalty of the production workers, which are now contested by the radical right-wing parties (H1). However, it is possible to identify different patterns of decline in support for left-wing parties. In the DIG and NILG countries, production workers have clearly moved away from the left. In contrast, the erosion of votes has been more contained – probably for different

Table 13.5 The most voted parties by the production workers, late 2010s

	CNI		CIE		CID		BCNI	
	NIG	EIG	DIG	NILG	NIG	EIG	DIG	NILG
1° Party	Labour Party, Labours (43.2%)	Democratic Party, Democrats (51.9%)	Swedish Social Democratic Party, SAP (41.4%)	Danish Social Democratic Party, SD (36.5%)	Alternative for Germany, AfD (25.2%)	National Front, FN (27.7%)	Movement 5 Stars, M5S (28,8%)	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE (32,6%)
2° Party	Conservative Party, Tories (40.9%)	Republican Party, Republicans (48.1%)	Swedish Democrats – SD (21,9%)	Danish People's Party, DF (22.9%)	The Christian Democratic Union of Germany/ Christian Social Union in Bavaria CDU-CSU (24.4%)	The Republic on the Move, LaREM (14%)	The League (24,4%)	People's Party, PP (29,9%)
3° Party	United Kingdom Independence Party, UKIP (3.6%)		Moderate Party, M (17.7%)	Liberal Party, V (22.1%)	Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD (23.5%)	France Unbowed, (12.3%)	Go Italy, FI (20,5%)	We can (13,9%)
4° Party	Liberal Democrats, LibDems (3.4%)		Green Party – MP (4.6%)	Liberal Alliance, LA (3.7%)	Free Democratic Party, FDP (10,4%)	The Republicans, LR (9.7%)	Democratic Party, PD (17,6%)	Citizens, Cs (9,4%)

Source: European Social Survey (ESS): round 1 (2001) and round 9 (2019); International Social Survey Programme: 2002 for France, 2002–2004 and 2014–2016 for the United States, 2017 for Denmark, Sweden and Spain. Data are weighted.

reasons – in the EIG and NIG countries. However, there has been a clear shift to the parties of the radical right in the Scandinavian countries.

The support of the sociocultural professionals for left-wing parties reveals marked differences between the four growth models (Table 13.4). In the DIG and NILG countries, voting for left-wing parties declined over the two decades under review. In Germany, this downswing was particularly marked. In 2017, Germany's sociocultural workers split over into the CDU-CSU (the most voted party by this social class, around 32%) and The Left (a radical left-wing party, which is the third option, with around 15.8% of the vote). In France, the decline in support was also severe, although slightly more contained than in Germany (-15.6 pp). In this country, sociocultural professionals opted for Emmanuel Macron's new party (35.0%), the most voted for The Republic on the Move (LaREM), followed by France Unbowed (FI, a radical right party, which obtained around 22% of the votes). A substantial decline in support for left-wing parties by sociocultural workers was also evident in Italy and Spain. In Italy, the PD did manage to keep more than 30% of the votes of this group – although in 2017 it turned out to be only the second choice of the sociocultural professionals, preceded by the Five Star Movement (M5S). In Spain, the party most voted for by sociocultural workers was the Popular Party (PP) (around 25%), while PSOE was only the second choice.

A different scenario can be seen in the EIG and NIG countries. Starting with the Scandinavian countries, in Sweden, the SAP continued to be the first party voted for by sociocultural professionals in the late 2010s (around 32%). In Denmark, the propensity of this class to vote for the SD increased in comparison with the early 2000s and, as in Sweden, the Social Democrats were the party most voted for by the group. A similar situation emerges when looking at the data for the Anglo-Saxon countries. In the United Kingdom, the vote of sociocultural professionals for the Labours increased significantly, attracting the consensus of more than 50% of those belonging to this social class. Finally, notwithstanding a limited decline in support, the Democrats continued to be the first choice of sociocultural professionals in the United States. However, it must again be remembered that the majority system heavily biases the data, so comparisons with other models must be made with care.

The hypothesis that sociocultural professionals represent a new area of influence of left-wing parties (H2) is only partially confirmed, especially if we consider the *time factor*. Nevertheless, our hypothesis is valid in the EIG models and in the NIG countries. In these countries, left-wing parties were able to maintain a high level of consensus among the working class and, at the same time, attract sociocultural professionals. This was not the case in the DIG and NILG countries, where losses among production workers and sociocultural professionals were matched.

