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Social Class, Union Power and Perceptions of Political Voice: Liberal Democracies, 1974-2016

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ABSTRACT:

Focusing on the role of social class as a determinant of individuals' perceptions of being politically represented, or having political voice, this paper analyses responses to a survey question that asks respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement that «people like me don't have any say about what the government does.» We draw on surveys fielded by the International Social Survey Program in 19 liberal democracies between 1996 and 2016. For a subset of 7 countries, we also analyze data from a cross-national survey asking the same question in the mid-1970s, allowing us to explore class gaps in perceptions of political voice over a longer time horizon. We show that there is a very clear class hierarchy in perceptions of being politically represented, with less skilled, routine workers feeling poorly represented and middle-class professionals feeling well represented, and that social class trumps relative income as a determinant of perceptions of being represented in politics. We also show that class gaps in perceptions of political voice have been remarkably stable over time. Finally, our analysis shows that the effects of union membership on workers' perceptions of being represented in politics have changed. In the 1970s, unskilled workers and skilled production workers who were union members perceived themselves as having more political influence than their non-union counterparts, but this is no longer the case today.

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Focusing on the role of social class as a determinant of individuals' perceptions of being politically represented, or having political voice, this paper analyses responses to a survey question that asks respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement that "people like me don't have any say about what the government does." We draw on surveys fielded by the International Social Survey Program in nineteen liberal democracies between 1996 and 2016. For a subset of seven countries, we also analyse data from a cross-national survey asking the same question in the mid-1970s, allowing us to explore class gaps in perceptions of political voice over a longer time horizon.

The topic of unequal political representation by income or social class has attracted the attention of students of comparative politics as well as American politics in recent years. Following Gilens' (2012) approach to this topic, recent studies suggest that the US is by no means the only case of unequal responsiveness. In Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, the probability of policy change rises significantly when policy change is supported by high-income citizens and much less, if at all, when it is only supported by low- and middle-income citizens (Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer 2020; Schakel 2019; Mathisen 2019; and Persson 2020). Pooling data for some 20 liberal democracies, Schakel, Burgoon and Hakverdian's (2019) comparative analysis also suggests that "pro-rich bias" in policy responsiveness is pervasive. Other comparative studies show that the ideological dispositions and policy preferences of members of parliament are more closely aligned with the dispositions and preferences of affluent citizens than with low-income citizens (Giger et al. 2012; Rosset et al. 2013; Rosset and Stecker 2019; Lupu and Warner 2020).[12]

[1] Exemplified by Bartels (2016), yet a third strand of research on unequal representation matches legislative votes by members of parliament with the preferences of their constituents sorted by income (see also Becher Stegmueller and Käppner 2018 and Lloren and Wüest 2019). For our present purposes, it is not necessary to review debates generated by recent scholarship on unequal representation.

How and why perceptions of being represented in politics vary across individuals, across countries and over time are questions of intrinsic interest. Moreover, a long-standing behaviouralist literature teaches us that such perceptions matter for electoral turnout and other forms of participation. Beyond such considerations, we believe that the "subjectivist turn" that we make in this paper can serve to advance the literature on unequal representation. Specifically, we seek to address two blindspots in this literature by leveraging perceptions of having political influence.

The first blindspot pertains to what Powell (2004: 101) refers to as the "daunting task" of creating a "yardstick" for comparing political representation—and, by extension, *inequality in representation*—across countries. Gilens' influential 2012 study measures unequal responsiveness by the effect of support for policy change in different income groups on the probability of policy change being adopted. The obvious problem with this approach is that it averages across policy proposals that differ not only in their scope but also in their salience for different income groups. As each national study of this type relies on a unique set of survey items, it becomes quite dubious to compare estimated effects of public opinion on policy adoption across countries. Importantly for our present purposes, cross-temporal comparisons are also problematic to the extent that the questions asked in surveys change over time. As suggested by Powell (2004), citizens' own assessments of government responsiveness might serve, at least provisionally, as a "yardstick" for cross-national and cross-temporal comparison.

The second blindspot that we seek to address has to do with the focus on income groups in recent literature on unequal representation of policy preferences related to distributive conflicts. With very exceptions (notably Elsässer 2018 and Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer 2020; see also Lindh and McCall 2020), this literature operationalizes unequal representation in terms of the representation of low-, middle- and high-income citizens. Setting data-related reasons aside, this setup is attractive in that the three groups are of equal size and, from a normative point of view, ought to have the same the same political influence. However, it seems quite likely that at least some of the unequal representation documented by recent literature actually has to do with other forms of social

inequality. As indicated already, we will focus here on the question on how relative income and social class compare as determinants of respondents' perceptions of themselves as being represented in politics. For reasons that we will articulate shortly, we are also interested in exploring the effects of union membership on perceptions of being represented and in exploring how class membership and union membership interact with each.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We first elaborate on the specific questions that we seek to address, set out working hypotheses, and present the class schema that we employ. We then present the survey data that we analyse, introduce other variables included in our analyses and briefly discuss model specifications. The empirical results are presented in two steps. To begin with, we estimate effects of relative income, class membership and union membership with data for 1996-2016, for individual countries as well as the entire sample of nineteen countries. We then explore temporal changes in class gaps and the effects of union membership: first, for the 19 countries over the period from 1996 to 2016 and then for 6-7 countries over the period from 1974 to 2016.

