

Why do so many people vote ‘unnaturally’? A cultural explanation for voting behaviour

PETER ACHTERBERG & DICK HOUTMAN

Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract. The traditional class approach to politics maintains that the working class ‘naturally’ votes for left-wing parties because they represent its economic interests. Such traditional voting patterns have, however, become less typical, giving rise to the ‘Death of Class Debate’ in political sociology. Against this background, using data collected in the Netherlands in 1997, this article examines why so many people, working and middle class alike, vote for parties that do not represent their ‘real class interests’. Critically elaborating Lipset’s work on working-class authoritarianism and Inglehart’s on postmaterialism, the article confirms that ‘natural’ voting complies with the logic of class analysis. ‘Unnatural’ voting, however, is not driven by economic cues and class. Right-wing working-class voting behaviour is caused by cultural conservatism that stems from limited cultural capital. The pattern of voting for the two small leftist parties in Dutch politics underscores the significance of this cultural explanation: those with limited cultural capital and culturally conservative values vote for the Socialist Party (‘Old Left’) rather than the Greens (‘New Left’). Breaking the traditional monopoly of the one-sided class approach and using a more eclectic and open theoretical approach enables political sociologists once again to appreciate the explanatory power of the class perspective.

Introduction

Studies of the relationship between class and voting are typically based on the assumption that the electorate is inclined to vote for ‘the natural party of their class’ (Heath et al. 1995: 564). Which party is the natural class-party, and hence what actually constitutes ‘natural’ voting behaviour, depends on class-based economic interests. Lipset (1970: 186) speaks of ‘true class interests’ in this context. Owing to their poor economic position, the working class is held to favour economic redistribution and vote for leftist parties. Middle-class citizens are held to reject economic redistribution, because of their privileged economic position, and vote for rightist parties. In short, people are assumed to seek to maintain or even improve their own economic situation at the expense of other classes: voting is regarded as ‘the expression of the democratic class struggle’ (Lipset 1960: 220; see also Nieuwbeerta 1995: 1) – a conception that dominates political sociology.

The empirical validity of this theoretical approach has always been the subject of discussion. For example, when preparing the Second Reform Bill (1867), which was to enfranchise a large part of the working class, members of the British Parliament were afraid they would lose power to leftist parties. Not all members of the working class went on to vote for their own party, however. Many did not and kept the rightist parties in power (McKenzie & Silver 1968). Furthermore, recent studies have indicated that the relationship between class and voting has declined (Nieuwebeerta 1995, 1996). Something appears to be fundamentally wrong with the basic logic of a 'naturally' left-voting working class.

Of course, working-class conservatives constitute only half of the problem. Many members of the middle class also vote for parties that do not match their class position. Manza and Brooks (1999: 66–67) note that, since the 1950s, an increasing proportion of the higher middle class (professionals) in the United States has been voting for a leftist party (i.e., the Democrats). Since the 1970s, this class even appears to be more leftist than rightist. Here, again, there seems to be something fundamentally wrong with the logic of class analysis.

In the light of the traditional class approach, which refers to 'natural' class parties and 'true' class interests, it is difficult to understand why so many people show 'unnatural' voting behaviour by failing to vote for their 'natural' parties following their 'true' class interests. This raises the question of how it can be explained that many people tend to vote contrary to their class interests. After formulating some hypotheses that will allow us to examine the reasons for middle-class citizens voting for the left and working-class citizens voting for the right, we will test these hypotheses using data collected in the Netherlands in 1997.¹

A cultural explanation for 'unnatural' voting behaviour

Many attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of working-class conservatism. Since the Marxist notion of 'false class consciousness' seems to have lost its credibility, various authors have wondered (without applying any empirical tests) whether economic motives could justify a vote for a right-wing party by a member of the working class. Reid (1977: 232) suggests that workers, because of their relatively poor position in the labour market, are hostile to immigrants with whom they compete. Logically, they do not favour immigrants in their country. Consequently, they may vote for a right-wing party opposed to immigration. Weakliem and Heath (1994: 246–247) suggest that workers choose parties emphasising overall economic growth, allowing them to profit only in the longer rather than shorter term.

Reid (1977) and Weakliem and Heath (1994) try to reconcile the phenomenon of working-class conservatism with accepted class theory by stretching the notion of economic interests considerably. While interpreting new facts with the help of existing theories is in itself not problematic, it becomes problematic when nothing more than this is done. That economic interests guide working-class supporters of right-wing parties is merely assumed and needs empirical investigation.