With regard to low-skilled workers in the new services, the data in Table 13.4 show that in the DIG countries the decrease in support was particularly marked in Germany. In France – where the vote for this group had been more

fluid also in the early 2000s – the downswing was more limited, but still considerable. In the NILG countries, Italy's decline is particularly evident (-22.8 pp). The PD is only the third most voted party, closely preceded by the Lega (18%) and by the M5S – this last being voted by more than 40% of low-skilled service workers. On the contrary, in Spain, the decline was more contained (about -8 pp). The PSOE managed to maintain the consensus of almost 30% of service workers, but, compared to the early 2000s, it was overtaken by the PP, albeit by a narrow margin.

A heterogeneous situation can also be observed in the EIG countries. The drop in consensus among low-skilled workers is evident in both Sweden and Denmark, though more remarkable in the latter. However, the downturn takes on a different significance in the two countries. In Sweden, the SAP continues to be the most popular party. In Denmark, on the other hand, the consensus is more limited (around 22.6%) and the SD, while also being the first most voted party, had only a slight advantage over the radical right-wing party at the end of the 2010s.

The NIG countries follow the opposite trend of the other three growth models. Finally, concerning the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Labours lost support in the UK but not significantly (only -3 pp of the consensus). On the contrary, the Democrats slightly increased their consensus among this social class in the USA.

In short, the hypothesis that the vote of low-skilled service workers turns out to be fragmented with all major parties in open competition (H3) is only partially confirmed. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, also because of the majority electoral system, this group's vote is stable or has even consolidated over time in favour of left-wing parties. In the Scandinavian countries, the propensity to vote for the social-democratic parties remains strong in Sweden, while it is weaker in Denmark, where the extreme right appears to obtain almost the same consensus within this group. Again, there is no open competition between all parties in the EIG countries. Workers in this sector seem to represent a stronghold of the left-wing party contended by the new Radical Right. Our hypothesis is confirmed in continental countries, especially Germany, where the vote is very fragmented. In France, fragmentation is more limited within the radical left, with the PCF and the FI in open competition. Finally, also in the Mediterranean countries, our hypothesis finds only partial confirmation. In Italy, at the beginning of the 2000s, low-skilled service workers represented an area of influence of the left-wing, but at the end of the decade, it was the M5S that attracted the most support, followed by the League. In Spain, the vote was more fluid: in this case, the two main parties, the PSOE and the PP, were in open competition for the vote of this group.

Finally, let us consider the electoral behaviour of the traditional bourgeoisie (Table 13.4). At the end of the 2010s, in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Denmark, the consensus of the traditional bourgeoisie towards left-wing parties increased. On the contrary, the left lost votes in the rest of the

countries, especially France and Italy. However, such a loss was more modest than that displayed among the production workers. Table 13.6 shows that left-wing parties are among the top three parties voted for by the traditional bourgeoisie in all four growth models, albeit in different positions and with different intensities.

In the NIG countries, it is hardly surprising that Labour in the UK and the Democrats in the US are the second most voted party, considering the majority electoral system. It should be noted, however, that in both cases, the traditional bourgeoisie vote has remained firmly anchored to the Conservative parties, notwithstanding the fact that in the UK, Labour has managed to increase its support compared to the situation in the early 2000s.

Also, left-wing parties are the second vote choice in the EIG countries. Compared to the United States and the United Kingdom, this result is less obvious, considering that these countries are characterised by a proportional electoral law and a multi-party system. In other words, left-wing parties have managed to break through even among the upper class, in open competition with other right-wing parties. However, differences within the model can be noted. In Sweden, the Moderate Party (M) remain the first party voted by the traditional bourgeois class (37.3%) and the gap with the SAP is considerable. In Denmark, on the other hand, the gap between the Liberal Party (V) (around 23%) and the SD (around 19%) is narrow. It means that the upper class seems to have become a stronghold of the centre-right contended by the left wing in this country.

In the DIG countries, left-wing parties are the third most voted party of the upper class, but with substantial differences between Germany and France. In France, the majority of the votes of the traditional bourgeoisie were concentrated on Macron's centrist party (LaREM, 43%), which seems to have taken votes away from both Les Républicains (LR) and the PS. In Germany, on the other hand, the SPD has regained support among the upper class and the gap with the The Christian Democratic Union of Germany/Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU-CSU) – although high – is smaller than that between the LaREM and the PS in France. Moreover, the SPD appears to be in open competition with the Greens and Liberal Party (FDP) for the upper-class vote. In other words, the SPD has lost support among the workers but has grown in the traditional bourgeoisie class – without, however, supplanting the CDU-CSU.