To anticipate, we find that there is a very clear class hierarchy in perceptions of being politically represented, with less skilled, routine workers feeling poorly represented and middle-class professionals feeling well represented, and that social class trumps relative income as a determinant of perceptions of being represented in politics (or not). We also find thate class gaps in perceptions of political voice have been remarkably stable over time, going as far back as the mid-1970s. Finally, our analysis shows that the effects of union membership on workers' perceptions of not being represented in politics have changed over time. In the 1970s, unskilled workers and skilled production workers who were union members perceived themselves as having more political influence than their non-union counterparts, but this is no longer the case today.

Needless to say perhaps, our inquiry bears on the relationship between unequal representation and working-class support for "populist" parties and politicians. We will address this question in the conclusion.

Questions and hypotheses

Again, the survey question that we analyse asks respondents about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that "people like me do not have any say about what the government does." This question has been included in many American public opinion surveys over the last 50 years and the answers that it yields are commonly interpreted by students of political behaviour as indicative of individuals' sense of "external political efficacy." Following Balch (1974), the behaviouralist literature distinguishes between internal efficacy, which refers to belief in one's capacity to participate effectively in politics, and external efficacy, which refers to the belief that government institutions and political leaders respond to the demands of citizens who participate.[3]

Esaiasson, Kölln and Turper (2015) argue that perceived government responsiveness should not be conflated with external political efficacy, which they characterize as "generalized and affectively charged beliefs about the representative system" (434). Conceiving perceptions of government responsiveness as more objective assessments pertaining to specific policies and specific political actors, these authors propose survey instruments that ask respondents to rate decision-makers in terms of whether they inform themselves as to the wishes of citizens and make decisions in line with those wishes. It should also be noted that a number of recent cross-national surveys have fielded other questions pertaining to representation and responsiveness. To cite only a couple of examples, Whitefield's (2006) comparative analysis of public perceptions of political representation in post-communist states includes a question asking respondents whether they agree that "government acts for the benefit of the majority" (740) while Rohrschneider (2005) seeks to explain cross-national

[3] See Arzheimer (2008) for a review of the literature on internal and external political efficacy. The standard practice in this literature is to create an index of external political efficacy based on answers to the survey question we use and to a second question, asking respondents whether or not they subscribe to the statement "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." While behaviouralists typically treat external efficacy as an independent variable, some recent contributions to the US literature on this topic seek to explain variation in external efficacy across individuals and over time. Of particular interest for our present purposes, Norris (2015) leverages variation across US states to argue that income inequality reduces mean levels of external efficacy.

variation support of the statement thatnational political institutions make sure that EU decisions "are in the interest of people like yourself" (857).

The primary reason why we stick with the standard "efficacy question" is that this question allows us to include more countries in our analysis and, most importantly, to encompass a longer time span than any other survey question about political representation or government responsiveness of which we are aware.[4] In addition, we believe that the formulation of this question is well suited for our purposes in that it asks respondents to identify themselves as members of a segment of the population ("people like me") and then to assess the extent to which this segment—as distinct from citizens in general or the majority—wields political influence.

The literature on unequal government responsiveness leads us to expect that low-income citizens are more likely to think that "people like me" have no say in what government does than high-income citizens. The same goes for working-class respondents relative to middle-class professionals (or semi-professionals). As indicated at the outset, one objective of this paper is to assess the relative importance of income and class membership as determinants of perceptions of having political influence (or not). If politicians catering to potential campaign funders is the primary mechanism behind unequal responsiveness, we would expect relative income to be the main determinant of such perceptions. More precisely, we might expect the rich to perceive themselves as having political influence while most other citizens would, more or less equally, perceive themselves as having little or no influence. However, the fact unequal responsiveness can be observed not only in the US, but also in countries where election campaigns are primarily funded by public subsidies suggests that there is more to unequal responsiveness than the role of (private) money in electoral politics. As many studies have shown, voting and other forms of political participation that do not involve financial contributions vary not only by income, but also by education, social status and civic skills (Schlozman, Verba and

[4] In addition, the surveys that include this question allow us to operationalize social class membership in an appropriate manner (see below).

Brady 2012; Dalton 2017). American political scientists commonly conceive these attributes as a composite continuous variable called "socio-economic status" (SES), but they might equally be conceived as attributes of social class (Savage 2015).