As regards middle-class voters, the notion of economic interests is also being stretched analytically. In the so-called theory of the 'New Class', leftist voting members of the middle class are assumed to pursue economic interests (Bruce-Briggs 1979; Brint 1984; De Graaf & Steijn 1997). Because a large proportion is occupied in public services, they are held to benefit from government intervention because this provides them with job and career opportunities. In short, we see that the economic interests of classes are being stretched considerably without proper and direct empirical evidence.

This stretching of economic class interests underlines the dominance of class analysis in political sociology and the logic that underlies class analysis is not itself open to discussion. In this way, one can, in retrospect, always explain voting behaviour through class: when workers are voting for leftist parties and members of the middle class are voting for rightist parties, it is because they pursue economic (class) interests; when they are, respectively, voting for rightist and leftist parties, it is also because they pursue economic (class) interests.

This fixation on economic interests and economic voting motives is remarkable because, since the 1950s, Lipset has pointed to rightist tendencies in the working class that are not economic in nature. In his influential article 'Democracy and Working-class Authoritarianism', he introduces a distinction between economic values relating to the distribution of wealth and income and cultural values relating to individual liberty and social order and argues that the working class is characterised by economic progressiveness (in favour of economic redistribution) and by authoritarianism (Lipset 1959: 485). Later research has convincingly demonstrated that this working-class authoritarianism is, in fact, an authoritarianism of the poorly educated rather than an authoritarianism of those in a weak economic position (see, e.g., Grabb 1979; Dekker & Ester 1987).

At the same time, Inglehart (1977, 1990) points to leftist tendencies in the middle class. The middle class can be characterised by its 'postmaterialism' in which the importance of individual freedom is stressed. Working-class authoritarianism, characterised by an emphasis on social order, and middle-class postmaterialism, characterised by an emphasis on individual freedom, are mirror images (see, e.g., Middendorp 1991: 262; Dekker et al. 1999).

Authoritarianism and postmaterialism not only correlate strongly (and negatively) with each other, but they also correlate with acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles and instrumental or expressive orientations towards education (Houtman 2003: 74–77). In this article, we refer to this complex of moral and political values, with its emphasis on either individual freedom or social order, as ‘cultural progressiveness/conservatism’ (compare Middendorp 1991; De Witte & Scheepers 1999).

In the social scientific literature concerning cultural progressiveness/conservatism, there is a strong consensus that cultural progressiveness is caused by education. With higher levels of education generally come more culturally progressive values (see Lipsitz 1965; Grabb 1979, 1980; Lipset 1981; Dekker & Ester 1987). Much less consensus exists about the question of whether or not this effect of education on cultural values can be interpreted as a class effect. On the one hand, there are those who argue that it can, because education is generally considered a key indicator of class (see, e.g., Goldthorpe 1980; Lipset 1981; Wright 1985). On the other hand, there are those who argue that although education and class are strongly correlated, education cannot be equated with class (see, e.g., Grabb 1980; Dekker & Ester 1987). Indeed, Inglehart (1977: 72–89) also suggests that the effect of education on postmaterialism cannot be interpreted as a class effect because other class indicators such as occupation and income do not have the same effect on postmaterialism.²

The key question, then, is whether or not the cultural progressiveness of the better educated confirms the theory that explains cultural progressiveness/conservatism through class. Lamont (1987) suggests that cultural capital (i.e., the ability to recognise cultural expressions and comprehend their meaning; see Bourdieu 1984) is decisive. This suggestion is promising for three reasons. First, since Bourdieu’s path-breaking work in this area, education is no longer merely considered a key indicator of the strength of one’s labour market position (‘class’), but of cultural capital as well (see, e.g., Kalmijn 1994; De Graaf & Kalmijn 2001). Second, the validity of education as an indicator of cultural capital is underscored by its substantial positive correlation with cultural participation (see, e.g., DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr 1985; Ganzeboom 1989). Indeed, Bourdieu (1986) makes a distinction between education as an indicator for institutionalised cultural capital and cultural participation as an indicator for embodied cultural capital. Third, although the notion of cultural capital is typically used in studies of school success, social mobility and reproduction of social inequality (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr 1985; Niehof 1997), it also makes sense theoretically to assume that it affects cultural progressiveness. As people have a greater ability to recognise cultural expressions and comprehend their meaning (and thus, as

they have more cultural capital), they are less likely to reject different lifestyles and non-traditional patterns of behaviour as deviant and are more likely to be willing to accept them (see also Gabennesch 1972).