Finally, with regard to the NILG countries, substantial differences emerge between Italy and Spain. In Italy, despite a drop in support since the early 2000s,⁷ the PD is the most voted party by the traditional bourgeoisie. In the face of a sharp drop in votes among the working class, the PD has become the upper-class party. However, the consensus achieved (27%) is much lower than that of the LsREM in France. In contrast, the traditional bourgeoisie has remained firmly anchored to the PP or has shifted towards Citizens (Cs) in Spain. Despite being the third most voted party, the PSOE obtains a limited

Table 13.6 The four most voted parties by the traditional bourgeoisie (late 2010s)

	<i>NIG</i>		<i>EIG</i>		<i>DIG</i>		<i>NILG</i>	
	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Spain</i>
1° Party	Tories (48.4%)	Republicans (58.4%)	M (37.3%)	V (23,2%)	CDU-CSU (30.3%)	LaREM (42.9%)	PD (27.1%)	PP (38.9%)
2° Party	Labour (27.9%)	Democrats (41.6%)	SAP (16.5%)	SD (19.4%)	Alliance 90/The Greens (17.6%)	LR (19.5%)	M5S (24.3%)	Cs (20.4%)
3° Party	LibDem (12.5%)		Liberal People's Party, L (12.9%)	DF (13.2%)	SPD (17.2%) FDP(17.1%)	PS (9.4%) FI (9.4%)	The League (16.4%)	PSOE (13.3%)

Source: European Social Survey (ESS): round 1 (2001) and round 9 (2019); International Social Survey Programme: 2002 for France, 2002–2004 and 2014–2016 for the United States, 2017 for Denmark, Sweden, and Spain. Data are weighted.

consensus among this class of voters (13%), and the distance with the PP remains high.⁸

Our hypothesis that the traditional bourgeoisie group is the area of influence of the centre-right parties (H4) is confirmed, although with exceptions. In Italy, the PD is the party most voted by the upper class. In France, Macron's centrist party gains the highest consensus among the bourgeois class, overtaking the Gaullist right. The analysis furthermore illustrates that support for left-wing parties from the traditional bourgeoisie varies between the countries examined. In the UK, US, Sweden, France, and Spain, the success of the left among the upper class is more limited – particularly in the last two ones.

13.7 Changes in the constituency of left-wing parties

Table 13.7 shows the changes in the constituencies of the left-wing parties in the four growth models. As explained above, the analysis will focus mainly on two aspects. The first concerns the weight of the production worker class within the left-wing parties' electorate, and its change over time. The second aspect regards the new configurations of social class coalitions supporting the left-wing parties. Our analysis aims to assess whether a *process of electorate middle-classisation* – which entails a marginalisation of lower social classes (production workers and low-skilled service workers) – may be identified.

Alternatively, whether inter-class alliances have formed between the new progressive middle class (the sociocultural professionals), the low-skilled outsiders (the service sector workers), and the historical blue-collar electorate (the production workers).

13.7.1 The weight of the production workers within the left-wing parties' constituency

Consistently with the data previously shown in Table 13.4, the weight of production workers in the constituency of the left-wing parties decreased in all four growth models. However, it is possible to identify substantial differences.

In the NIG countries, production workers' share within the constituency of Labour in the United Kingdom and the Democrats in the United States has diminished considerably (around -10 pp and -9 pp, respectively). Despite the fact that in these countries – also due to the majoritarian electoral system – the working class has continued to vote for the left over time, its weight within the electoral structure has shrunk. In contrast, in the EIG countries, the presence of the production worker has remained solid, notwithstanding a decline since the early 2000s. Production workers are still the class with the most significant weight within Denmark's SD constituency (around 25%) and represent 20.2% of the SAP electorate in Sweden, second only to low-skilled service workers. In the DIG countries, the downsizing of the working-class presence within the electorate of the SPD in Germany and the SP in France

Table 13.7 Changes in constituencies of left-wing parties in the four growth models (% of each class over the whole constituency), early 2000s, late 2010s