Descriptive (mis)representation is another causal mechanism that features prominently in the new literature on unequal representation. While unequal responsiveness is typically measured in terms of responsiveness to income groups, studies of how social background shapes the personal preferences of legislators as well as their responsiveness to constituents and interest groups emphasize occupational background, often conceived as a proxy for social class (e.g., Carnes 2013, O'Grady 2019, Hemingway 2020). Related to this particular mechanism of unequal representation, yet another reason why we expect social class to be a more important determinant of perceptions of being represented than relative income groups has to do with how citizens conceive their social identity. Simply put, income groups are entirely abstract while social classes are arguably more concrete, certainly more "categorical," and hence more readily perceived as groups to which one does or does not belong. Though intergenerational class mobility is quite common, the vast majority of individuals do not change objective class position over their working life. By comparison, mobility in the income distribution would appear to be much more common (Eriksson and Goldthorpe 2010). It follows from this, we hypothesize, that social class is more relevant than one's place in the income distribution when survey respondents are prompted to think of "people like me."

Our core hypothesis about social class focuses on the distinction between working-class and middle-class citizens. As we will explain shortly, the class schema that we employ in our empirical analyses also distinguishes between the unskilled and skilled workers and between the (lower) middle class and the upper middle class. We leave it as an open empirical question whether or not more fine-grained class distinctions matter for perceptions of being politically represented.

The second objective of this paper is to assess changes in citizens' perceptions of being politically represented. Again, we first explore whether or not class differences in such perceptions

changed over the period from 1996 to 2016 with ISSP data for 19 countries and then, drawing on additional source of survey data, explore changes from the mid-1970s to the mid-2010 for a subset of 6-7 countries.

For lack of survey data on citizens' policy preferences prior to the 1980s or 1990s, the literature on income or class bias in government responsiveness has not been very attentive to temporal change,[5] but many of the explanations of unequal responsiveness proposed in this literature suggest that political inequality has increased along with economic inequality over the last three or four decades. As electoral turnout fell significantly in many countries over the 1980s and 1990s, the turnout gap between low-income and high-income citizens appears to have increased (see, e.g., Armingeon and Schädel 2015). Union decline represents another pervasive trend that would lead us to expect that unequal representation has increased and that working-class citizens, in particular, feel less well represented today than they did in the 1970s or 1980s. Historically, unions have not only mobilized working-class citizens to vote, but also served as a counterweight to lobbying by corporate interests and wealthy citizens in the domain of legislative politics and executive policy-making (Pontusson 2013). Finally, it appears to be the case that the "political class" has become more exclusively university-educated and that the number of career politicians, without strong occupational attachments prior to entering politics, has increased in most of the countries included in our analyses (Best 2007, Alexiadou 2016, Bovens and Wille 2017). In conjunction with changes in electoral participation and interest-group politics, the "professionalization" of politics has arguably contributed to the political marginalization of the working class.

[5] Elsässer's (2018) study of German labor-market and social-policy legislation represents a noteworthy exception. Based on data going back to the early 1980s, Elsässer finds that legislators have always been less responsive to the preferences of working-class citizens than to the preferences of middle-class professionals and small business. Gilens (2012) presents evidence suggesting that government policy in the US was less responsive to the preferences of affluent citizens in the 1960s than in the time period covered by his main analysis (1981-2002), but it does not appear to be the case that policy was more responsive to the preferences of low- and middle-income citizens in the earlier period.

The aforementioned changes might be conceived as slow-moving trends with incremental effects on class differences in perceptions of being politically represented. Drawing on earlier literature in comparative political economy, an alternative view posits that the 1980s marked a more abrupt change in the distribution of power among social classes.[6] What we have in mind here is the idea that the *trentes glorieuses* involved institutionalized class compromise or, in other words, a "postwar settlement" that incorporated the working class and its organized representatives through the expansion of the welfare state and various forms of corporatist interest intermediation. As Margaret Thatcher so clearly recognized, the Keynesian policy paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s rendered governments vulnerable to strike activity and other forms of worker disruption by positing that the macroeconomy would be managed through bargaining with unions rather than fluctuations in the rate of unemployment. By all counts, 1978-82 represents a major turning point in this regard, not only in Thatcherite Britain (and Reaganite America) but across the OECD world, with governments henceforth abandoning full employment as a policy objective and increasingly relying on monetary policy, implemented by independent central banks, rather than incomes policy to keep inflationary pressures in check. The details of this shift in macroeconomic policy paradigms need not concern us here. Suffice it say that the standard interpretation of the shift from "Keynesianism" to "neoliberalism" leads us to expect that workers, especially unionized workers, experienced a decline in their political influence from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s.