In short, the question of what the relationship between education and cultural progressiveness actually means cannot be answered by an assessment of the statistical effects of occupational class and/or education. Occupational class inevitably mixes up the strength of one's labour market position with the amount of cultural capital as indicated by education. It thus inevitably produces a 'working class' with a weak economic position and a limited amount of cultural capital and a middle class with a strong economic position and ample cultural capital. To bypass the interpretation problems posed by the use of theoretically ambiguous variables such as those, it is necessary to use more explicit indicators for class and cultural capital. Consequently, we will measure the strength of the labour market position using wage dependency, risk of unemployment and income. As explained above, cultural capital can be measured by means of the level of cultural participation (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr 1985). Although we also include education in our analysis, it is no less ambiguous than occupational class because it also taps the strength of one's labour market position and the amount of cultural capital. Consequently, it is likely to have a similar effect on economic progressiveness as the explicit class indicators and a similar effect on cultural conservatism as cultural participation.

This discussion leads us to expect that cultural rather than economic interests will be decisive in explaining 'unnatural' voting behaviour. We expect, therefore, that members of the working class, having a small amount of cultural capital on average, adhere to culturally conservative values that lead them to cast rightist votes. For members of the middle class, exactly the reverse is expected. Because of their larger amount of cultural capital, they are expected to adhere predominantly to culturally progressive values that lead them to vote for leftist parties. As to left-voting members of the working class and right-voting members of the middle classes ('natural' voting), of course, the explanation offered by traditional class analysis, drawing on economic class interests, is expected to be tenable.

In short, in deciding how to vote, we expect that two interests lead to different choices: economic interests related to class, on the one hand, and cultural interests related to cultural capital, on the other. We expect 'natural' voting behaviour in line with class to be caused by class positions and the economically progressive or conservative values to which these give rise (Hypothesis 1). 'Unnatural' voting behaviour may then be attributed to the amount of cultural capital and the culturally conservative or progressive values connected to it (Hypothesis 2). Before we describe how we will test

these hypotheses, we will first elaborate on the data and measurements that will be used.

Data and measurements

All analyses presented in this article were conducted on data that were collected by the second author through the panel of Centerdata (KUB, Tilburg, The Netherlands). This panel is representative of the Dutch population older than 18 years and working more than 20 hours per week ($N = 711$) (for a more detailed description of the data, see Houtman 2003).

Income. For this variable, we used net monthly family income. Thus, we merged each respondent's income with the income of his or her partner. We distinguished ten categories: 1 (fl0 to fl999), 2 (fl1000 to fl1999), and so on, through to 10 (fl9000 or higher) (with fl1000 equivalent to around €450).

Wage dependence. Wage dependence was simply measured by asking all working respondents whether or not they were in salaried employment. Answers were 'No' (1) and 'Yes' (2).

Risk of unemployment. The risk of unemployment was operationalised by asking (1) whether or not respondents had a temporary contract, (2) the number of times the respondent had been unemployed for a period longer than three months since the completion of full-time education, and (3) an estimation of the risk that a person with the same job and the same type of contract (either temporary or permanent) would be forced to look for another job within the next three years. After standardising the answers to these three questions, they were combined into a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Factor analysis produced one factor, explaining 54 per cent of the total variance, and the scale's reliability was 0.67 (Cronbach's alpha). Higher scale scores indicate higher risk of unemployment.

Economic progressiveness/conservatism was measured by means of six Likert-type items that stated, for example, that the government should take measures to reduce income differences and large income differences are unjust because in principle all people are equal.³ Factor analysis produced one factor, explaining 41 per cent of the variance. The reliability of the scale was 0.71 (Cronbach's alpha) and high scores indicate economic progressiveness.

Cultural progressiveness/conservatism was measured using a linear combination of a short version of the F-scale for authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950),

a scale measuring acceptance/rejection of traditional gender roles, a scale measuring expressive/instrumental educational orientations, and Inglehart's index for postmaterialism. Factor analysis produced one factor, explaining 53 per cent of the variance. Factor loadings were -0.82 for authoritarianism, 0.69 for rejection of traditional gender roles, 0.74 for an expressive educational orientation and 0.65 for postmaterialism. The three final measures were reversed and then linearly combined with the F-scale scores in such a way that high scores indicate cultural conservatism.

Cultural participation was measured by asking each respondent the number of books he or she owned; the number of novels he or she had read in the previous three months; the number of times he or she had been to concerts, the theatre, cabaret, or ballet and art exhibitions; the frequency with which he or she spoke with others about art and culture; and the extent to which he or she regarded himself or herself 'a lover of arts and culture'. Factor analysis produced one factor explaining 45 per cent of the variance. The reliability of the scale was 0.79 (Cronbach's alpha) and higher scores indicate more cultural participation.

Education. Seven levels of education were distinguished: no more than elementary education (2.7 per cent); lower vocational education (15.0 per cent); advanced special education (13.6 per cent); five- or six-year secondary education (9.0 per cent); intermediate vocational education (22.6 per cent); higher vocational education (BA degree) (26.3 per cent); and university education (MA degree) (8.0 per cent). As expected, and consistent with the findings of others discussed above, education is strongly and positively related to cultural participation ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). This substantial correlation underscores the fact that education taps not only the strength of one's labour market position, but cultural capital, too.