		Traditional bourgeoisie			Petty bourgeoisie			Technical (semi-) professionals			Production workers			Associate managers			Office clerks			Sociocultural (semi-) professionals			Service workers		
		t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Dif.
NIG	UK-Lab.	9.8	3.4	-6.4	8.4	7.0	-1.4	4	10.3	6.3	23.2	13	-10.2	3.9	18.7	14.8	9.6	11.3	1.7	11.1	16.6	5.5	30	19.8	-10.2
	USA Dem.	20.6	12.6	-8	11.2	7.5	-3.7	7.1	9.7	2.6	22.3	12.9	-9.4	1.2	7.6	6.4	15.6	11.3	-4.3	11	17.3	6.3	11	21.1	10.1
EIG	SW-SAP	7.2	2.5	-4.7	3.7	4.8	1.1	7.5	9.2	1.7	22.6	20.2	-2.4	7	10.9	3.9	10.4	9.8	-0.6	11.7	17.1	5.4	29.9	25.6	-4.3
	DK SD	4.9	2.1	-2.8	3.6	3.8	0.2	7.8	11.4	3.6	31.5	25.4	-6.1	6.7	7	0.3	12.3	13.6	1.3	12.8	19.9	7.1	20.5	16.9	-3.6
DIG	GE-SPD	3.4	4.1	0.7	4.6	4.2	-0.4	14.9	15.4	0.5	30	20.9	-9.1	7.2	10.3	3.1	9.8	19.2	9.4	12.5	13.7	1.2	17.6	12.1	-5.5
	FR-PS	7.3	5.2	-2.1	3.6	3.5	-0.1	7.9	18.1	10.2	31.3	14.1	-17.2	-7.9	9.4	1.5	17.4	16.3	-1.1	13.7	20.9	7.2	11	12.6	1.6
NILG	IT-PD	6.7	8.1	1.4	15.6	13.8	-1.8	4.9	10.2	5.3	24.2	16.7	-7.5	6.4	7.2	0.8	14	15.3	1.3	13.1	15.7	2.6	15.1	13.1	-2
	SP-PSOE	2.7	2.1	-0.6	14.9	9.9	-5	2.8	6.4	3.6	36.5	29.6	-6.9	5.6	5.4	-0.2	10.1	9.3	-0.8	8	11	3	19.6	26.4	6.8

Source: European Social Survey (ESS): round 1 (2001) and round 9 (2019); International Social Survey Programme: 2002 for France, 2002–2004 and 2014–2016 for the United States, 2017 for Denmark, Sweden and Spain. Data are weighted.

Note: For France, the data for the early 2000s refer to party affiliation (*party to which a person feels closer*) and not to the real electoral choice expressed at national elections. The values must therefore be read with caution.

is greater than in the Scandinavian countries. However, there are differences between the two countries. In Germany the downturn was less evident than in France, and the working class continued to be the most represented (20%) within the SPD electorate. In contrast, in France, the quota of production workers has decreased significantly, representing only 14% of the SPD constituency. Finally, in the NILG countries, the shrinking of the production workers' weight was more moderate than in the continental countries, but, again, with significant differences. The Spanish PSOE continued to represent the working class (30% of its electorate). In Italy, blue-collar workers are only 16.7% of the PD constituency. In other words, Spanish production workers continued to vote for the PSOE – despite a substantial decline – and retained a significant share within the party constituency. Inversely, in Italy, the PD lost support among production workers who jointly have a modest representation among the party electors.

13.7.2 Configuration of the coalitions supporting left-wing parties

In reference to Table 13.7, we notice that, despite a general decline in the vote of the sociocultural professionals (see Table 13.4), the latter have increased their weight within the constituencies of all the left-wing parties. This increase is more pronounced in the NIG and EIG countries and France, while it is more moderate in Germany and the NILG countries. Moreover, if we look at the values for the end of the 2000s, sociocultural workers represent a new area of influence of the left-wing electorate in the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries but also in Italy (where their weight is over 15%). In France, this group represents 20% of the PS electorate. Lower values can be observed in Germany and Spain. The data are consistent with the fact that, in Spain, the votes of sociocultural workers for the PSOE have halved over two decades, while, in Germany, those for the SPD have shrunk almost three-fold.

Moving towards the bottom of the social stratification, we can see a decline in the weight of low-skilled service workers in the EIG countries, but also in the UK, Germany, and Italy. However, at the end of the 2010s, in the NIG countries this class has the highest relative weight within the constituency of Labour in the UK (19.8%) – despite a distinct plunge since the early 2000s – and of the American Democrats (21%). In the EIG countries, the electoral weight of this group has declined over time, consistent with the fact that these workers have decreased their support for the SAP and SD. Nevertheless, the group has remained an area of influence for the left wing in Sweden (25% of the Sap constituency), hence becoming the class with the greatest relative weight – and has also maintained a crucial role in Denmark (17%, approximately). In the DIG countries, the service workers' share within the PS constituency has remained stable, while in Germany it decreased. However, the

values stand at around 12% in both cases, considerably lower than in the NIG and EIG countries. Lastly, the situation is more heterogeneous in the NILG countries. In Italy, the weight of low-skilled service workers within the PD electorate has further declined over time and does not go any higher than 13% at the end of the 2010s. In contrast, in Spain, despite a downturn, the weight of the class remains significant (26.4%), second only to that of production workers.