Directly related to the above, the third (and final) objective of this paper is to explore how union membership affects people's perceptions of being represented in politics and, in particular, whether or not the effects of union membership on the perceptions of working-class citizens have changed over time. As a baseline, we hypothesize that unions may have two countervailing effects on members' perceptions of their political influence. On the premise that union members identify with

[6] The relevant literature includes, most notably, Scharpf (1991), Hall (1993), Blyth (2002) and Baccaro and Howell (2017).

policy proposals (or demands) put forth by unions and that unions wield some capacity to sway policy-makers, the first hypothesis is that union member perceive themselves as having more political influence than non-union respondents. There is, however, another possibility, namely that rhetoric and practices of unions make their members more aware of political as well as economic inequality and therefore more prone to agree with the (quite strong) statement that "people like me don't have any say about what government does."[7] An obvious question that arises is whether the relative importance of the two effects varies dependent on the class affiliation of union members. Regarding changes in the effects of union membership over time, the preceding discussion leads us to expect that unionized workers perceived themselves as having more political influence in the mid-1970s than they do today.

Social classes

Identifying social classes based on occupational categories, our empirical analysis relies on a modified version of the class schema proposed by Oesch (2006), the current "industry standard" among students of comparative European politics interested in the effects of social class on policy preferences and voting behaviour (e.g., Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Ares 2020; Rennwald 2020). Summarized very briefly, the Oesch class schema involves two dimensions: a vertical dimension on which classes are distinguished by skill levels, the marketability of skills and working conditions conceived in terms of authority and autonomy; and horizontal dimension on which (some) classes are distinguished by "work logics" or, in other words, the type of work people perform.

Oesch sorts employees into four vertical classes: the routine working class, the skilled working class, the middle class, and the upper middle class. On the horizontal dimension, he then divides each of these classes based on three work logics: a technical work logic (production work in the case of

[7] See Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) on the effects of union membership on attitudes towards income inequality and redistribution.

workers), an organizational work logic (clerical work) and an interpersonal work logic (service work). Ignoring work logics, Oesch identifies four additional classes of people who do not work for someone else: large employers, self-employed professionals, small business owners with employees and small business owners without employees. Altogether, then, the Oesch class schema consists of as many 16 small classes.

To simplify matters, the main class categories that we employ are based on the vertical dimension of the Oesch class schema and we will fold large employers and self-employed professionals into the "upper middle class."[8] In addition, we collapse small business owners with and without employees. Thus we end up with five large classes: the upper middle class (large employers, professionals, managers, bankers and civil servants), the middle class (teachers, nurses, associate managers, technicians), the skilled working class, the routine working class and the small business class (including farmers and self-employed craftsmen).[9]

We focus on the vertical class dimension not only to reduce the number of classes (and thus preserve statistical power), but also because this dimension would appear to be most salient for our present purposes. While there are good reasons to suppose that "work logics" affect people's policy preferences (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014), we cannot think of any obvious reasons why, for example, technical professionals (engineers) would perceive themselves as more or less politically influential than socio-cultural professionals. In due course, however, we will distinguish between, on the one hand, production workers and, on the other hand, clerical and service workers. We do so because production workers have historically been the core of organized labour and arguably occupied a privileged position in the postwar politics of class compromise (that is, relative to other workers).

[8] Restricted to the vertical dimension, Oesch's class schema ends up being very similar to that of Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992).
[9] See Table A1 in the Appendix for survey-based estimates of the relative size of these five classes.

Data, variables and model specifications

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) has fielded five surveys that included the question about not having any "say about what government does" since 1996, three in module "Role of Government" (1996, 2006, 2016) and two in the module "Citizenship" (2004, 2014). Our analysis of ISSP data for this time period encompasses all countries that satisfy the following three criteria: (a) they can be characterized as liberal democracies, (b) they participated in at least two surveys, and (c) their surveys include sufficient information about respondents' occupation to implement the class schema described above. This makes for a sample of 19 countries.[10] Analysing changes over time, we pool data for 2004 with data for 2006 and data for 2014 with data for 2016, so that we end up with three temporal observations (1996, 2004/6 and 2014/6). As indicated at the outset, we also supplement ISSP data with data from the 1974 Political Action Survey to explore changes in perceptions of being represented over a longer time span in a subset of seven countries: Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States.[11] Because Austria, Finland and the Netherlands did not participate in the ISSP Role-of-Government Module of 1996, the three temporal observations in this analysis are 1974, 2004/6 and 2014/6. Moreover, the Austrian Political Action Survey of 1974 did not ask about union membership: consequently, we with replicate our analysis with and without Austria.

The ISSP surveys invited respondents to express their views in terms of a five-point Likert scale running from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly" via "agree," "neither agree nor disagree" and "disagree." In the 1974 Political Action Survey, the (neutral) middle response category was not included as option. All the analyses presented in this paper rely on a binary distinction between

[10] The 19 countries are Australia (5 surveys), France (5), Germany (5), Great Britain (5), Norway (5), Spain (5), Sweden (5), Switzerland (5), United States (5), Denmark (4 surveys), Finland (4), New Zealand, Belgium (3 surveys), Canada (3), Ireland (3), Netherlands (3), Austria (2 surveys), Iceland (2) and Portugal (2).