Voting behaviour. Respondents were asked which party would be the party of their choice if there were elections for the Dutch Parliament the next day. Respondents who indicated that they would vote for Labour (PvdA), the Greens (GroenLinks) or the Socialists (SP) were classified as 'Left'. Respondents who indicated that they would vote for the Liberals (VVD), the Democrats (D66), Christian Democrats (CDA), or one of three small fundamentalist Christian parties (SGP/GPV/RPF) were coded 'Non-Left'. Respondents who indicated that they would not vote or would vote for a party not mentioned, were left out of the analysis.

Social class. We used the EGP-class schema, designed by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, in order to introduce a distinction between 'unnatural' voters

and 'natural' voters. Assignment of class positions to respondents occurred on the basis of (1) their occupational title, (2) whether or not they were self-employed, and (3) the number of employees they managed (see Bakker et al. 1997: 8). The 711 respondents working at least 20 hours a week were assigned an EGP-class position. Class I (15.0 per cent) included higher-grade professionals, self-employed or salaried, higher-grade administrators and officials in central and local government and in public and private enterprises; managers in large industrial establishments; and large proprietors. Class II (30.2 per cent) included lower-grade professionals and higher-grade technicians; lower-grade administrators and officials; managers in small business and industrial establishments and services; and supervisors of non-manual employees. Class III (21.2 per cent) included routine non-manual workers: clerical workers, sales personnel, and other rank-and-file employees in services. Class IV (5.3 per cent) included the petty bourgeoisie: small proprietors, including farmers and smallholders, self-employed artisans and all other 'own account' workers apart from professionals. Class V (7.5 per cent) included supervisors of manual workers and lower-grade technicians. Class VI (5.8 per cent) included skilled manual workers in all branches of industry. Class VII (14.2 per cent) included semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers in industry and agricultural workers. The remainder (0.7 per cent) could not be assigned to any of these groups. Following Andersen and Heath (2002) and Nieuwbeerta (1995), we regarded classes V through VII as working class.⁴

Results

'Natural' and 'unnatural' voters

Table 1 shows the distribution of preferences of members of the seven classes for a left party or a non-left party. It is remarkable that, on the basis of our knowledge of one's class position, no correct prediction can be made about the party one would most likely choose (Cramer's $V = 0.14$, $p > 0.10$). The fact that the working class is just as likely to vote for a rightist party as the middle class underscores the importance of the theoretical problem that is addressed in this article.

In order to explain why so many members of the middle class vote for the left and why so many members of the working class for the right, we thus need to code the respondents into these two different groups: 'natural' and 'unnatural' voters. Using the EGP-class schema, we placed all members of the working class who said they would vote for a non-leftist party and all members of the middle class who said they would vote for a leftist party in the category

Table 1. Leftist voting behaviour by EGP-class position (percentages) ('natural' voters: N = 304 (56.6%); 'unnatural' voters: N = 233 (43.4%); 'unnatural' voting behaviour italicised)

EGP-class	Non-left	Left
Class I	56.0	<i>44.0</i>
Class II	62.4	<i>37.6</i>
Class III	55.0	<i>45.0</i>
Class IV	81.8	<i>18.2</i>
Class V	<i>61.0</i>	39.0
Class VI	<i>57.7</i>	42.3
Class VII	<i>52.4</i>	47.6
Total	59.6	40.4

Note: Cramer's V = 0.14 (p > 0.10).

of 'unnatural' voters. In the category of 'natural' voters, we placed all members of the working class who said they would vote for a leftist party and all members of the middle class who said they would vote for a non-leftist one. In the next section, we focus on finding an explanation for those two types of voting behaviour.

*Do 'natural' voters vote in accordance with their economic interests?
And what about 'unnatural' voters?*

Because the dependent variable in our analyses has only two values, left and non-left, we use logistic regression analysis. As mentioned above, educational level, cultural participation, wage dependence, net family income, risk of unemployment, cultural conservatism and economic progressiveness are the independent variables. EGP class is of course not included as an independent variable, because this would be meaningless for theoretical and statistical reasons. As to theoretical considerations, we have already seen that EGP class fails to affect the vote. More than that, it is this very circumstance that underscores the relevance of the problem addressed in this article. To find out whether, as expected, the logic of class analysis applies only to the 'natural' voters, with 'unnatural' voting stemming from cultural capital and cultural conservatism/progressiveness, unambiguous and explicit indicators for class and cultural capital need to be used. Moreover, including EGP class and simultaneously applying the distinction between 'natural' and 'unnatural' voting would produce a perfect explanation for both sub-samples because EGP-class positions have been used to code the respondents into the two categories. By

