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What Class, What Vote? Post-Fordist Social Groups, Class Coalitions and the Mainstream Left

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What Class, What Vote? *Post-Fordist Social Groups, Class Coalitions and the mainstream Left*

Abstract: This article investigates the electoral behaviour of post-Fordist social classes between the beginning of the 2000s and the end of the 2010s in eight Western countries, focusing particularly on the vote for the mainstream Left.

More specifically, the work answers three research questions. How has social stratification changed in the countries analysed? How have the post-Fordist social groups voted in the last two decades, and how has their support for the Left changed? What kinds of class coalitions supporting Left parties have now emerged, and how stable are they?

The empirical analysis shows that, the electoral behaviour of post-Fordist social groups varies considerably according to the welfare regime considered. The comparative analysis also points out that Left-wing parties have taken different *paths* in response to the change of social stratification.

Key Words: Social Stratification; Post-Fordist social groups; Class Politics; Left Parties

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1. Introduction

The demise of Fordism in the 1970s gave way to a transformation of the Western countries' economic and labour market structures that substantially impacted on the social stratification and, consequently, on *class politics* - that is, the presence of systematic links between the voters' social class and the political party they support (Oesch and Rennwald 2018).

In recent decades, and more evidently since the 1990s, the concept of class has given rise to heated debates within comparative politics literature. A distinct polarization has emerged between those who advocate for the end of class politics - the *dealignment thesis* (Dalton 1996; Clark and Lipset 1991) - and those who continue to emphasize the importance of the class variable in post-industrial societies (Pisati 2010). These latter argue that social class remains a relevant concept as it continues to affect - positively or negatively - citizens' opportunities throughout their lives. In this regard, it has been highlighted how in terms of income distribution class inequalities not only persist but have increased in recent decades, especially due to the economic and financial crisis of the late 2000s and the new pandemic crisis that started in 2020. Social class, therefore, would remain a key factor to consider when explaining electoral behaviour and its change over time (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993; Breen 2005; Evans and Mills 2000).

Nevertheless, class has become a more complex variable. The process of economic de-industrialization and tertiarization, the increase in female employment, and the *upgrading* of workers' skills have substantially changed the Fordist labour market system of the advanced economies (Freeman and Soete 1994; Esping-Andersen 1999; Beramendi *et al.* 2015).

These structural changes have produced two main outcomes.

First, in the post-Fordist era, low-skilled jobs have proliferated in the service sector. Unlike unskilled manual workers, new service workers are inadequately represented at the trade union level and have poor mobilization skills (Iversen and Wren 1998; Bonoli 2006; 2013). This has led to less stable job contracts and more limited access to social rights and benefits (Palier and Thelen 2010). The emergence of this new group has significantly blurred the traditional division between blue-collar and white-collar workers. Low-skilled service workers can thus be placed in a new *grey zone*, in-between the middle class and the traditional working class.

Second, the middle class has become even more heterogeneous than in the Fordist period. The updating of workers' skills and the expansion of a specialized tertiary sector requiring skilled and highly educated workers have splintered the "middle classes" even further, with new diverse interests and policy preferences to defend.

In this new, evolving context, Daniel Oesch (2006) has proposed a new class scheme which accounts for contemporary labour market stratification and identifies eight new larger post-Fordist social classes or class groups. Politically speaking, these new class groups have been seen to act differently compared to the Fordist classes, since they have diverse interests and policy preferences (e.g., Armingeon and Bonoli 2006; Häusermann 2010; 2018; Häusermann et al. 2020; Beramendi et al. 2015). Consequently, the mainstream Left and the mainstream Right have seen their electoral bases change, with new cross-class alliances emerging (Häusermann 2018). Such a change has impacted mainly on the mainstream Left, which in the last decades has undergone a profound ideological transformation, often resulting in a decline in consensus (Kitschelt 1994; Bonoli and Powell 2004; Giddens 2013; Manow et al. 2018; Mudge 2018; Rennwald 2020; Ghetin et al. 2022).

Through a comparison of eight countries belonging to the main welfare regimes – the USA, the UK, Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain– this article investigates the post-Fordist social class electoral behaviour between the beginning of the 2000s and the end of the 2010s, with particular attention to the vote for the mainstream Left.

More specifically, the article answers three research questions. First, how has social stratification changed in the countries under scrutiny? Is it possible to find a common trend or have cross-regime differences emerged? Second, with specific reference to the support for the Left, how have the post-Fordist social groups voted in the last two decades, and have they changed their electoral behaviour over time? Third, which kind of class coalitions supporting mainstream Left parties have now emerged, and how stable are they?

The contribution of the article is threefold.

First of all, it engages with the social stratification literature by providing an updated analysis of the *politics* of social stratification. It offers a comparative, longitudinal analysis of the electoral behaviour of post-Fordist social classes in the last twenty years. Several works have investigated this phenomenon from a comparative perspective. However, most of the works have adopted a synchronic strategy of analysis, thus concentrating on a specific point in time or considering one or more decades as a whole – for example, by using aggregated datasets (e.g., Schwander and Häusermann 2013; Häusermann et al. 2014; Häusermann 2020). While these analyses are very informative, they tend to provide only a snapshot of the phenomenon. In contrast, by comparing two points in time, the early 2000s and the late 2010s, it is possible to identify possible changes, thus capturing the evolutive nature of electoral behaviour in the post-Fordist age.

Second, the article addresses the literature on comparative electoral studies and comparative party politics, providing an in-depth analysis of the electoral basis of the mainstream Left, through comparison of two crucial time points: the early 2000s, when most of the mainstream Left parties reconfigured their positions on centrist or Third Way-oriented positions and were in office in several Western countries, and the late 2010s, characterized by the electoral success of the Radical Right and Populist parties and declining support for the mainstream Left. A thorough analysis of

the changes that occurred across the social classes supporting the Left allows us to better understand one of the possible leading causes of its decline.

Finally, the work compares four pairs of countries belonging to different welfare regimes. It thus shows that while some common trends can be identified, class politics in the post-Fordist age continues to have different configurations across and within welfare regimes.

The article is structured as follows. First, we analyse the changes in the productive structure and social stratification between the Fordist and post-Fordist periods. Second, based on the broad literature in the field, we elaborate on some hypotheses on the electoral behaviour of post-Fordist social groups, particularly regarding their propensity to vote for the mainstream Left. Third, case selection and method are discussed. Fourth we empirically apply the theoretical framework to our case studies and test our hypotheses. The final part of the article is dedicated to the conclusions.

2. The Changes in the Social Stratification

As previously mentioned, three main developments have radically transformed the Fordist labour market system of the advanced economies. .

The first concerns the process of de-industrialization combined with the resulting tertiarization of the economy (Freeman and Soete 1994; Esping-Andersen 1993; 1999; Pierson 2001).

De-industrialization has led to the massive decline - in numerical terms - of production workers, especially the unskilled. The new means of production have also required industrial workers to upgrade their skills. Those who have failed to do so have been pushed further to the margins of society. Tertiarization has produced an unequal labour market system, given that the tertiary sector is highly polarized, with high-skilled and high-paid jobs at one extreme and low-skilled and low-paid jobs at the other.

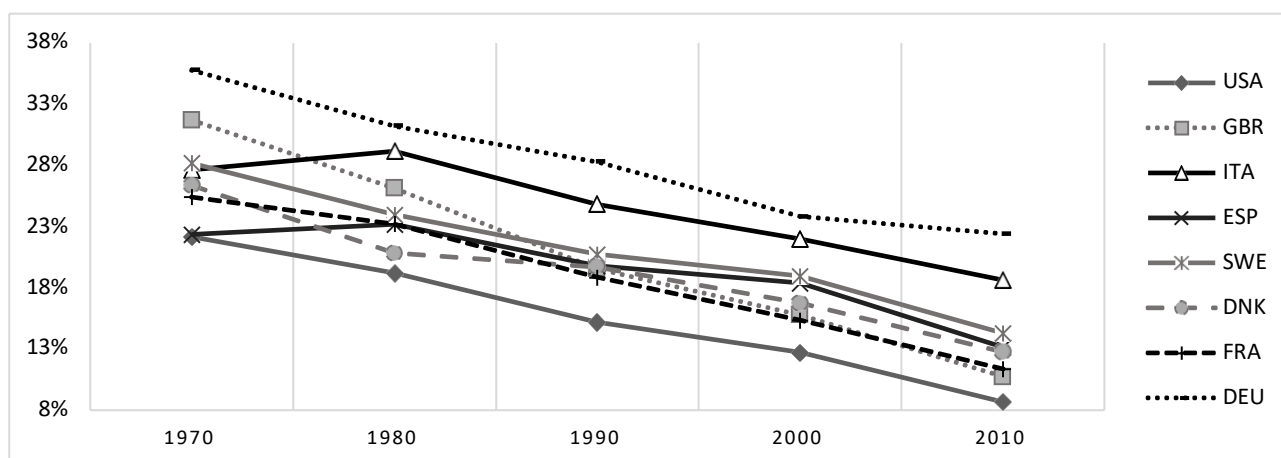
The second change is related to the increase of the female employment rate in all advanced economies. Working women, however, have not been hired in the declining manufacturing sector but rather are mostly employed in the new, low-paid service sector (Esping-Andersen 1999).