The analysis of the weight of the traditional middle classes in the Left constituency leads to interesting results.

Except for Spain, the quota of technical professionals and associate managers has increased in all models concerning managers. At the end of the 2010s, the technical professionals represented a critical left electorate within the DIG countries – where their weight exceeded 15% in both Germany and France. In the NIG, EIG, and NILG countries, the role of this group was more modest, with values around 10%. The electoral weight of associate managers proved particularly significant in the United Kingdom (18%). In the EIG countries and Sweden, the share remained more contained (around 10%) and reasonably limited (below 10%) in the NILG countries and Denmark.

Finally, the weight of clerks within the constituencies of left-wing parties has diminished moderately in the United States, Sweden, Spain, and France, while it has increased in all other countries. Nevertheless, this group plays a crucial role in the left-wing constituencies in Germany, France, and Italy – exceeding 15% in all three cases.

The last group to be analysed is the bourgeoisie. As far as the traditional bourgeoisie is concerned, its weight within the left-wing constituency has dwindled in all the countries, with two important exceptions: Germany and Italy. In Germany, however, the increase has not affected its relative weight within the SPD constituency, which remains small (4.4%). On the contrary, in Italy, the weight of the traditional bourgeoisie within the PD electorate is relatively high (8.8%), second only to the USA, where the group represents 12% of the Democrat electorate.

Even the electoral weight of the petty bourgeoisie has decreased over time, except for the NIG countries. In general, the petty bourgeoisie does not represent a key constituency of the left-wing parties, except in the NILG countries. However, in Italy and Spain, the weight of this social class is above average, 13.8% and 9.9%, respectively, which are relatively high values for left-wing parties.

In the light of these data, it is possible to speculate on the *post-Fordist class coalitions* that were configured in the late 2010s to support the left wing. More specifically, it is interesting to assess whether the left-wing parties are supported by a coalition that includes the *historical* electorate of production workers, on the one hand, and the new groups of low-skilled service workers and sociocultural workers, on the other. Or whether the new structure of the left-wing constituency is based on a coalition comprising the middle classes

(technical professionals, associate managers, and office clerks), with the support of the bourgeois classes as well.

Table 13.8 shows each social class's weight within the left-wing parties' constituency in the eight countries under review at the end of the 2010s. The first three social classes with the highest relative weight are in bold. Table 13.9

Table 13.8 Weight of each social class within the constituency of the left-wing parties in the eight countries, late 2010s (values)

	NIG		EIG		DIG		NILG	
	UK	USA	Sweden	Denmark	Germany	France	Italy	Spain
1° Party	SWs (19.8%)	SWs (21.1%)	SWs (25.6%)	PWs (25.4%)	PWs (20.9%)	SCPs (20.9%)	PWs (16.7%)	PWs (29.6%)
2° Party	AMs (18.7%)	SCPs (17.3%)	PWs (20.2%)	SCPs (19.9%)	OCs (19.1%)	TPs (18.1%)	SCPs (15.7%)	SWs (26.4%)
3° Party	SCPs (16.6%)	PWs (12.9%)	SCPs (17.1%)	SWs (16.9%)	TPs (15.4%)	OCs (16.3%)	OCs (15.3%)	SCPs (11%)
4° Party	PWs (13%)	TB (12.6%)	AMs (10.9%)	OCs (13.6%)	SCPs (13.7%)	PWs (14.1%)	PB (13.8%)	PB (9.9%)
5° Party	OCs (11.3%)	OCs (11.3%)	OCs (9.8%)	TPs (11.4%)	SWs (12.1%)	SWs (12.6%)	SWs (13.1%)	OCs (9.3%)
6° Party	TPs (10.3%)	TPs (9.7%)	TPs (9.2%)	AMs (7%)	AMs (10.3%)	AMs (9.4%)	TPs (10.2%)	TPs (6.4%)
7° Party	PB (7%)	AMs (7.6%)	PB (4.8%)	PB (3.8%)	PB (4.2%)	TB (5.2%)	TB (8.1%)	AMs (5.4%)
8° Party	TB (3.4%)	PB (7.5%)	TB (2.5%)	TB (2.1%)	TB (4.1%)	PB (3.5%)	AMs (7.2%)	TB (2.1%)

Source: European Social Survey (ESS): round 1 (2001) and round 9 (2019); International Social Survey Programme: 2002 for France, 2002–004 and 2014–2016 for the United States, 2017 for Denmark, Sweden, and Spain. Data are weighted.