Table 2. Explanation of the vote by 'natural' voters (1 = non-left; 2 = left) (logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses, N = 281)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Risk of unemployment	0.093 (ns) (0.092)		0.034 (ns) (0.098)
Wage dependence	2.226* (1.123)		1.193 (ns) (1.137)
Income	-0.410** (0.145)		-0.132 (ns) (0.160)
Educational level	-0.734*** (0.128)		-0.697*** (0.137)
Cultural participation	-0.127 (ns) (0.225)		-0.367 (ns) (0.252)
Economic progressiveness		1.606*** (0.267)	1.216*** (0.311)
Cultural conservatism		0.157 (ns) (0.240)	-0.500 (ns) (0.311)
Constant	1.369 (ns) (1.340)	-6.955*** (1.216)	-0.387 (ns) (2.176)
-2Log likelihood	197.435	227.149	176.547
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.387	0.251	0.474

Notes: *(p < 0.05); **(p < 0.01); ***(p < 0.001); ns = not significant.

implication, all members of the working class in the category of 'natural' voters vote left-wing, while every member of the middle class is voting right-wing. The reverse applies to the category of 'unnatural' voters: we already know that all members of the working class vote for a right-wing party, while all members of the middle class vote for a left-wing party.

Two tables (Tables 2 and 3), each containing information about three estimated models, are presented. The first model is used to estimate the effects of the indicators of class and cultural capital on voting behaviour, the second to estimate the effects of the indicators of economic and cultural progressiveness/conservatism, and the third to estimate the effects of all variables together.

For the 'natural' voters, the two unambiguously cultural variables (cultural participation and cultural conservatism) play no role whatsoever (Table 2). The indicators of the strength of a person's labour market position, however, significantly affect voting behaviour. In the first model, we find significant effects for wage dependence and for family income. For wage-dependent 'natural' voters, the odds of voting left are higher than for those who are not wage depen-

Table 3. Explanation of the vote by 'unnatural' voters (1 = non-left; 2 = left) (logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses, N = 218)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Risk of unemployment	0.130 (ns) (0.091)		0.092 (ns) (0.101)
Wage dependence	-5.555 (ns) (16.174)		-5.701 (ns) (15.961)
Income	0.149 (ns) (0.132)		0.186 (ns) (0.000)
Educational level	0.456*** (0.119)		0.344** (0.128)
Cultural participation	0.854*** (0.208)		0.442 (ns) (0.243)
Economic progressiveness		0.306 (ns) (0.249)	0.490 (ns) (0.270)
Cultural conservatism		-1.835*** (0.284)	-1.147*** (0.340)
Constant	3.581 (ns) (16.190)	5.705*** (1.244)	6.173 (ns) (16.118)
-2Log likelihood	200.244	200.504	179.406
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.375	0.374	0.470

Notes: **($p < 0.01$); ***($p < 0.001$); ns = not significant.

dent, and for those with lower family incomes, the odds of doing so are higher than for those with higher family incomes. These effects disappear after controlling for economic progressiveness in the third model. This means that a poor position on the labour market leads to economic progressiveness, which in turn leads to higher odds of voting for the left. Finally, a higher level of education increases the odds of voting for a non-left party, while a lower level of education decreases the odds of voting for a party on the left. Like the effects of wage dependence and income, this negative effect of educational level thus needs to be understood in terms of class-related economic interests.

In the final model, level of education and economic progressiveness explain almost 50 per cent of the variance of the voting behaviour of the 'natural' voters. The first hypothesis is thus accepted: 'natural' voting behaviour can be explained by class position and by the economically progressive or conservative values resulting from this class position. This is not a remarkable finding, of course, because it is exactly what class analysis has been assuming all along. However, the importance of this finding becomes clear when we look at the results of a similar type of analysis for the 'unnatural' voters (Table 3).

Risk of unemployment, wage dependence, family income and economic progressiveness, all class-related variables, play no role whatsoever in explaining 'unnatural' voting behaviour. The effect of cultural participation (an indicator of cultural capital), however, is significant and positive in the first model, indicating higher odds of voting left for those who participate more actively in different forms of culture. This effect disappears after controlling for cultural conservatism in the third model. The effect of cultural conservatism is significant and negative, indicating that culturally progressive people are more inclined to vote for a left-wing party. This means that, as expected, people with a larger amount of cultural capital are more culturally progressive, which increases the odds of voting for a party on the left. The effect of level of education is significant and positive in the first as well as the third model, which needs to be understood in a cultural sense. It indicates that the odds of voting for a left-wing party increase as the educational level of the 'unnatural' voters increase. This effect clearly contrasts with the effect of education found in our analysis of the 'natural' voters. Note that, in the final model, about 50 per cent of the variance of the voting behaviour of the 'unnatural' voters is explained by level of education and cultural conservatism. This closely resembles the percentage of variance explained in the analysis for the 'natural' voters. Therefore, the cultural explanation of voting behaviour is equally valuable for explaining 'unnatural' voting behaviour as the class explanation is for explaining 'natural' voting behaviour. In short, the second hypothesis is also accepted: 'unnatural' voting behaviour can be explained by a person's cultural capital and the cultural values resulting from it.