Finally, the third change regards the expansion of tertiary education - no longer a privilege for a restricted circle of society - and the resulting updating and improvement of workers' skills – what was called the *upgrading* of the labour market system (Oesch and Rodríguez-Menés, 2011; Beramendi et al. 2015). However, this *skill upgrading* is not generalized but concerns a specific group of workers. A process of labour market polarization has thus developed: at the top of the hierarchy, we find highly educated and skilled workers, while at the bottom we find workers with low skills and qualifications employed in low-paid jobs. Ultimately, upgrading has not automatically improved the working conditions (Oesch 2012). On the contrary, the labour market is manifesting an ever-increasing dichotomy between high-skilled and low-skilled workers, generating even further inequalities in income and job stability (Rueda 2007; Crouch 2010; Emmenger *et al.*, 2002).

Taking into consideration these developments, we can now describe the main changes in the employment structure between the Fordist and post-Fordist periods.

The long process of intersectoral transition from manufacturing to services had a considerable impact on the employment structure of the advanced economies. From 1970 to 2010, employment in the manufacturing sector halved from 27.4% to 14%. Although a common trend, employment in service activities has exceeded that in manufacturing at a faster pace in some countries compared to others (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Workers in manufacturing activities as a percentage of active population (1970-2010).

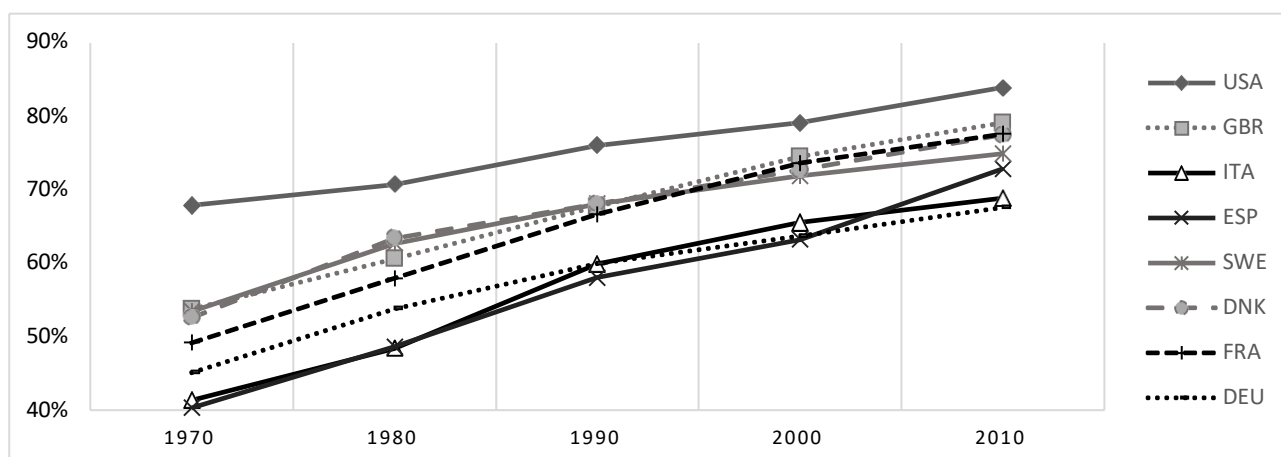


Source: Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) 10-Sector Database and Trimmer *et. al* (2015), Authors' elaboration.

In the 1970s, the United Kingdom was one of the countries with the highest presence of industrial employment, while in the 2010s the share of manufacturing employment dropped to 8.7%. Conversely, despite a declining trend, in Germany and Italy manufacturing employment has continued to represent a significant share of the workforce, respectively 22.4% and 18.6%.

Employment in service activities increased significantly from half the population of advanced economies into their three quarters. As happened in the manufacturing sectors, cross-countries differences emerged. In the period under observation, in Anglo-Saxon countries about eight out of ten workers were employed in services. Lower values are recorded in the Mediterranean countries and Germany (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Workers in service activities as a percentage of active population (1970-2010).



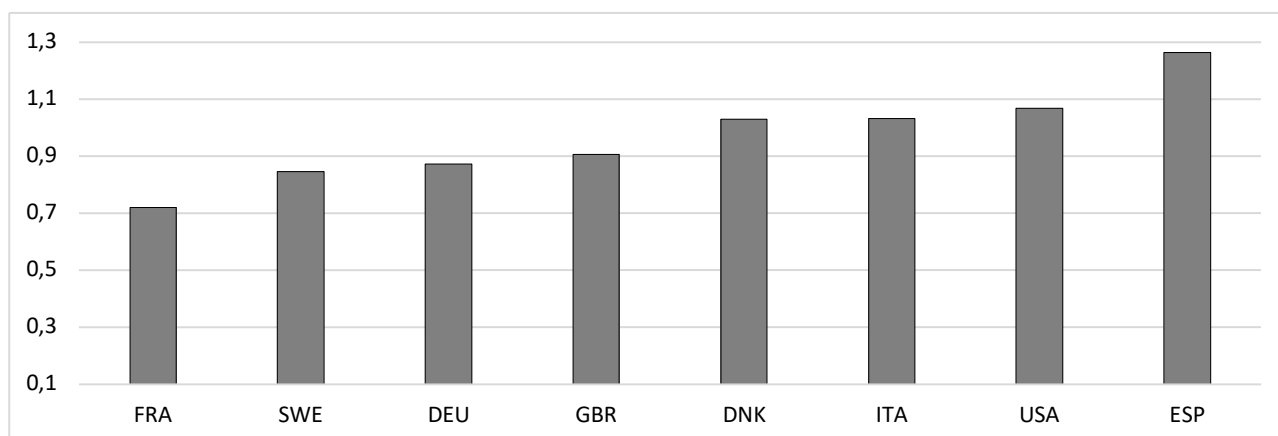
Source: Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) 10-Sector Database and Trimmer *et. al* (2015), Authors' elaboration

However, the increase of occupation in services did not homogeneously affect social stratification. Employment in service sectors revealed a dual trait. Knowledge-intensive jobs, generally more secure and better paid, were accompanied by low-skilled and low-productivity jobs, associated with low wages and poor social protection (Bonoli 2006; Palier and Thelen 2010). In recent years this dualization of occupational structure has further increased as a consequence of the shrinking of

intermediate positions due to the automation process (Wright and Dweyer 2003; Autor et al. 2008; Goos and Manning 2007).

To detect empirical cross-country differences of the polarization in service activities, we collected data on two types of service jobs. To represent those that generally show the highest productivity and wage growth we selected business services activities, (e.g. finance, insurance, transport, telecommunications, etc.). To depict low productivity and low-wage jobs, we chose customer services (Michaels et al., 2014). As a synthetic indicator of labour polarization in service sector, we calculated the ratio between the share of low-skilled services and that of highly-skilled services (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Dualization of service sectors in advanced economies. (2010).



Source: *Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) 10-Sector Database* and Trimmer *et. al* (2015), Authors' elaboration. The index is calculated as the ratio between the share of low-skilled services and that of highly-skilled services.

From this point of view, the countries with a higher share of employment in low-qualified service sectors are Spain, the United States, Italy and Denmark. Although globalization had pushed the occupational structure upwards by relocating low-skilled manufacturing jobs, and technological progress led to increasing occupation in higher complexity sectors (Berman et al., 1998), the demand for low-productivity personal and customer services drove it downwards. This is especially true where public employment narrowed, collective bargaining weakened and deregulation affected low-skilled employment contracts (Thelen, 2014). Despite personal job satisfaction mostly increasing in the last twenty years (Oesch and Piccitto 2019), from a materialistic point of view polarization did occur.