Legend:

TB: Traditional bourgeoisie; TPs: Technical (semi-) professionals; AMs: Associate managers; SCPs: Sociocultural (semi-) professionals; PB: Petty bourgeoisie; PWs: Production workers; OCs: Official Clerks; SWs: Service workers.

Table 13.9 Composition of the coalition formed by the first three classes supporting the left-wing parties and overall weight on their electorate

	NIG		EIG		DIG		NILG	
	UK	USA	Sweden	Denmark	Germany	France	Italy	Spain
Class coalition	SWs+ AMs+ SCPs	SWs+ SCPs + PWs	SWs+ PWs+ SCPs	PWs+ SCPs + SWs	PWs+ OCs + TPs	SCPs+ TPs+ OCs	PWs+ SCPs + OCs	PWs + SWs+ SCPs
Overall weight	55.1%	51.3%	62.9%	62.2%	55.5%	55.3%	47.7%	67%

shows the coalition formed by the first three classes supporting the left wing and its overall weight in the constituency. The results are analysed for each growth model.

Starting with the NIG countries, in the UK the coalition of the three social classes with the highest electoral weight comprises low-skilled service workers, associate managers, and sociocultural professionals. This coalition of social classes achieves an electoral weight of 55% and, if we include production workers, it reaches 66%. In other words, the coalition supporting the Labours in the late 2010s includes both the new, libertarian, middle class – i.e. the sociocultural professionals – and the low-skilled, low-wage workers of the service sector. However, in the light of the downsizing of production workers, associate managers – which belong to the traditional middle class – represent now a key electoral group.

Inversely, the configuration of the coalition supporting the Democrats in the United States seems to have shifted more to the lower social groups. The top three social classes with the greatest weight within the party constituency are low-skilled service workers, sociocultural professionals, and production workers. Overall, this coalition represents 51% of the votes for the US left. Notwithstanding the lower value compared to the UK, the coalition seems to be more compact in terms of social policy preferences. In other words, the Democrats under Obama gained support from both the historical constituency of production workers and the new post-Fordist classes. However, the traditional bourgeoisie continues to have considerable weight. Presumably, the party is pressured to consider its policy interests, even if they diverge from those of the class coalition that now supports the Democratic Party.⁹

In the EIG countries, the coalition of service workers, sociocultural professionals and production workers is particularly powerful, representing well over 60% of the electorate of these parties. In other words, in the SAP and the SD, the production workers' representation crisis has been limited. At the same time, the two parties have succeeded in representing the new post-Fordist classes emerging from the process of globalisation and tertiarisation.

The coalitions in the DIG countries have displayed more instability. In Germany, the first three social classes in terms of electoral weight within the SPD constituency are production workers, clerks, and technicians. This coalition represents 55.5% of the party's electorate, with a weaker presence of low-skilled service workers and sociocultural professionals. The reconfiguration of the constituency structure since the end of the 2010s has thus pushed towards the traditional middle classes. Furthermore, though conserving a significant quota of production workers, their presence is nevertheless on the wane.

The situation is even more skewed towards the middle class in France, where the top three classes with the most significant electoral weight are sociocultural professionals, technical professionals, and clerks (55.3% of the SP electorate).

In this case, production workers and low-skilled service workers are under-represented. The party thus seems to have pursued a path of “*middle-classisation*”, without, however, succeeding in winning over the loyalty of the middle and upper classes, who have flocked to Emmanuel Macron’s centrist party.

Lastly, the reconfiguration of class coalitions is heterogeneous in the NILG countries, with Italy and Spain revealing significant differences. In Italy, the structure of the PD constituency is more fluid and consequently more fragile. The first three social classes – production workers, sociocultural professionals, and office clerks – do not amount to 50% of the party’s electorate. The class of low-skilled service workers is marginal. Furthermore, unlike in other countries, the bourgeoisie in Italy (both traditional and petty bourgeoisie) has a significant weight (21.9%). In other words, the PD’s class coalition formed on the “left” is weak. Besides, the significant weight of the bourgeois classes is supposed to affect the formulation of the party’s policy proposals. Inversely, in Spain, we find a coalition of classes very similar to that of the DIG countries. The first three social classes by electoral weight – production workers, low-skilled workers, and sociocultural professionals – have an overall weight of 67%. In other words, the PSOE is supported by a *left-wing coalition*, which manages to hold together both the historical constituency of the production workers and the new post-Fordist social classes.