The role of education in both analyses deserves some comments. In the first analysis (Table 2), its effect is negative, in the second one (Table 3), it is positive. This confirms the ambiguous nature of education as an indicator of class and cultural capital simultaneously. It is also remarkable that, in Tables 2 and 3, the direct effects of education on voting behaviour do not disappear after controlling for economic and cultural values. This suggests that voting behaviour is not only value-rationally motivated (i.e., driven by economic and cultural progressiveness/conservatism), but that economic and cultural identities related to economic and cultural positions (both indicated by education) also play a role (compare Weakliem & Heath 1994).

'Natural' voters base their votes on economic motives that flow from their economic positions, but class-based economic interests do not drive the behaviour of 'unnatural' voters. The latter is based on cultural voting motivations that are connected to cultural capital. Rightist-voting members of the working class and leftist-voting members of the middle class, in short, vote the way they do because their voting behaviour is culturally rather than economically motivated. Working-class votes for the left and middle-class votes for the right are,

as they are traditionally expected to be, caused by economic voting motivations, attributable to the strength of a person's class position and the economic interests this entails. The rightist-voting working class is, in short, likely to remain an unresolved problem as long as students of political behaviour neglect the cultural dynamics that underlie voting behaviour.

The Socialist Party and the Greens: Old Left and New Left

The importance of the cultural explanation can also be demonstrated by an analysis of differences in motivations for voting for the two small leftist parties in the Dutch Parliament: the Socialist Party (SP) and the Greens (Groen-Links). We restrict our analysis to the 63 respondents with a preference for either of these two parties and use a level of significance of 10 per cent. After all, because of this small number of respondents, relatively strong effects are not easily found to be significant in the logistic regression analysis.

Table 4 demonstrates that the choice between these two parties can be understood reasonably well in a cultural sense. The first model demonstrates

Table 4. Explanation of the vote for the Socialist Party (1) and the Greens (2) (logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parenthesis; N = 63)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Risk of unemployment	-0.005 (ns) (0.130)		-0.006 (ns) (0.138)
Wage dependence	1.490 (ns) (1.009)		1.018 (ns) (1.044)
Income	0.134 (ns) (0.295)		0.052 (ns) (0.319)
Educational level	0.147 (ns) (0.194)		0.061 (ns) (0.204)
Cultural participation	0.668~ (0.366)		0.330 (ns) (0.386)
Economic progressiveness		-0.776~ (0.467)	-0.656 (ns) (0.491)
Cultural conservatism		-1.394** (0.446)	-1.025* (0.528)
Constant	-1.350 (ns) (1.287)	-7.496** (2.538)	-4.781 (ns) (3.284)
-2Log likelihood	69.730	66.821	64.880
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.213	0.266	0.300

Notes: ~($p < 0.10$); *($p < 0.05$); **($p < 0.01$); ns = not significant.

that people who participate culturally more actively (an indicator of cultural capital) are more inclined to vote for the Greens than for the Socialist Party. We observe that, despite the fact that this effect is significant at the 10 per cent level only, the first model explains about 20 per cent of the variance of voting for either the Socialist Party or the Greens. The second model shows that cultural progressiveness/conservatism is important for choosing between these two parties. The odds of voting for the Greens are higher as people are more culturally progressive. Our analysis also shows that economic progressiveness/conservatism affects the choice between these two parties, although this effect is small. More economically progressive voters tend to vote for the Socialists. The third model estimates the effects for all indicators and only finds a significant effect for cultural conservatism, which is in the same direction as the effect found in the second model. So, the effect of cultural participation found in the first model disappears after controlling for cultural conservatism. This implies that cultural conservatism mediates the effect of cultural participation.

The choice between the two small leftist parties does not appear to depend much on economic motives. This is not surprising because few are able to tell in exactly what way these two parties differ as to their ideas on socio-economic policy. Consequently, supporters of those two parties differ only with respect to cultural progressiveness/conservatism, which is connected with their amount of cultural capital. Supporters of the Socialist Party are more culturally conservative than those of the Greens. The latter party can be characterised as 'New Left' (Inglehart 1990), whereas 'Old Left' is the characterisation that best fits the Socialist Party.