The socio-economic change due to the post-Fordist transformations has thus profoundly shaped the social structure of the advanced economies. A recent picture of those effects is presented in table 1 (see next sections for detailed information on the class scheme and on the source of the data). According to our calculation, social stratification differs markedly across countries.

Tab. 1. Social stratification in 8 advanced economies (late 2010s)

	UK	USA	DNK	SWE	DEU	FRA	ITA	ESP
Traditional Bourgeoisie (TB)	4,5	14,0	2,8	4,6	4,1	3,2	5,1	2,9
Petty Bourgeoisie (PB)	11,0	9,8	5,2	6,1	5,8	8,0	17,1	13,4
Technical (semi-) professionals (TPs)	9,2	9,7	11,6	12,7	11	11,2	7,1	7,5
Production Workers (PWs)	14,4	13,7	18,0	15,4	21,6	19,0	21,8	22,2
Associate Managers (ASs)	17,9	8,2	14,5	16,6	9,9	15,0	8,0	7,1
Official Clerks (OCs)	11,9	10,2	11,3	8,6	17,2	11,9	13,2	12,4
Socio-Cultural (semi-) Professionals (SCPs)	12	11,7	16,1	15,5	14,5	11,8	9,7	10,5
Service Workers (SWs)	19,2	22,8	20,5	20,6	16,0	19,9	18,0	24,0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: our elaborations on European Social Survey (ESS) data, round 9 (Italy, Germany, United Kingdom and France) and International Social Survey Program (ISSP), "Social Networks and Social Resources" (2017) (Denmark, Spain, Sweden and the United States).

In the Scandinavian countries, the transformations due to de-industrialization have greatly strengthened the class of service workers while concurrently some social groups that have now become characteristic of the post-Fordist era, such as socio-cultural (semi-) professionals, associate managers and technical (semi-) professionals, have expanded significantly.

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

In the other countries, post-Fordist pressure has had a lower impact on social stratification. Traditional Fordist social classes, such as official clerks and production workers, still represent a significant share of the social distribution. However, each country presents peculiar social configurations. In Germany, production workers, clerks and socio-cultural professionals are over-represented. The Italian class structure stands out for the remarkable presence of the petty bourgeoisie (in particular small business owners) and for the weaker role of the most qualified service workers, such as socio-cultural and technical (semi-) professionals, as well as associate managers. The case of Spain is quite similar to Italy, except for a more marked presence of skilled service workers, who represent about a quarter of the Iberian workforce. Finally, France has a unique class structure, halfway between post-industrial societies, such as those of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries, and more traditional societies, as in the cases of Italy and Germany. While production workers still represent almost a fifth of the population, there is also a high share of associate managers, technical (semi-) professionals and service workers.

3. Post-Fordist Social Groups' Electoral Behaviour and the Mainstream Left: Theoretical Considerations

As discussed in the introduction, we argue that in the post-Fordist Age, individuals' class positions still affect their political attitudes – both in economic and cultural terms – and thus even their electoral behaviour. More specifically, work experiences shape voters' policy interests and

preferences, and this is expected to lead to systematic differences in class voting (Oesch and Randwall 2018; Häusermann et al. 2020). Compared to the Fordist Age, however, work experiences have changed. Oesch's class schema combines two dimensions - a vertical one and a horizontal one - to grasp better such a change.

The vertical dimension focuses on skills: the higher the level of marketable skills, the greater the advantages that occupation has in terms of income and working autonomy. These skills are identifiable in a hierarchical order: *professional/managerial*, *associate professional/managerial*, *generally/vocationally skilled*, and *low/unskilled*.

Oesch's skill dimension problematizes the difference between manual and non-manual labour. Indeed, the traditional "industrial" class assumes that non-manual workers are necessarily more privileged than blue-collar workers. However, this edge is no longer a foregone conclusion in a post-industrial economy, given the growing heterogeneity of non-manual labour. Work contracts in the low-skilled service sector offer lower benefits in terms of remuneration, access to welfare and job protection – compared to contracts in the low-skilled manufacturing sector (Oesch 2006).

In addition to the vertical perspective, Oesch includes a second horizontal dimension, a sort of "employee perspective", which complements that of the employer. This horizontal differentiation is categorical and based on the workers' work logic. A job can therefore be based mainly on technical competence (the logic of technical work), on a managerial model (the logic of managerial work), on face-to-face interaction with clients (the logic of interpersonal work), or on complete autonomy (the logic of independent work). Differences in the logic of work would seem to influence people's preferences and values.

Combining the vertical perspective with the horizontal one, Oesch proposes a scheme that includes sixteen social classes which can be reduced to eight social groups: 1) large employers, managers and self-employed professionals (traditional bourgeoisie, TB)¹, 2) small business owners (petty bourgeoisie, PB), 3) technical (semi-) professionals (TPs), 4) production workers (PWs), 5) associate managers (ASs), 6) official clerks (OCs), 7) socio-cultural (semi-) professionals (SCPs) and 8) service workers (SWs).

Considering the analyses conducted by Oesch and other scholars (e.g., Häusermann 2010; 2020; Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Rennwald, 2020; Schäfer and Schwander, 2020; Hildebrandt and Jäckle, 2021), we can formulate a series of hypotheses regarding the electoral behaviour of these post-Fordist social classes. We will focus here only on those social classes whose vote for the mainstream Left was influential in the past or could be relevant in the present².

The "contested" class of PWs in the post-Fordist era

In the Fordist era, PWs represented the key constituency of the mainstream Left. Accordingly, this latter promoted economic and social policies aimed at defending the interests of this specific social class - especially in terms of labour regulation, access to welfare and education (Stephen and Huber, 2001). However, since the 1990s the mainstream left parties' policy positions have gradually changed, 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 (Bonoli and Powell, 2004; Giddens, 2013; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Mudge, 2018). Furthermore, the emergence of a new "cultural" dimension of the political conflict

1 In contrast with Oesch's original scheme, we included higher grade managers within the traditional bourgeoisie group. Despite their work logic being managerial, over time this group has followed an independent work logic, given its broad room for manoeuvre at the company level.

2 Regarding the other social classes, Oesch and Rennwald (2018) suggest that: a) the consensus of the technical (semi-) professionals and clerks is contested by all poles; b) associate managers keep voting for the centre-right; c) as regards the petty bourgeoisie, the deterioration of its status could convince this group to vote for the radical right.

has pushed left parties to support libertarian positions concerning civil rights, multiculturalism, globalization and environment (Inglehart, 2018; Ghetin et al., 2022). The literature of comparative politics has highlighted how these two phenomena - the shift towards the centre in the economic dimension and the support to libertarian positions in the cultural dimension - have contributed to the PWs' alienation from the mainstream Left (Kriesi *et al.*, 2008). Since they are negatively affected by the transformations of the economic structure, PWs have started to fear losing their status, perceiving themselves as the real “losers” of the globalization and modernization process (Lefkofridi and Michel 2014). For these reasons, this social class has become a "contested stronghold" by the populist parties of the radical right, which have developed a strategy based mainly on welfare chauvinism in defence of the old social rights and benefits typical of the Fordist age (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; Kitschelt 2004; Giuliani 2019). It is to be noted that in Germany, Spain, Italy and other Mediterranean countries (Greece), there are also new radical left formations that could attract those production workers who are dissatisfied with the policies promoted by the mainstream left parties.

Our first hypothesis is the following:

***Hp1:** In the post-Fordist era, PWs' votes for the mainstream Left has declined while their support for populist radical right parties has increased*

The mainstream Left's new area of influence: the SCPs

Comparative literature has highlighted that the tertiarization and upgrading processes have led to an increase in the share of SCPs in most advanced economies. This social class represents a new type of middle class, culturally libertarian and in favour of the expansion of welfare policies (Häusermann 2010; Beremendi et al 2015). The positions of socio-cultural workers would represent a “halfway position” between the traditional bourgeoisie and the blue collars. The former tend to support welfare cuts to reduce taxes, while the latter would be more likely to defend the old social policies (Häusermann 2010; 2012; Garritzmann et al., 2019). On the contrary, SCPs - the new “highly educated” outsiders (Häusermann *et al.*, 2014) - will be more in favour of expanding new social policies, although this may imply a cut in old social policies - such as raising the retirement age (Beremendi *et al.*, 2015). In terms of electoral behaviour, the literature has highlighted that this group has become the new key constituency of left parties - albeit not limited to the mainstream Left but also of the New Left and the Greens (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; see also Ghetin et al., 2022).