13.8 Concluding remarks

The chapter’s goal has been to investigate the electoral behaviour of the post-Fordist social classes in eight advanced economies that occurred from the end of the 1970s onwards. Such changes have affected the political strategies of the political parties as the Glorious Thirties came to an end, especially those of the left-wing parties. More specifically, we tried to understand how the classes’ support for the left was evolved between the early 2000s and the late 2010s and which kind of class alliances left parties can now rely on. Clearly, it cannot be assumed that changes in social structures have univocally and unilaterally influenced party strategies. Political parties have reacted in different ways, according to trajectories influenced by internal factors (history, ideology, organisational set-up) as well as external factors (above all, the characteristics of political competition, but also the economic situation of the countries). These trajectories are the consequence of the firm tensions and conflicts that have characterised the life of these parties everywhere.

However, the shrinking of the working class, the spread of high- and low-skilled workers in the service sector, and the upgrading in education levels all have undoubtedly conditioned the parties’ strategies to widen or consolidate their consensus.

In the context of these transformations, the left-wing parties could have taken several paths, also in parallel. They could have tried to compensate for the diminution of production workers by appealing to low-skilled service workers. They might also have tried to broaden consensus among sociocultural professionals, typically more hostile to conservative parties from a cultural perspective. Finally, they could have gambled on the growing salaried middle classes (technicians, clerks) and the bourgeois electorate. In pursuing these goals, the left-wing had to focus on maintaining their traditional electorate – the production workers – who certainly could turn into a stronghold contended by other parties – first of all, the radical right, as indeed happened.

Data revealed that in the eight advanced economies under review, none of these possible paths was fully and univocally pursued by the left-wing parties. Different empirical responses emerged to the four initial hypotheses according to the growth models involved. The hypothesis that production workers' votes for left-wing parties decreased while their support for radical right-wing parties intensified (H1) found confirmation, but with substantial differences between models. On the one hand, the decline was more radical for the DIG and NILG countries and less so for the EIG countries. On the other, radical right-wing forces experienced growth in support among production workers in all the countries analysed, save in the case of Spain. Nonetheless, here too, the visibility of Vox – a new radical right-wing party – has recently increased.

The hypothesis that the traditional bourgeoisie group is the area of influence of centre-right parties has been confirmed (H4). Once again, however, there are exceptions. In Italy, the PD is the most voted party by the upper class.

Hypotheses H2 and H3, in contrast, were only partially confirmed. The empirical analysis suggests that sociocultural professionals represent the left parties' new area of influence (H2) only in the NIG and EIG models. On the contrary, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed in the DIG and NILG countries, especially considering the period after the economic crisis. As far as low-skilled service workers are concerned, their vote is particularly fragmented only in the DIG countries and Spain, with all the main parties in open competition (H3). In contrast, in the NIG and EIG countries, service workers' vote has been consolidated over time in favour of the left-wing parties – although in Denmark the group has moved closer to the radical right-wing parties. In Italy, the “populist” pole (M5S and Lega) has managed to attract most of the support of these workers.

It is time now for some conclusive remarks. First of all, the left-wing parties in the EIG and NIG countries are those that seem to have suffered the least enervation from the post-Fordist transition: not only have they managed to contain the loss of votes among production workers (albeit on the wane as an occupational class), but they have been increasingly able to replace them with

the new growing service workers, both low and high-skilled. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this outcome issues from two very divergent paths. In the NIG models, the recovery of consensus among the lower classes was due only to Obama's high popularity among African American voters. On the contrary, in the case of the EIG countries, the left-wing parties were able to build a more consolidated bloc of high and low-skilled production and service workers. However, we should bear in mind that the results of the NIG countries are strongly conditioned by the majority electoral system which provides the electorate with fewer "political" alternatives and, at the same time, helps the left-wing parties to retain their historical constituencies more easily, thus containing centrifugal pressure. What is more, in the NIG countries, the abstention rate (especially in the United States) is very high. For this reason, the effect of the post-Fordist transition in NIG social classes is partly concealed by an electoral system that is difficult to compare with that of the other growth types.