Table 3 demonstrates that members of the middle class who vote for a leftist party do so for cultural reasons: they vote left because they are culturally progressive. It appears that culturally progressive values lead people to vote for the Greens, a 'New Left' party. 'Unnatural' voters from the middle class, in short, vote predominantly for 'New Left', while 'natural' voters from the working class, following their culturally conservative values, vote predominantly for parties such as the Socialists. This leads us to expect that a similar explanation will prove tenable for the distinction between old and new-rightist parties. A vote for either Pim Fortuyn's LPF (New Right) or the Liberals (VVD; Old Right) in the 2002 and 2003 parliamentary elections in the Netherlands is likely to be explainable by means of this cultural logic, too. We hope to address this issue in a future article.

Conclusion

The class approach to politics has been designed to explain why members of the working class vote for a leftist party and members of the middle class vote

for a rightist party. However, with its one-sided focus on differences in economic position and the political values resulting from this, class analysis does not succeed in explaining why members of the working class increasingly vote right and members of the middle class increasingly vote left. Using theoretical insights that depart from the economic logic of class analysis, we developed, tested and confirmed a supplementary explanation for voting behaviour, which focuses on cultural rather than economic differences. Our findings demonstrate that interests linked to cultural capital account for votes contrary to class interests ('unnatural' voting behaviour). This cultural explanation also explains why people vote for one of the two small leftist parties in the Dutch Parliament. Those with little cultural capital and, related to that, culturally conservative values, are more likely to vote for the Socialist Party (Old Left) than for The Greens (New Left).

This does not mean that class analysis has become obsolete. Although it cannot explain 'unnatural' votes, it provides a very good explanation of 'natural' ones. It is important to stress that the proposed cultural explanation for voting behaviour does not conflict with class analysis. It rather supplements it by giving cultural interests, which also affect voting behaviour, their due attention. Acknowledging the importance of such a cultural explanation may eventually even be the only way to salvage class analysis. After all, the latter's one-sided focus on class interests easily leads to the mistaken conclusion (based on evidence such as that reported in Table 1) that class has no more value for explaining voting behaviour. It is only a small step then towards the sombre conclusion that class is dead. See, for instance, the research literature with titles such as 'Are Social Classes Dying?' (Clark & Lipset 1991), 'The Death of Class' (Pakulski & Waters 1996), 'The End of Class Politics?' (Evans 1999) and 'The Breakdown of Class Politics' (Clark & Lipset 2001).

An ironic conclusion forces itself upon us. Precisely its traditional dominance in the study of voting behaviour seems to be the principal cause of the current impression that the explanatory power of the class approach to politics is on the wane. Class analysis may be saved from a premature death by breaking up its virtual theoretical monopoly. We believe that paying due attention to crosscutting cultural interests and voting motivations does exactly this. Using such an eclectic and open theoretical approach enables political sociologists to once again appreciate the explanatory power of the class perspective.

Notes

1. Our data have been collected before the national elections of 2002, which produced a landslide victory for the late Pim Fortuyn's notorious rightist-populist LPF. Thus

- extremist right-wing parties are absent from our analysis – a typical feature of the Dutch political landscape until the 2002 national elections.
2. Note however, that Inglehart's alternative interpretation of this effect – as stemming from parental affluence – is not empirically sustained either (compare Houtman 2003: 66–82).
 3. The six items that were used for economic progressiveness are: Government should increase social benefits; poverty no longer exists in the Netherlands; large differences in income are unjust because all people are principally equal; workers today do not need to compete for an equal position in society; government should take rigorous measures to reduce differences in income; and companies should be obliged to give their employees a share of the profits.
 4. Goldthorpe (1980) considers classes VI and VII the working class(es). It can also be argued that members of class III belong to the working class, too, because the nature of their work is highly routinised (compare Wright 1979). If classes VI and VII rather than classes V, VI and VII are regarded as the working class, this does not substantially change the results as they are reported in this article.