Our second hypothesis is, therefore the following:

***Hp2:** In the post-Fordist era, SCPs represent the new key area of influence of the Left.*

The new grey zone between blue-collar and white-collar workers: the SWs

The decline of the manufacturing sector has not implicated the disappearance of low-skilled jobs. On the contrary, these jobs have increased in most advanced economies and are now concentrated in the new grey zone represented by the low-skilled service sector. The status of SWs is uncertain. On the one hand, they do not enjoy the same degree of protection as PWs, and they have access mostly to need-based social policies while being excluded from the more generous social insurances (Palier and Thelen 2010). On the other hand, although they are not negatively affected by the globalization process because they are employed in "protected" sectors of the economy, they often fail to be part of the group of the labour market insiders, given the precariousness of their job contracts (Häusermann 2020). Furthermore, in the low-skilled service sector, productivity cannot grow to the same level as the manufacturing sector, which implies lower

wages (Huber and Stephen, 2001; Pierson 2001). We also know that their degree of mobilization and organization tends to be lower than that of production workers, given the fragmentation of preferences and interests (Bonoli 2013). In this regard, the literature shows that the poor unionization of the service sector has made SWs' representation marginal for the trade unions (Rueda, 2007).

SWs can be thus considered the new unskilled outsiders, affected by deregulation of the labour market and welfare cuts (Häusermann 2010). The electoral preferences of this group are less straightforward. Recalling the hypotheses of Oesch and Rennwald (2018), we can say that the vote of this class is fluid and can be garnered by the Left, the Christian Democratic or conservative parties, as well as the new radical right.

Our third hypothesis is the following:

***Hp3:** The vote of SWs tends to be fragmented, with all major parties in open competition.*

The TB: an exclusive area of influence for the Right or a new base for the left?

The comparative party politics literature has always highlighted that the TB group is the centre-right parties' primary area of influence (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2008; Ghetin et al. 2022). However, it has been highlighted that in the post-Fordist era the emergence of a new dimension of the cultural conflict has opened up the competition for the vote of this social class to other political actors. In other words, the TB could continue to have more market-oriented preferences in the economic dimension of the political conflict and support liberal positions on cultural issues, such as civil rights (Kitschelt 2004). Given the realignment of the mainstream Left towards the centre, it is possible to hypothesize that this group can support these parties. However, literature shows that a reconfiguration of preferences also took place in the centre-right (Häusermann 2012; Nauman, 2012). Liberal parties have further accentuated their libertarian positions, while conservative or Christian Democratic parties have toned down some of their authoritarian stances, especially concerning civil rights (Giuliani, 2021). Therefore, the chances that the mainstream left parties may contest the vote of the traditional bourgeoisie are still low. Our fourth hypothesis is the following:

***Hp4:** The bourgeoisie group remains the Right's main area of influence, and its support for mainstream left parties is marginal.*

Non-voting patterns in Post-Fordist social classes

So far, we have conceptualized and speculated on the post-Fordist social classes' electoral behaviour in terms of *voting* for political parties. However, comparative politics literature has largely documented that, since the end of the 1980s, electoral turnout has dramatically scaled down (e.g., Blais, 2007). As Rennwald has pointed out (2020), the new voting patterns in the post-Fordist age can no longer be reduced to a mere choice between different political parties. On the contrary, the decision for social classes nowadays is first of all between *abstention* on the one hand, and *voting* on the other.

In this regard, empirical studies have highlighted that social and economic inequalities are likely to negatively affect electoral participation (Schäfer and Schwander, 2019; Solt, 2008). For the most disadvantaged social groups – more specifically, the PWs and the SWs – the perception of not being properly represented by political forces triggers a sense of subjective political impotence which makes abstention a rational choice for them (Schwander et al. 2020). Such a lack of representation is also strengthened by the ideological changes occurring among the mainstream left parties. As discussed previously, nowadays these parties rely less and less on a working-class constituency and have increasingly shifted to the centre of party competition in order to attract the

new educated, middle-class – i.e. the SCPs (Fervers and Schwander, 2015). It follows that the mainstream Left’s capacity to mobilize their historical working-class constituency has substantially decreased. While a significant share of PWs are expected to converge on the Radical Right, it is likely that several members of these group opt for abstention (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Rennwald, 2020).

At the same time, electoral turnout is expected to be even lower among the SWs, as suggested by the literature (Häusermann, 2020). Their reduced capacity of mobilization and unionization have made their interests unlikely to be properly represented by political actors, including trade unions. At the same time, contrary to the PWs, their support for the Radical Right parties is supposed to be lower since, from a cultural-oriented perspective, this class does not share strong authoritarian positions (Häusermann, 2020). In other words, their sense of political impotence is less likely to be channelled towards the Radical Right. It follows that abstention represents a rational decision for this group.

Our last hypothesis is the following:

Hp5: PWs and SWs’ electoral participation is substantially weaker than the national average. SWs, in particular, show a significant low turnout.

4. Case selection and Method

To investigate the post-Fordist social classes’ electoral behaviour, we adopted a medium-N comparative research design (Morlino 2005), focusing on four pairs of Western countries. Each pair belongs to, and is the best representative of, one of the four welfare regimes identified by the comparative welfare state literature (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 2005). More specifically, the USA and the UK represent the Anglo-Saxon regime; Denmark and Sweden stand for the Scandinavian regime; France and Germany are the prototypes of the Continental regime; and, finally, Italy and Spain exemplify the Southern regime. The decision to consider different welfare regimes is motivated by the fact that the structural changes in the labour market structure of the advanced economies have not followed a singular path (Pierson 2001; Hall and Soskice 2001). Comparative literature has demonstrated that institutions – especially those inherited from the past – strongly affect how countries respond to the post-Fordist challenges (Trigilia, 2020; Hassel and Palier, 2021). Accordingly, social stratification is expected to vary and thence the social class electoral behaviour (see, Schwander and Häusermann 2013; Häusermann et al. 2014). Welfare regime classification can thus be seen as valuable in detecting differences and similarities within a most-different-case research design. Furthermore, by focusing on two countries for each regime, it is possible to assess *defections* within the same welfare regime.

As specified in the previous sections, we are interested in analysing the social class electoral behaviour regarding the mainstream Left between the early 2000s and the late 2010s. Accordingly, we selected the following parties: the Labour Party (Labours) for the UK, the Democratic Party (Democrats) for the USA, the Swedish Democratic Party (SAP) for Sweden, the Danish Social Democratic Party (SD) for Denmark, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) for Germany, the Socialist Party (PS) for France, the Democratic Party (PD) for Italy and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) for Spain.

Within the “mainstream Left” label, we included the mainstream parties that belong to the centre-left pole of the political contestation. Following this definition, we excluded the radical left parties, one the one hand. On the other, we did not solely look at Social Democratic parties, but we incorporated within the analysis also those left parties that have more economically liberal or mixed backgrounds (such as the Democrats and the PD). Regarding the Italian case, the PD was formed only in 2007 after the merger of the two Italian main centre-left parties, the Left Democrats and the *Margherita*. For this reason, we refer to the aggregated results scored by these two parties when investigating the early 2000s.

Analysis of the post-Fordist social class electoral behaviour is based on data from two comparative mass survey datasets, the European Social Survey (ESS) and the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). The work compares the first survey waves occurring at the beginning of the 2000s with the most recent surveys, held between 2017 and 2019. More specifically, for the early 2000s, we employed *ESS Round 1 (2001)* for all the countries, except in the cases of the USA and France for which we relied on *ISSP 2002 "Family and Changing Gender Roles III"*³

For the late 2010s, we used *ISSP 2017 "Social Networks and Social Resources"* for Denmark, Sweden, Spain, and an aggregated ISSP dataset *ISSP (2014-2016)* for the USA. For the rest of the countries analysed (the UK, France, Germany, and Italy), we relied on *ESS Round 9 (2019)*.

The combination of the ESS and ISSP is quite common in the comparative literature (see Kriesi et al., 2008; Häusermann, 2010) and is very useful when data from a certain country are missing⁴. Furthermore, the formulation of questions concerning electoral behaviour in the two datasets are extremely similar, thus making the data easily comparable. In this regard, to operationalize party voting choice, we used the variable "*prvt: party voted in the last national elections*" in the ESS, and the variable "*PRTY: Country specific party voted for in the last general election*" included in the ISSP⁵. Similarly, to operationalize the electoral turnout, we relied on the variable "*vote: voted last election*" in the ESS and the variable "*VOTE_LE: vote last election: yes, no*" in the ISSP⁶.