[11] We downloaded data from the Political Action Survey as well as the ISSP surveys from the GESIS Data Archive (https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA0765 and https://www.gesis.org/en/issp/home).

respondents who agree with statement (either strongly agree or simply agree) and those who do not agree. Thus we estimate logistic regression models and avoid the complications involved in interpretating the results of ordered logistic regression models. We include respondents who chose the middle response category among those who do not agree with the statement when we analyse only ISSP data, but we drop these respondents when we pool data from the ISSP and the Political Action Survey.[12] Simply put, we estimate the effects of the independent variables on the probability that a respondent will agree with the statement that "people like me don't have any say about what government does."

For reasons set out above, the independent variables of primary interest are social class, relative income and union membership. Union membership is a simple dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent is a union member, otherwise zero. As for social class, respondents are assigned to one of Oesch's 16 small classes based on their current or past employment and these classes are then aggregated to form larger classes (the number of which varies across models). The initial assignment to small classes is based on three variables: occupation (ISCO codes), employment status (employee, self-employed or employer) and, for employers, the number of employees (employers with more than 9 employees being coded as "large employers"). While 4-digit ISCO-88 and ISCO-08 codes readily allow for the operationalization of the Oesch class schema with ISSP data, the 1974 Political Action Survey includes 3-digit ISCO-68 codes that we have translated into 4-digit ISCO-88 codes.[13] Because national surveys within ISSP as well as the Political Action Survey differ in whether or not (or how) they assign occupational status to retired people, spouses without an employment

[12] Whether or not such Likert scales should include the neutral option has been the subject of some debate among survey researchers (see Menold and Bogner 2016). The ISSP-based results we present below do not change significantly if we drop respondents who chose the middle category. More on this below.

[13] The operationalization of the Oesch schema with 1996 ISSP surveys also poses special problems. For one thing, the Swedish and British surveys used national occupational classification schemes that had to be converted into into ISCO-88 codes. In the British case, we used additional information on educational background to distinguish skilled workers from unskilled workers. For Norway, Spain and the US, occupational codes in the 1996 ISSP are based on ISCO 1968, which we converted to ISCO 1988. Finally, it should be noted that the variable "number of employees" is not available for Norway, Spain and the US in the 1996 ISSP survey. In these cases, large employers are included in the category of the small-business class.

history and the unemployed, we restrict all of our analyses to respondents who are currently in paid work.[14]

The income variable used in our analyses of ISSP is based on self-reported disposable household income. The wording of income questions and response formats vary across national surveys carried out within the framework of the ISSP, but all these surveys end up placing responded in a set of income bands. Following the industry standard among scholars using ISSP or ESS data to explore the effects of relative income on policy preferences and voting behaviour, we assign respondents to income quintiles in their countries based on the mid-point of their income band weighted by the size of their household.[15]

Beyond the independent variables of primary interest, all the analyses that we present below include gender and age as control variables.[16] In addition, all analyses include the variable "electoral winner." This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 for all respondents who identify with and/or voted for a party in government at the time of time when they answered the survey.[17] Following Anderson and Guillory (1997), there is every reason to suppose that citizens who support parties that are in the government are more likely to perceive of themselves as having some influence over what the government does than citizens who identify with and/or voted opposition parties (see also Singh, Karakoç and Blais 2012). Controlling for this effect would seem to be especially important when we explore over-time changes in class differences in perceptions of being politically represented. After

[14] Having excluded respondents with missing values on our variables of interest as well as the retired, spouses and the unemployed, our pooled ISSP dataset consists of some 47,059 respondents. The corresponding number is 5,563 for the Political Action Survey (with Austria).

[15] Unable to implement this procedure with data from the Political Action Survey, we do not control for relative income in our analyses of change in class differences over the period 1974 to 2016.

[16] We do not control for level of education because education is a component of social class as we conceive the latter concept (following Oesch and others).

[17] For the 1996, 2004 and 2006 ISSP surveys, our coding of electoral winners and losers is based on a question about party identification ("which party do you feel close to?"). For the 1974 Political Action Survey as well as the 2014 and 2106 ISSP surveys, it is based on a question about party choice in the last national parliamentary election (or, in the French case, the first round of the last presidential election). Döring and Manow (2019) provide the basis for our identification of parties in government.

all, it could be the case that there were more Left governments in 1974 than in 2014 and that working-class citizens perceived themselves as more influential in 1974 for this reason alone.