References

- Adorno, T.W., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D.J. & Sandford, R.N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Andersen, R. & Heath, A. (2002). Class matters: The persisting effects of contextual social class on individual voting in Britain, 1964–97. *European Sociological Review* 18(2): 125–138.
- Bakker, B., Sieben, I., Nieuwbeerta, P. & Ganzeboom, H. (1997). Maten voor prestige, sociaal-economische status en sociale klasse voor de standaard beroepenclassificatie 1992. *Sociale Wetenschappen* 40(1): 1–22.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Brint, S. (1984). 'New class' and cumulative trend explanations of the liberal political attitudes of professionals. *American Journal of Sociology* 90(1): 30–71.
- Bruce-Briggs, B. (ed.) (1979). *The new class?* San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace.
- Clark, T.N. & Lipset, S.M. (1991). Are social classes dying? *International Sociology* 6(4): 397–410.
- Clark, T.N. & Lipset, S.M. (eds) (2001). *The breakdown of class politics: A debate on post-industrial stratification*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- De Graaf, N.D. & Steijn, A.J. (1997). De 'service' klasse in Nederland: Een voorstel tot aanpassing van de EGP-klassenindeling. *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 18(1–2): 131–154.
- De Graaf, P.M. & Kalmijn, M. (2001). Trends in the intergenerational transmission of cultural and economic status. *Acta Sociologica* 44(1): 51–66.
- De Witte, H. & Scheepers, P. (eds) (1999). *Ideology in the Low Countries: Trends, models and lacunae*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Dekker, P. & Ester, P. (1987). Working-class authoritarianism: A re-examination of the Lipset thesis. *European Journal of Political Research* 15(4): 395–415.

- Dekker, P., Ester, P. & van den Broek, A. (1999). Fixing left and right: Value orientations according to Middendorp and Inglehart. In H. de Witte & P. Scheepers (eds), *Ideology in the Low Countries: Trends, models and lacunae*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- DiMaggio, P. (1982). Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of US high school students. *American Sociological Review* 47(2): 189–201.
- DiMaggio, P. & Mohr, J. (1985). Cultural capital, educational attainment and marital selection. *American Journal of Sociology* 90(6): 1231–1261.
- Evans, G. (ed.) (1999). *The end of class politics? Class voting in comparative context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gabennesch, H. (1972). Authoritarianism as world view. *American Journal of Sociology* 77(5): 857–875.
- GANZEBOOM, H. (1989). *Cultuurdeelname in Nederland*. Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum.
- Goldthorpe, J. (1980). *Social mobility and class structure in modern Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grabb, E.G. (1979). Working-class authoritarianism and tolerance of outgroups: A reassessment. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43(1): 36–47.
- Grabb, E.G. (1980). Marxist categories and theories of class: The case of working-class authoritarianism. *Pacific Sociological Review* 23(4): 359–376.
- Heath, A., Evans, G. & Payne, C. (1995). Modelling the class-party relationship in Britain, 1964–92. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A* 158(3): 563–574.
- Houtman, D. (2003). *Class and politics in contemporary social science: 'Marxism lite' and its blind spot for culture*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Inglehart, R. (1977). *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kalmijn, M. (1994). Assortive mating by cultural and economic occupational status. *American Journal of Sociology* 100(2): 422–452.
- Lamont, M. (1987). Cultural capital and the liberal political attitudes of professionals: Comment on Brint. *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1): 1501–1506.
- Lipset, S.M. (1959). Democracy and working-class authoritarianism. *American Sociological Review* 24(4): 482–501.
- Lipset, S.M. (1960). *Political man*. New York: Doubleday.
- Lipset, S.M. (1970). *Revolution and counter-revolution*. New York: Doubleday.
- Lipset, S.M. (1981). *Political man* (expanded and updated edn). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lipsitz, L. (1965). Working-class authoritarianism: A re-evaluation. *American Sociological Review* 30(1): 103–109.
- Manza, J. & Brooks, C. (1999). *Social cleavages and political change: Voter alignments and US party coalitions*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- McKenzie, R. & Silver, A. (1968). *Angels in marble: Working-class conservatives in urban England*. London: Heineman.
- Middendorp, C.P. (1991). *Ideology in Dutch politics: The democratic system reconsidered, 1970–1985*. Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum.
- Niehof, J. (1997). *Resources and social reproduction: The effects of cultural and material resources on educational and occupational careers in industrial nations at the end of the twentieth century*. Groningen/Utrecht/Nijmegen: ICS.

- Nieuwbeerta, P. (1995). *The democratic class struggle in twenty countries, 1945–1990*. Amsterdam: Thesis.
- Nieuwbeerta, P. (1996). The democratic class struggle in postwar societies: Class voting in twenty countries, 1945–1990. *Acta Sociologica* 39(4): 345–383.
- Pakulski, J. & Waters, M. (1996). *The death of class*. London/Delhi: Sage.
- Reid, I. (1977). *Social class differences in modern Britain*. London: Open Books.
- Weakliem, D.L. & Heath, A.F. (1994). Rational choice and class voting. *Rationality and Society* 6(2): 243–271.
- Wright, E.O. (1979). *Class structure and income determination*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wright, E.O. (1985). *Classes*. London: Verso.

Address for correspondence: Peter Achterberg, Faculty of Social Sciences (M6-07), Erasmus University Rotterdam, PO Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Tel.: +31 10 4082068; Fax: +31 10 4089098; E-mail: p.achterberg@fsw.eur.nl