To make the comparison more homogeneous, we proceeded to weigh the data by applying three different weights. The first one is a socio-demographic weight and weighs the cases by age group, sex, geographical area of belonging and educational qualification. The second weight adds a "political" variable, that is, the effective parties' voting result. Finally, the third weight is meant to make social stratification data more accurate by using the frequency distribution of the 16-class variable of Oesch's class scheme constructed using data from the European Labour Force Survey.

3 For the USA, to make the sample more robust we aggregated ISSP 2002, 2003 and 2004 datasets - to analyse social class voting in the early 2000s - and ISSP 2014, 2015 and 2016 datasets - to detect social class voting in the late 2010s

4 For example, the first round of the ESS does not allow to reproduce the Oesch's class scheme for France. For this reason, we decided to use the ISSP. Furthermore, at the time of writing, ESS did not provide updated data concerning electoral behaviour for Denmark, Sweden, and Spain at the end of the 2010s, and therefore we opted to use the 2017 ISSP dataset.

5 Considering the early 2000s, for France and the USA this variable is not included in the ISSP. Therefore, we were obliged to rely on the variable "Party Affiliation".

6 For France, the 2002 ISSP dataset does not include the "VOTE_LE" variable, and therefore French electoral turnout in the early 2000s cannot be shown.

Tab. 2. Map of Relative Electoral Turnout: Difference between the group-specific turnout rate and the rate among the entire workforce (Early 2000s- Late 2010s)

	Anglo-Saxon Regime						Scandinavian Regime						Continental Regime						Southern Regime					
	UK			USA			Sweden			Denmark			Germany			France			Italy			Spain		
	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Dif.	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Chg.	t1	t2	Chg.
Traditional Bourgeoisie (TB)	5.7	6.3	↑0.6	6.1	18.1	↑12	7.6	7.3	↓0.3	5.3	3	↓2.3	7.8	12.7	↑4.9	n.a.	12.4	n.a.	4.8	14.3	↑9.5	5.1	14.1	↑9
Production Workers (PWs)	-12.6	-13	↓0.4	-0.3	-16.1	↓15.8	-2.5	0.7	↑3.3	-3.5	-0.5	↑3	-10	-13.2	↓3.2	n.a.	-14.3	n.a.	-4.7	-8.4	↓3.6	-3.8	-4.1	=0.3
Socio-Cultural (semi-) Professionals (SCPs)	10	7.3	↓2.7	10.9	17.7	↑6.8	9.1	4.8	↓4.3	3.4	0	↓3.3	5.7	9	↑3.3	n.a.	14.4	n.a.	1.7	9.4	↑7.7	7.8	8.4	↑0.5
Service Workers (SWs)	-8.6	-11.8	↓3.2	-10.1	-12.3	↓2.3	-7.2	-7.5	=0.3	-8.2	-2.6	↑5.6	-6.9	-12.6	↓5.7	n.a.	-18.5	n.a.	-0.8	-12.9	↓12.1	-3.7	-8.8	↓5.1
Workforce Mean	65.2	76.7	11.4	70.6	63.1	-7.5	84.8	90.8	6	91.2	95.3	4.1	86.4	81.4	-5	n.a.	60.9	n.a.	93.7	79	-14.9	87.7	81.5	-6.3

Source : ESS (Round 1 and Round 9) and ISSP (ISSP 2002 "Family and Changing Gender Roles III" and ISSP 2017 "Social Networks and Social Resources).

For France, turnout data are not available for the early 2000s.

Legend: t1= Early 2000s; t2= Late 2010s; Chg.: Change between t2 and t1.

↑: the specific class's relative turnout has improved over time

↓: the specific class's relative turnout has worsened over time

=: the specific class's relative turnout has remained constant over time

Tab. 3. Support for the mainstream Left from the Main Post-Fordist Social Classes (Early 2000-Late 2010s)

	Anglo-Saxon Regime						Scandinavian Regime						Continental Regime						Southern Regime					
	UK (Labours)			USA (Democrats)			Sweden (SAP)			Denmark (SD)			Germany (SPD)			France (PS)			Italy (PD)			Spain (PSOE)		
	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 (TB)	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
Production Workers (PWs)	49.8	43.2	-6.6	55.4	51.9	-3.5	55	41.4	-13.6	36.7	36.5	-0.2	47.7	23.5	-24.2	41.3	7.6	-33.7	37.4	17.6	-19.8	47	32.6	-14.4
Socio-Cultural (semi-) Professionals (SCPs)	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 (SWs)	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
Workforce Mean	36.9	39.7	+2.8	53.6	51.4	-2.2	40	31.5	-8.5	26.2	26	-0.2	39.5	20.1	-19.4	24.7	7.9	-16.8	34.9	20.1	-14.8	39.5	23.1	-16.4

Source : ESS (Round 1 and Round 9) and ISSP (ISSP 2002 "Family and Changing Gender Roles III", ISSP 2017 "Social Networks and Social Resources. For the USA, aggregated ISSP Datasets 2002-2004 and 2014-2016).

Legend: t1= Early 2000s; t2= Late 2010s; Dif.: Difference

In the final row we showed the support for the mainstream Left among the whole workforce. If the specific social class's vote share difference is higher/lower than that of the workforce, the loss/gain can be interpreted as the result of changing behaviour of a given social class and, consequently, does not depend on the political party's general performance among the workers.

This last weight cannot be used for the USA. For this reason, in order to make the sample more robust, we decided to aggregate datasets. For more information concerning the operationalization, please consult the supplementary material.

5. Empirical Analysis

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the longitudinal, comparative analysis of the electoral behaviour for those post-Fordist social classes which are most relevant for the mainstream Left in our eight case studies.

Before analysing the *voting* behaviour for each social class (table 3 and tables A-D in the Online Appendix), we shall focus on the data regarding the electoral turnout. Table 2 shows the relative turnout data measured as the difference between the group-specific turnout rate and the rate among the entire workforce. Negative values mean that the social class turnout is lower than workforce mean, while positive values indicate that the social class turnout is higher.

The first aspect to note is that electoral participation over time varies across the countries⁷. The Anglo-Saxon cluster records the lowest turnout, especially the USA (63.1% in the 2016 presidential election). Furthermore, in the UK we can observe a positive trend, with workforce electoral participation increasing by almost 12 percentage points (pp) at the end of the 2010s. Also France shows a low turnout in the late 2010s (60.9% in 2017), but in this case the data refer to legislative and not presidential elections where generally participation is higher. For the rest of the countries under analysis, the workforce turnout remains relatively high over time. This is especially true for the Scandinavian countries. However, while in Sweden and Denmark the participation increased, in Germany, Italy and Spain the trend is negative. In Italy, in particular, compared to the early 2000s, turnout scaled back by 14 pp.

Despite these different turnout patterns, table 2 shows very clearly that electoral abstention is mostly concentrated among the two disadvantaged social groups, i.e. the PWs and the SWs. In all the countries, these two social groups display a lower turnout compared to the national workforce mean. However, some variations can be observed.

With regard to the PWs, their turnout is significantly lower in the Anglo-Saxon countries, but also in Germany and Italy. Furthermore, participation substantially dropped compared to the early 2000s. In the Scandinavian countries and in Spain, the picture is slightly different. In Denmark and Sweden, BC's electoral turnout increased, and, at the end of the 2010s, it was approximately aligned to the workforce mean – or even higher in the case of Sweden. Also in Spain, there was a slight improvement in the late 2010s, and, by comparison, PW electoral participation is only marginally lower than that of the entire workforce (-4 pp). Finally, in France, in the late 2010s, the PWs' relative turnout remains one of the lowest among all the other countries.

SWs show the lowest turnout among the post-industrial social classes in all the countries selected. Their electoral participation rate deviates significantly from the national mean in the Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Southern countries. Furthermore, in these welfare regimes, over time, the trend worsened. In Germany and Spain the negative difference between the SW's turnout and the rate among the entire workforce increased by 5 pp between the early 2000s and late 2010s, and by more than 10 pp in Italy. In the Scandinavian countries the picture is slightly diverse, once again. While SWs keep on recording lower turnout, in Sweden the trend is by and large stable, with no significant variation occurring over the last twenty years. Furthermore, compared to the other countries, in Sweden the value remains moderately low (-7 in the late 2010s, compared with -18 in France, for example). Even in Denmark, the SWs turnout is lower than the workforce mean.

⁷ We refer to survey data, which, in general tend to overestimate the electoral participation. The values therefore need to be treated with caution.

However, here there was an increase in this social group's participation, with the difference between the SWs turnout rate and the workforce mean rate shifting from -8.2 to -2.6.