The trajectory of the EIG left-wing parties toward a new post-Fordist social-democratic base is pretty unique. Indeed, in the NIG and DIG models, all countries, except for Spain, have in common their failure to represent low-skilled service workers and, to a lesser extent, sociocultural professionals. In these countries, left-wing parties undertook different paths. The first path is that of the French Socialist Party, which constitutes the emblematic case of a *leaking party*: not only did it fail to prevent losing its traditional constituency, comprising production workers (in any case smaller from the beginning, also due to the historical presence of the Communist Party), but it lost all its consent to the benefit of new parties that emerged on its right and left. Furthermore, it did not manage to attract service workers.

Italy and Germany share a more traditional social structure, instead. Production workers are still numerous and employment in service sectors is comparatively weaker. The weight of self-employed workers (petty bourgeoisie) is also high, especially in Italy. This more traditional social structure undermined the post-Fordist challenges and, consequently, hindered the left-wing parties from recognising that service workers were more and more relevant in the post-Fordist social structure. German and Italian left-wing parties underwent two different paths. On the one hand, the SPD can be conceived as a *fortress party*, which tries to defend its traditional social bases (production workers, white-collar workers, technical professionals). However, SPD's effort is not that effective. It loses production workers' consent toward both its right and left and, at the same time, it fails to expand significantly in the direction of the new middle classes in the sociocultural sector. On the other hand, The PD can be defined as a *party that uproots itself*. In search of new social bases, chiefly in the salaried middle classes and the bourgeoisie, it relinquishes its roots in the working class while failing to create adequate appeal for the new low-skilled service workers.

In Spain, the PSOE adopts a different path that seems to bring it closer, in terms of electoral bases, to that of the Nordic countries. A sort of *post-Fordist Mediterranean social democracy* based on the electoral support of the traditional working-class, new service workers and professionals in the socio-cultural sector. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the Spanish socialist party will be able to maintain and defend this coalition under attack from the new forces of the radical left and recently also from the radical right.

Notes

- 1 The term “main left-wing parties” is used here to refer to those parties labelled as social-democratic by Armingeon et al. (2018) and, in any case, to those parties representing the main left-wing force in the countries in question throughout the period examined here.
- 2 Consumer services include trade and repair of personal property, restaurants, and hotels (NACE Codes G–H). Business services include transport, storage, communication, financial activities, real estate, renting, information technology, research, and other business services (NACE Codes I–K). Finally, personal services include public administration, education, health and social work and household activities (NACE Codes L–P). The sectoral taxonomy used is ISIC rev. 3.1.
- 3 Concerning the other occupational classes, Oesch and Rennwald (2018) suggest that: (a) the consensus of the group of (semi-) professional technicians and office clerks is contended by all poles – left-wing, centre-right and radical right; (b) the group of associate managers should remain a predominantly centre-right party-oriented area; (c) as for the small business owners, the deterioration of their status, especially as a result of globalisation and the recent economic and financial crisis, could transform them from a predominantly centre-right oriented area into a stronghold contended by the radical right.
- 4 To use more homogenous data, we used three statistical weights: the first refers to the socio-demographic dimension: age, gender, geographical area, and educational qualifications. The second weight refers to the political dimension, namely the result of voting at the most recent elections when the interview was conducted. The third refers to social stratification. In this case, we used the extended Oesch’ schema (16 social classes) based on the data from the European Labour Force Survey.
- 5 This transformation occurs for two reasons. First, since the number of traditional parties is limited, their internal composition tends to be heterogeneous. This encourages increasing competition between the various factions and thus generates changes, even radical, in political orientation. Second, elections in majoritarian systems are a zero-sum game. The opposition is more motivated to radicalise the conflict in order to differentiate itself from the government parties (Kriesi et al, 2008). In this regard, see the example of the Republicans in the United States following Donald Trump’s victory and the British Conservatives after Brexit under the new leadership of Boris Johnson.
- 6 For the case of Italy, the votes of the Left Democrats (DS) and The Daisy were added together for the election results in the early 2000s. The two parties merged in 2007 to form the Democratic Party (PD).

- 7 As already indicated, for the early 2000s reference is made to the sum of the DS and The Daisy votes.
- 8 It should be noted that Spanish data refer to 2017 and therefore do not account for the last elections (2019), in which the far-right party Vox obtained 10.26% of the votes.
- 9 Voter turnout in the United States is historically low, especially when the lowest income quintile is considered (Mahler, 2008). See Dalton (2008) for more details.

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