In due course, we will present the results of pooling ISSOP data to estimate a model that also includes respondents' self-assessed political interest, their trust in political elites and their sense of "internal political efficacy." Measured on a scale from 1 (very interested) to 5 (not at all interested), political interest is included as a continuous variable in this model. Political trust is measured as the average response to a question about trust in government or civil servants and a second about trust in politicians, both with response options ranging from 1 (high trust) to 5 (low trust).[18] For internal efficacy, we rely on two questions, answered on an ordinal 5-point scale, one asking the respondent whether s/he has a good understanding of the important political issues facing the country and the other asking whether s/he thinks that most people are better informed politics and government than s/he is. We calculate the respondent's average value on these two questions, ranging between a value of 1 (high internal efficacy) to 5 (low internal efficacy). We conceive of these as variables that might mediate the relationship between social class and perceptions of being politically represented.

The models that we estimate with pooled ISSP data for the period 1996-2016 include country and survey-year fixed effects. For individual countries, we replicate these models with survey-year fixed effects.[19] Exploring changes in class gaps from 1996 to 2016 (19 countries) and then from 1974 to 2016 (7 countries), we estimate models that interact the class variables with year dummies and include country fixed effects. Finally, and most tentatively, we estimate three-way interaction models

[18] There is some variation in the availability and formulation of these questions across the ISSP surveys. In the 1996, 2006 and 2016 surveys, respondents were asked their opinion about the following statement "most civil servants can be trusted to do what is best for the country." In 2004 and 2014, respondents were instead asked whether they agree that "most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right" (ordinal 5-point scale). Regarding politicians, the 1996, 2006 and 2016 surveys asked respondents whether they agree that "people we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election" while the 2004 and 2014 surveys asked whether they think that "most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally." (Responses to all these questions are on a 5-point ordinal scale).

[19] Note also that our analyses include a weighting factor to correct for over-sampling of former Eastern Germany in ISSP surveys. For the other countries, we use national weights (design or post-stratification weights) when they are available.

with data for six countries to explore changes in the interaction of social class and union membership since the mid-1970s (again with country fixed effects included).

Pooled results (1996-2016)

Pooling data from all five ISSP surveys, Table 1 presents the distribution of responses to the question about not having any say in what government does for each of the five large social classes. Setting small businessmen aside, we observe a very clear class hierarchy in responses to this question. While 57.0% of routine workers agree that people like themselves have no say, the corresponding figure for upper-middle-class respondents is 33.4%. In-between these extremes, 52.3% of skilled workers and 41.4% of (lower) middle-class respondents agree with the statement. With 49.0% agreeing with the statement, small businessmen are situated closer to the skilled working class than the middle class in this hierarchy.

[Table 1]

The first panel in Figure 1 displays the average marginal effects that we obtain when we estimate a logistic regression model with membership in the five large classes, along with age, gender, union membership and electoral winner/loser status, as predictors of agreeing with that "people like me have no say." The second panel repeats this exercise with income quintiles instead of classes and the third panels shows the results of estimating a model that includes both social class and relative income. (Again, all three models also include country and survey-year fixed effects). With all three of these models, we find that women are marginally less likely to agree with the statement than men and that respondents who voted for government parties are much less likely to agree than other respondents. By contrast, neither age nor union membership seems to affect the probability of

agreeing with the statement. For union membership, we interpret these results to mean that the hypothesized effects cancel each other.[20]

[Figure 1]

The regression results presented in Figure 1 confirm the class hierarchy observed in Table 1 and demonstrate that the effects of belonging to any one of the social classes that we have identified are statistically significant. When we substitute income quintiles for social classes, we find that income quintiles also have statistically significant effects and that the sense of not being politically represented falls as we move up the income ladder. Looking at the third panel of Figure 1, it is tempting to conclude that social class and relative income both matter, more or less equally, for perceptions of having political influence. However, two points about these results deserve to be noted. First, we find that routine workers are more likely to perceive themselves as lacking political influence than skilled workers, but there is no significant difference in such perceptions between respondents in the first and the second income quintiles. Secondly, the average marginal effect of being in the upper middle class rather than the routine working class is more than twice as large as the average marginal effect of being in the fifth income quintile rather than the first quintile (-.186 as compared to -.089). Put differently, the effects of class appear to be considerably larger than the effects of relative income and class also appears to provide more fine-grained leverage on perceptions of having political influence.

Examining the country-specific versions of the third panel of Figure 1 presented in the Appendix (Figure A1) reinforces this conclusion. To summarize, we observe a clear class hierarchy in perceptions of being represented in 15 out 19 countries and upper middle-class survey respondents are significantly more likely to perceive themselves as having political influence than routine workers in 17 out of 19 countries (the exceptions to the latter generalization being Canada and Iceland). By contrast, differences between income groups are quite muddled in about half the countries and

[20] Estimating models that interact social class and union membership, we do not find any evidence that the effects union membership differ across classes (results available upon request).

respondents in the top quintile are significantly more likely to perceive themselves as having political influence than respondents in bottom quintile in only 11 out 19 countries.