To summarize, the most-disadvantaged social classes – the PWs and the SWs – show a lower electoral turnout compared to the workforce mean. Our fifth hypothesis is thus confirmed. However, cross-country differences remain. In the Scandinavian countries – and, to a lower extent, in Spain when considering the PWs – in view of a very high workforce turnout rate, the electoral participation of PWs and SWs remain only moderately lower, and it improved over time. In other words, while it is true that on average these two social classes show an inclination to abstention even in Sweden and Denmark, such an inclination is relatively lower than in the rest of the advanced democracies. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in these two countries, while the TB and SCP participation rate continues to be higher than the workforce mean as in the other countries analysed, the trend for these two social classes is negative. In the late 2000s, their electoral participation decreased, while in the other advanced democracies it improved (with the exception of the SCPs in the UK). Scandinavian parties – and especially the mainstream Left – therefore, seem to be more effective than their Anglo-Saxon, Continental, and Southern counterparts in holding back the trust of the most disadvantaged social groups, while being relatively less successful in maintaining the trust of the middle and higher social classes.

Let us now shift our attention to table 3 to analyse in detail the *voting behaviour* of the main post-industrial social classes and especially their support for the mainstream Left. For the sake of clarity, we address each social class separately.

Production Workers (PWs)

Table 3 shows clearly the generalized drop in the production workers' vote for the mainstream left-wing parties in all the countries analysed. This result is also confirmed when controlling for the overall electoral performance of each party (final row in table 3). The decline in mainstream Left vote share among PWs is stronger than the *overall* decline in mainstream Left vote share, except for Denmark.

Despite this broad, common trend, different *declining patterns* emerge among the four regimes.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries, the decline in consensus among PWs is less marked. In the UK, the loss stands below 6%, and the Labour Party managed to keep over 43% of the PWs' vote at the end of the 2010s. However, in these years Labour improved its overall performance compared to the early 2000s (an increase of 2.3 pp). This improvement is only partially visible when considering the PWs. Labour was effective solely in *limiting* the loss, but not in reversing the negative trend, thus attracting more votes from this social class. In the United States, PWs' support for the Democrats remained relatively stable, recording a slight decline (-3.5 pp), though stronger compared to the overall decline in the Democratic party vote share (-2.2). These results need a clarification. The data for both the UK and the USA are strongly conditioned by the majority electoral system, which provides the electorate with fewer "political" alternatives. Therefore, the electoral system affects the results, indirectly helping the Left to retain a more significant share of votes, especially from its historical constituencies, and thus to contain centrifugal forces (Lijphart 1990). Two phenomena, however, have to be considered. On the one hand, as previously observed, electoral turnout in these countries, especially for the PWs, is very low. In the absence of alternatives, those disappointed with the current politics tend to abstain (Plane and Gershtenson 2004; Häusermann 2020).

On the other hand, the majority system has favoured the repolarization of the party system, especially in the United States (Girdon et al., 2018; Rodden 2019). Put differently, while preventing the formation of new challengers - and so their chances of entering parliament -

majoritarian electoral rules provide strong incentives for the transformation and radicalization of mainstream parties (Kriesi et al. 2008).

Shifting the attention to the Continental and Southern countries, the decline in the PWs' vote is striking. In Germany and France, there was a decrease of 24 and 34 percentage points respectively - much stronger than the overall decline in mainstream Left vote share, especially for France. In Italy and Spain the value is slightly lower.

The drop in the PWs' support is evident in the late 2010s. In the last elections, in France, only 7% of workers voted for the PS, and in Germany, only 23.5% chose the SPD. Similarly, in Italy, the support for the PD halved over two decades and was below 20% in 2018. Moreover, in these three countries, PWs' turnout decreased further, as previously discussed. In other words, the decision to support the mainstream Left was made among a relatively smaller group of voters (Rennwald, 2020), and many of them decided to back other parties.

In Spain, the PSOE managed to maintain a broader consensus (32.6%) but still much lower than in the early 2000s. However, PWs' abstention rate here is less marked.

In the Scandinavian countries, the fall in electoral support is evident but less pronounced. In Sweden, the SAP experiences a more significant drop compared to SD in Denmark. This latter managed to limit losses considerably (only -0.2 pp). Such losses seem to be more associated with a general – slight – decline (-0.2 pp) in the SD's general performance at the elections rather than with a real change in PW electoral behaviour. However, in both countries, the percentage of PWs who voted for the two social democratic parties remained high - above 30%. Furthermore, PW turnout – though lower compared to the workforce mean – remained high by comparative standards. In other words, despite a loss of consensus in the PWs' vote, the decline in the Scandinavian countries was more limited.

Where did the PWs' votes go in the late 2010s?

Table A in the Supplementary Material shows the top four parties voted by this social class at the end of the decade.

Mainstream Left parties continue to be the first choice in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. In UK and the USA, this is in contrast with the whole workforce's electoral behaviour, since in these countries the two most voted parties are from the mainstream Right (Table E in the Supplementary Material). In Sweden and Denmark, though the SAP and the SD are the first voting preference among *all* the workers (respectively, 31.5% and 26%), the support among the PWs is much higher (41.4% and 36.5%).

On the contrary, in the Continental countries, the SPD is only the third choice in Germany (23.5%). However, PWs support the party to a slightly higher level than the entire workforce (20.1%, Table E in the Supplementary Material). In France, the PS is not included in the ranking – while it emerges as the whole workforce's fourth choice.

The picture in the Southern countries is more heterogeneous. In Spain, the PSOE continues, despite the decline, to be the most voted party among the PWs (32.6%) – and to a higher level than the whole workforce (23,1%). The PD in Italy is only the PW's fourth choice (17.6%), surpassed - as in Germany - by a centre-right party (Forza Italia). Interestingly, the PD ranks second when considering the whole workforce (20.1%). In other words, in Italy, PWs vote the mainstream Left at a lower level than the whole workforce.

The PWs' support for the Radical Right is interesting. In all the countries analysed – except for the USA and Spain where no RRP are present in the time-frame considered – such support is much higher than that showed by the overall workforce (Table E in the Supplementary Material). Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the National Front (FN) are the most voted parties from this group in Germany and France. In the Scandinavian countries, despite the strength of the mainstream Left, the Radical Right is the PW's second voting choice. Likewise, in Italy, the League is the second most voted party by the production workers, while in the United Kingdom, the UKIP is the

third. This confirms that the new Radical Right parties have attracted a substantial, albeit variable, share of PWs' votes (Hp1).

To summarize, it is possible to identify different patterns of the PWs' declining support for the mainstream Left. On the one hand, in the Continental and Southern countries, production workers have clearly moved away from the mainstream Left Parties. However, in Spain, despite displaying a substantial drop in consensus, the PSOE seems to have performed better compared to the other mainstream Left parties while in the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, the electoral loss is more contained. However, in the UK and the USA, PWs' abstention rate remains high, whereas in Sweden and Denmark this social class is increasingly attracted by the Radical Right.

Socio-Cultural (semi-) Professionals (SCPs)

There are significant differences in SCP support for the mainstream Left among the four different regimes, as shown by tables 2 (see also Table B and E in the Supplementary Material).

In the Continental and Southern countries, the consensus among this social group has diminished over the two last decades. In Germany, the decline was particularly evident (-25,1) – and stronger than the overall drop of the SPD consensus (-19.4). In 2017, the SCPs shifted toward the CDU-CSU (which became the most voted party by the group, about 32%) and the radical Left (the *Die Linke* is the third option, with about 15.8% of votes). Interestingly, the SCPs' support for the Radical Left almost doubled that of the whole workforce (9.3%). The fall of consensus in France was also heavy, albeit slightly more limited than in Germany (-15.6% and slightly lower than the general decline in PS vote share). The PS emerges as only the SCP's fourth party choice (10.2%), while their first choice was for Emmanuel Macron's new party, The Republic on the Move, (LaREM), which turns out to be the most voted party (35.0%) - a higher support compared to that the overall workforce (29%). France Unbowed (FI), the radical left party guided by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, ranked second (approximately 22%). Interestingly, as observed in Germany, SCPs' propensity to vote for the radical left is much higher than that of the whole workforce (11.7%).

A sharp decline in mainstream Left support is also clear in Italy and Spain. However, in Italy, the PD managed to keep more than 30% of the votes of the SCPs - even if it turned out to be only their second choice in 2018, preceded by the M5S (34.5%). In Italy, the drop in the SCPs' support to the PD (-14.8 pp) seems to be strictly associated with the general decline of the party consensus in the late 2010s (which is indeed exactly -14.8 pp). Furthermore, SCPs championed the party to a higher level (32.3%) compared to the whole workforce (20.1%). Interestingly, in Spain, the SCPs preferred the People's Party (PP) (about 25%) over the PSOE, which was only the second choice (19.9%, a slight lower support compared the workforce mean). The electoral loss for the PSOE, however, is less pronounced among this social group (-13.6 pp) compared to the drop in the consensus among the overall workforce (-16.4 pp). Contrary to Germany and France, the Radical Left did not succeed in breaking through among this social class. Podemos (We can) indeed were only the SCP's fourth choice, with 12.5% of the votes, even slightly lower support than that displayed by the whole workforce (13.9%).

The picture is different in the Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, at the end of the 2010s, the SAP continued to be the first party voted by SCPs (about 33%, slightly higher support than that of the workforce). In Denmark, the SCPs' vote share for the SD increased, and, as in Sweden, the Social Democrats were the party most voted by the group (32.8%, a substantially higher level compared to the whole workforce – 26%). However, it is interesting that in Denmark, the Danish People Party (DF) – a radical right party – is the group' second choice, surpassing the Radical Left (Red-Green Alliance, EL). However, the data should not be overestimated, since the SCPs' support to the DF (13.3%) remains much lower compared to that recorded among the whole workforce (21.5%).

Finally, with regard to the Anglo-Saxon countries, in the UK, the SCPs' support for the Labour rose sharply, reaching over 50% of this class's consensus. Accordingly, it is evident from the analysis that SCPs are much more inclined to vote the Labour Party than the general workforce (39.7%).

In the United States, despite a limited decline in support, Democrats continued to be the SCPs' first choice with higher support than that displayed by the general workforce (56.2% vs. 51.4%). However, as previously discussed, the majority system strongly influences these data, and therefore the comparison with the other countries must be treated with caution.

The hypothesis that socio-cultural workers represent a new area of influence of the left-wing parties (Hp2) is only partially confirmed, especially if we consider the *temporal* variable. Our hypothesis is valid for the Scandinavian and the Anglo-Saxon countries (considering the distortions of the electoral system for the latter). Here, left-wing parties managed to maintain high consensus among the working class and at the same time attract the SCPs. However, it is important to remember that in the Nordic countries, this social group has begun to show a first, slight, sign of political mistrust, with electoral turnout diminishing. On the contrary, in the continental and southern countries, the losses among PWs were not compensated with new gains among the SCPs. These latter ones moved away from the mainstream Left, shifting their support towards centre/centre-right parties or to the Radical Left. In Italy, the PD was challenged by a new, populist contender - the 5 Stars Movement (M5S). However, though the party substantially lost consensus in the late 2010s within this class, it managed to retain a fairly significant share of SCPs' vote, contrary to the other continental and southern mainstream left parties.

Service Workers (SWs)

Shifting the attention toward the SWs, this social class's support for the mainstream Left declined particularly in Germany (-34.3, a much stronger decline than the overall drop of the SPD consensus). The SPD ends up as only the SWs' second electoral choice (18.1%), preceded by the Christian Democratic party (CDU-CSU). In France, where the vote was more fluid even in the early 2000s, the drop is more contained but still considerable (-10.3%, a lower decline than the overall drop of the PS consensus). Contrary to Germany, however, SWs did not turn to the mainstream centre or centre right, but preferred the Radical Right. Indeed, FN turned out to be the SWs' first electoral choice at the end of the 2010s (22.7%, a much higher support than that displayed by the entire workforce – i.e. 13.6%)

In the Southern countries, the losses are particularly marked in Italy (-22.8%). The PD is only the third most voted party, preceded by the League (18%) and the M5S, the latter being voted by more than 40% of SWs. On the contrary, in Spain, the decline is more contained, though still relevant (approximately -14%, lower than the overall drop of the PSOE consensus). The PSOE managed to maintain the consensus of almost 30% of this social class, but, compared to the early 2000s, it was overtaken by the PP which emerges as the group's first choice, although the gap between the two parties is minimal. However, the SWs' propensity to vote for the PSOE is much higher than that displayed by the whole Spanish workforce (23.1%).

A heterogeneous situation can be observed in the Scandinavian countries. Both in Sweden and Denmark, the mainstream Left shows a decline in consensus among the service workers – much stronger than the overall drop in the mainstream Left vote share. However, the *declining* patterns in the two countries are different. In Sweden, the SAP continues to be the most voted party by the group (41.4%) – and to a strikingly higher level than that recorded among the entire workforce. In Denmark, the consensus is more limited (about 22.6%), and although the SD continues to be the most voted party, at the end of the 2010s it gained only a slight advantage over the radical right.

Finally, concerning the Anglo-Saxon countries, in the UK, the Labour lost support but not significantly (only -3% of the consensus). The party continued to attract approximately 50% of the

SWs' votes and remained the first party voted by this group in the late 2010s and to a strikingly higher level than that recorded among the British workforce (39.7%). However, the trend is not so positive if compared to the general party performance. Indeed, in the late 2010s, the party increased its overall voting share, but such an electoral gain did not involve the service workers. In other words, the Labours managed to limit electoral losses among the SWs, but were not successful in increasing their electoral gains among this social group. In the USA, in view of an overall electoral decline compared to the early 2000s, the Democrats continued to be the SWs' first electoral choice (58%, a notably higher level than that recorded among the entire workforce, i.e. 48.6%). Furthermore, the party also managed to slightly increase its consensus among this social class.

In short, the hypothesis (Hp3) that the vote of SWs is fragmented with all the main parties in open competition is only partially confirmed. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, also due to the majority electoral system, the group's support for the Left did not change. However, it has to be remembered that in both the UK and the USA, the SWs turnout was very low. In other words, in this country a relatively high share of this group's members chose to abstain from voting. In the Scandinavian countries, the propensity to vote for the mainstream Left remains strong in Sweden, while it is weaker in Denmark, where the far-right gained consensus. Also, in this case, open competition among all parties did not emerge. SWs in Denmark seem to be more a Left-wing stronghold contested by the Radical Right. With regard to the Continental countries, our hypothesis is confirmed in Germany, where the SWs' vote is very fragmented – and electoral turnout is very low. In France, fragmentation is relatively high as well, with all the parties in open competition, revealing a substantial advantage of the Radical Right. Interestingly, the PS is not part of such competition, resulting in being only the group's fifth choice. Finally, in the Southern countries, our hypothesis is validated only to some extent. In Italy, SWs represented an area of influence of the Left at the beginning of the 2000s, but at the end of the 2010s, their attention shifted towards the M5S, and, as second choice, to the League. Furthermore, even in Italy the SWs turnout substantially worsened over time. In Spain, the fluidity of the vote is high: in this case, the two main parties, the PSOE and the PP are in open competition for this social class's vote.

The traditional bourgeoisie (TB)

Finally, let us consider the electoral behaviour of the traditional bourgeoisie. At the end of the 2010s, in the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark the consensus of this group towards the mainstream Left increased, while in the rest of the countries consensus dropped, but to a lower intensity than that displayed among the PWs.

In all the four welfare regimes, the mainstream Left is among the top three parties voted for by the traditional bourgeoisie, albeit in different positions and with different intensity (Table D in the Supplementary Material).

The fact that the Labour Party in the UK and the Democratic Party in the US are the second most voted parties by the TB is not surprising given the majority electoral system. However, in both cases, the traditional bourgeoisie clearly remains a main area of influence of the Right (table D) - although, in the UK, Labours managed to slightly increase their support from the early 2000s onwards.

Also in the Scandinavian countries, the Left managed to break ground among the upper classes in open competition with other mainstream centre-right parties. However, it is possible to notice differences within the model. In Sweden, the Moderate Party (M) remains the first party voted by the traditional bourgeois class (37.3%) and to a strikingly higher level than that recorded among the entire Swedish workforce (23.7%). Furthermore, the gap with the SAP is high (20.8 pp). Even Denmark, the Liberal Party (V) is the TB's first electoral choice (23%), but in this case the distance from the SD of about 19% is very limited (4 pp). In other words, in this country, the upper

class seems to have become a stronghold of the centre-right which is now increasingly disputed by the mainstream Left.

In the Continental countries, the mainstream Left Parties are the third most voted party by the traditional bourgeoisie, but differences emerge. In France, the TB emerges as voting disproportionately for Emmanuel Macron's centrist party (43%, a higher level than that displayed by the entire workforce (29%). LaRem seems to have stolen votes from both the Gaullist right (i. e. The Republicans, LR) and the PS.