Figure 2 displays the average marginal effects that we obtain when we add political interest, political trust and internal political efficacy to the model that includes relative income as well as social class. Keeping in mind that higher values mean less interest, less trust and less sense of internal efficacy, all three variables are positively associated with perceiving oneself (and people like oneself) as not having any political influence. The strong effect of low political trust is particularly noteworthy. Adding the three variables reduces the effects of social class and relative income, suggesting that one or several of these variables play a mediating role. Relative to Model 3, the reduction in the effects of social class is bigger than the reduction in the effects of relative income, but the effects of social class were bigger to begin with and remain statistically significant in Model 4. We interpret this as support for our underlying assumption that the effects of social class (and relative income) have to do with individuals' assessment of how politics works, as distinct from their interest in politics or their assessment of their own competence as citizens.

[Figure 2]

Setting political interest, trust and internal efficacy aside again, the final step in our analysis of average effects across ISSP countries and surveys over the period 1996-2016 explores heterogeneity within the working class by distinguishing between, on the one hand, production workers and, on the other hand, clerical and service workers. In our fifth model, we make this distinction for routine workers as well as skilled workers. Figure 3 shows the average marginal effects yielded by this exercise. Simply put, we find that routine production and routine non-production workers are equally prone to think that they have no say about what government does and that the perceptions of skilled production workers are indistinguishable from those of routine workers. In other words, it is skilled clerical and service workers alone that occupy an intermediate position between routine workers and the middle classes. In light of these findings, the analysis that follows will maintain the distinction

between skilled production and non-production workers, but not the distinction between routine production and non-production workers.

[Figure 3]

Temporal changes in class differences and union effects

We now turn to the question of whether—or how—class differences in perceptions of having political influence have changed over time and the related question of the role of union power in shaping such perceptions. To begin with, Figure 4 reports predicted probabilities of routine workers, skilled workers, middle-class respondents and upper middle-class respondents agreeing with the no-influence statement in 1996, 2004/6 and 2014/6. Based entirely on ISSP data, we obtain these results by interacting time dummies with our class variables. For presentational purposes, we focus here on the "underrepresented working class" and the middle classes, but the analysis also includes skilled non-production workers and small businessmen.

[Figure 4]

Generalizing across our 19 ISSP countries included, it is not the case that workers have come to perceive themselves as less politically influential since the mid-1990s. In fact, we observe a statistically significant drop in agreement with the no-influence statement among these categories of respondents from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s and no change from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s. The same pattern holds for the middle class and the upper middle class.[21] At the same time, Figure 4 shows that class differences in perceptions of being politically represented are large and persistent.

[21] The overall results are very similar if we drop respondents who chose the middle response category: see Figure A.2.

Figure 5 shows the predicted probabilities that we obtain when replicate this exercise for the seven countries for which we have survey data from 1974, 2004/6 and 2014/6.[22] We still see some decline in the propensity of upper-middle respondents to agree with the statement that "people like me don't have any say," but this no longer holds for working-class respondents (and only very marginally, if at all, for lower middle-class respondents). While the perceptions of routine workers were stable over stable over this time period, the propensity of skilled production workers to perceive themselves as not having any political influence increased quite substantially from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. As shown in Table 2, increases in the gaps between skilled production workers and the middle classes from 1974 to 2004/6 and from 1974 to 2014/6 clear conventional criteria for statistical significance. The increase in the gap between routine workers and the upper middle class from 1974 to 2014/6 also clears the 95% confidence threshold. Still, the persistence of large class gaps remains the main story.

[Figure 5 and Table 2]

Turning, finally, to the changing role of union membership, Figure 6 reports on the results that we obtain when we interact union membership, social class and time dummies for the six countries with 1974 surveys that include the union membership question. Consistent with our expectations, as set out above, we find that the effects of union membership on workers' perceptions of being represented in politics changed significantly from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. In the mid-1970s, working-class union members were much less likely to perceive themselves as lacking political influence than their non-union counterparts. For skilled production workers and routine workers alike, we no longer observe any significant difference between union members and other respondents by the mid-1990s. Simply put, working-class union members caught up with the lack of political influence perceived by their non-union counterparts over the period from 1974 to 1996. In marked contrast,

[22] As indicated above, the model on which these results are based does not include relative income nor union membership. For country-specific versions of Figure 5, see Figure A.3.

middle-class unions members were less likely to perceive themselves as lacking political influence in the mid-1990s as well as the mid-1970s.[23]

Conclusion

With German panel data and 2014-16 data from the European Social Survey, Hense and Schäfer (2020) demonstrate that working-class citizens and low-income citizens are particularly prone to support right-wing populist parties. The authors show that working-class and low-income citizens are also more likely to perceive government as unresponsive and that such perceptions largely account for the association between social class and voting for right-wing populist parties.[24] Inspired by an earlier version of Hense and Schäfer's paper, we started the research for this paper thinking that government responsiveness had become more unequal since the early 1980s and that "experienced marginalization" explained the turn to right-wing populism among segments of the working-class over the last decade (or perhaps the last two decades).