In Germany, the SPD gains consensus among the upper class (+2.5 pp), slightly reducing the gap with the CDU, which, however, still remains high. Furthermore, the SPD appears in open competition with the Greens (Grüne) and the Liberals (FDP) for the vote of this class. In other words, the SPD lost consensus among the most disadvantaged social classes – that is, the PWs and the SWs – but grew in consensus from the traditional bourgeois class. Nevertheless, it was not able to replace the CDU-CSU.

Finally, the situation in the Southern countries shows substantial differences between Italy and Spain. Despite a decline in consensus in Italy compared to the early 2000s, the PD is the party most voted by the TB. In the face of a sharp drop in votes among the PWs, the PD became the upper-class party. However, the consensus obtained (27%) is significantly lower than that obtained by Macron in France. On the contrary, in Spain, the TB remained firmly loyal to the Right Pole - PP and Citizens (Cs). The PSOE, despite being the third most voted party, obtains a limited consensus among the voters of this class (13%, much lower than the support displayed by the entire workforce, i.e. 23.1%), and the distance from the PP remains marked.

Our hypothesis that the traditional bourgeoisie group is the Centre-Right's area of influence (Hp4) is confirmed but with some exceptions. In Italy, the PD is the party most voted by the upper class. In France, Macron's centrist party gain most of the TB' support, replacing de facto the traditional Gaullist Right. The analysis also shows that support for mainstream left parties by the TB varies among the countries examined. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, Sweden, France, and Spain, the mainstream Left's success among the upper class is more limited.

Interclass Alliances

The data so far discussed allows us to identify which kind of coalition supporting the Left was formed in the late 2010s.

In the Scandinavian countries, both the SAP and the SD managed to set up an interclass coalition between the historical working-class – the production workers – the service workers and what has been considered as the new “pro-redistribution” middle class (Beremendi, 2015), that is, the SCPs. This new block, which seems to represent the new social bases of the post-Fordist Social Democracy, appears to have been effective in containing electoral losses and maintaining high turnout rates in the last two decades. A similar picture can be identified also in the Anglo-Saxon countries. However, in the UK and the USA, this interclass coalition seems to be more the result of the majoritarian electoral system – which limits the social classes' electoral alternatives – rather than an actual political strategy of the mainstream parties of these countries. Furthermore, this interclass coalition has been substantially weakened by the PWs and SWs' low turnout. In other words, both the Labours and the Democrats can count on a relatively smaller and less mobilized “pro-redistribution” interclass alliance.

On the contrary, the mainstream Left in the continental countries - Germany and France - and Italy showed a considerable decline in consensus both from the PWs and SWs as well as from the new, highly-educated middle class represented by the SCPs. These parties failed to build the new “pro-redistribution” interclass alliance that emerged in the Nordic countries. Electoral loss and increasing drop of the turnout were not reversed.

In Spain the situation is intermediate. The PSOE contained the losses among the most disadvantaged classes but failed to increase the consensus among the SCPs. Therefore, its inter-

class alliance in favour of redistribution is weaker than that of the Scandinavian social democracies but certainly more structured than that which emerged in the continental countries and in Italy. In the case of Spain, we can refer to a post-Fordist Mediterranean social democracy that comes close to the Nordic model but with a weaker social base.

6. Conclusions

The article investigated the electoral behaviour of the post-Fordist social classes in eight advanced economies representing the four welfare regimes. More specifically, we tried to understand how the classes' support for the Left evolved between the early 2000s and the late 2010s and what kind of class alliances left parties can rely on now. The starting point of our analysis is that the social structure transformations ensuing from the end of the 1970s onwards have been accompanied by significant changes in the electoral bases of the Left-wing parties. In the post-Fordist age, social groups act differently in comparison with the Industrial age, and new alliances have emerged.

We thus formulated some hypotheses concerning the expected electoral behaviours of four social classes that we consider relevant for the Left: the PWs, the SCPs, the SWs, and the TB. Our analysis has shown that the hypotheses found different empirical confirmation depending on the welfare regime taken into consideration.

First of all, the most-disadvantaged social classes – the PWs and the SWs – confirmed a lower electoral turnout compared to the workforce mean in all the countries analysed (Hp5). However, in the Scandinavian countries - and, to a lower extent, in Spain - their electoral participation remains only moderately lower, and it improved over time.

The hypothesis that the PWs decreased their support to the Left while scaling up their consensus toward the Radical Right (Hp1) is confirmed, but with substantial differences among the regimes. The decline was more radical for the Continental and Southern countries and less intense for the Scandinavian ones. Furthermore, in the late 2010s, support for the Radical Right increased from the PWs in a transversal way, with the exception of Spain - where recently a new far-right party, Vox, has been obtaining unexpected results.

Similarly, the hypothesis that TB is the area of influence of the centre-right parties (Hp4) is confirmed. However, in this case, we have exceptions. In Italy, the PD appears to be the party most voted by the upper class.

Hypotheses Hp2 and Hp3, on the other hand, found only partial confirmation. Empirical analysis suggests that SCPs represent the new area of influence of left-wing parties (Hp2) only in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. On the contrary, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed in the continental and Southern countries – though in Italy the PD managed to retain a significant SCP vote share. With regard to the SWs, their vote appears to be particularly fragmented in the Continental countries and Spain, with all the main parties in open competition (Hp3). On the contrary, in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries, this group's vote has consolidated over time in favour of the left-wing parties - the group moving closer to the parties of the radical right in Denmark. In Italy, the “populist” and radical right pole (M5S and the League) attracted most of these workers' votes.

In terms of conclusive remarks, first our analysis clearly shows that, even though changes in the post-Fordist era were registered in class structure in all the countries analysed, the Left parties' response to this change has varied substantially. In other words, we can identify different *response paths*.

Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon left-wing parties have better countered the post-Fordist transition, curbing the loss of votes among PWs and, at the same time, managing to replace them with the new and growing service workers classes, both SCPs and SWs. However, differences between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon parties have emerged. In the former, the left-wing parties

have been able to build a steadier social bloc between PWs and service workers. In the latter, consensus among lower classes was regained due to three main reasons. Obama's popularity among Afro-Americans helped to retain votes from PWs and LPFs (Lewis-Beck et al. 2010; Powers 2014). Furthermore, the majority electoral system provides the electorate with fewer political alternatives and so far has upheld left-wing parties in reducing centrifugal forces. Finally, the low electoral turnout level (especially in the United States) has overshadowed the post-Fordist transition effect on left-wing parties (Anderson and Beramendi 2012).

Continental and Southern countries undertook a different path. With the exception of Spain, in those countries left-wing parties struggled to represent SWs and, to a lesser extent, SCPs. However, they struggled in different ways. We have thus identified diverse configurations of non-transition to what we might call the *post-Fordist social-democratic social bloc*.

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 the loss of its traditional constituency - the PWs - but it also lost all its consensus to the benefit of new parties that emerged on the right and left. Furthermore, it did not manage to attract service workers.

Italy and Germany in contrast share a more traditional social structure. PWs are still numerous and employment in service sectors is comparatively weaker. The weight of self-employed workers (Petty Bourgeoise) is also high, especially in Italy. This more traditional social structure undermined the post-Fordist challenges, and, consequently, has hindered the left-wing parties in recognizing that service workers are more and more relevant in the post-Fordist social structure. German and Italian left-wing parties followed two different paths. The SPD can be conceived as a *fortress party*, which defends its traditional social bases (PWs, Clerks and Technicians). However, the efforts of the SPD fall short of securing effective results. It actually loses PWs to both the right and left and simultaneously fails to expand significantly in the direction of the new middle classes of the SCPs. The PD can be defined as a *party that uproots itself*: in search of new social bases, mainly in the dependent middle classes and the bourgeoisie, it loses its roots within the PWs. At the same time, as with the SPD, it does not sufficiently attract high and low-skilled service workers.

Contrarily, the path taken by the PSOE is more similar to that of the Scandinavian left-wing parties. In this case, the post-Fordist social bloc gathers the support of PWs, SWs and SCPs with the implication that Spain differs widely from Italy. While the PSOE maintained a broader consensus among PSWs in the context of an increase in PW electoral turnout, the Spanish TB remained firmly loyal to right-wing parties. However, here too, the Spanish Socialist Party is challenged by the radical left parties and, more recently, also by a new far-right. The politics of Southern regimes are therefore diverging. Only further research could investigate this and other within-group differences.

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