The results presented above do not contradict any of the results presented by Hense and Schäfer (2020), but they do raise questions about the larger story that we thought we were going to tell. To the extent that people's perceptions of their political influence tell us something meaningful about the about the objective representation of different citizens, our results suggest that nothing much has changed over the last 30, even 50 years. For the subset of countries for which we have data going back to the 1970s, working-class citizens perceived themselves as having little or no political influence in the 1970s and we do not observe any increase in the percentage of working-class citizens expressing this view over time. If anything, the percentage of working-class citizens perceiving themselves as not having any political influence declined from 1996 to 2016 (as did the percentage of

[23] Results for skilled non-production workers and upper middle-class respondents are presented in Figure A.4.

[24] On working-class support for right-wing populist parties, see also Oesch and Rennwald (2018)

other citizens expressing this view). We do observe a statistically significant increase in class differences in perceived influence from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, but, again, stability in class differences is the main take-away of our analysis.

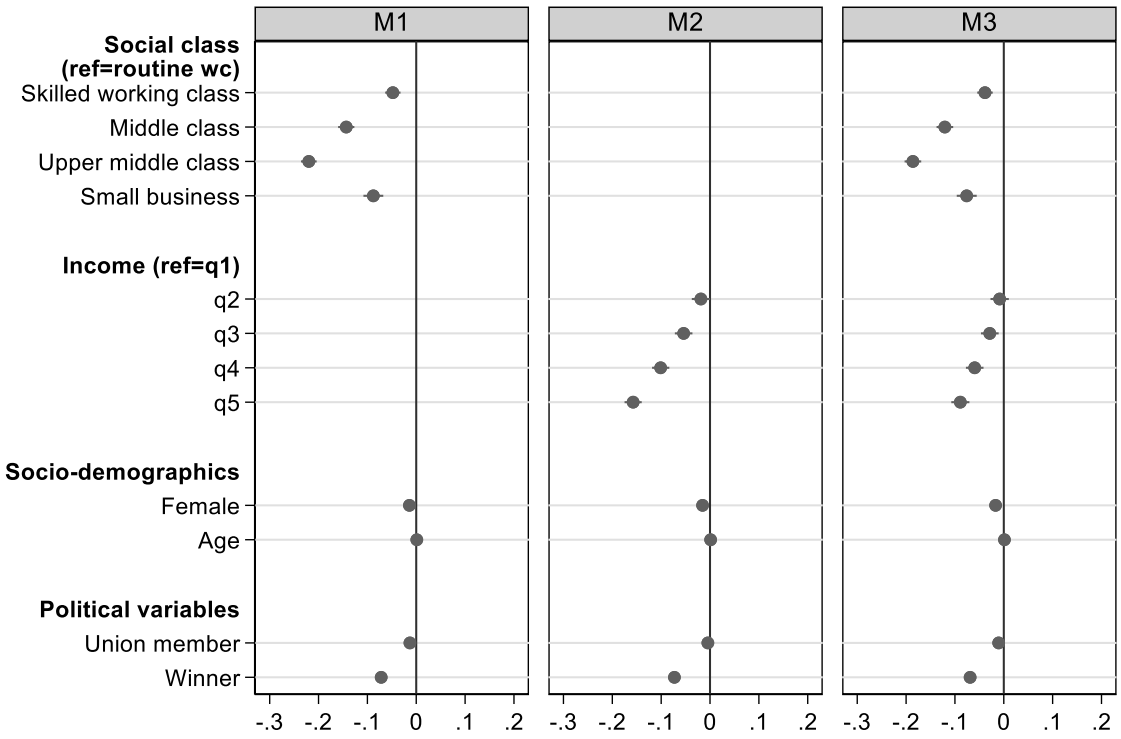
Another noteworthy feature of our empirical results is that the rise of neoliberal policy paradigms and the associated decline of unions appear to have had no effect on perceptions of political representation among workers who are not themselves union members. Unionized workers perceive themselves as less politically influential than they did in the 1970s, but this is not the case for unorganized workers. The implication would seem to be that unorganized typically do not perceive of unions as their representatives in politics.

It is perfectly possible that government responsiveness has become more unequal by some objective measure(s) and that citizens have failed to register this development in their perceptions of political representation. In this case, however, growing class bias in responsiveness can hardly be invoked to explain growing working-class support for populist parties. Other grievances—employment insecurity, income stagnation and rising income inequality as well as "cultural grievances"—would appear to be more directly relevant for changes in working-class political behaviour over the last two decades. That said, it may be that *unequal responsiveness has become more salient to working-class citizens* as a result of changing social and economic conditions. Arguably, workers perceived themselves as politically marginal already in the 1970s (or 1990s), but this did not bother them as much as it does today. The salience of perceptions of political representation (and how to measure it) is a topic that we hope to explore in future research.

Table 1: Distribution of survey responses by social class (1996-2016)

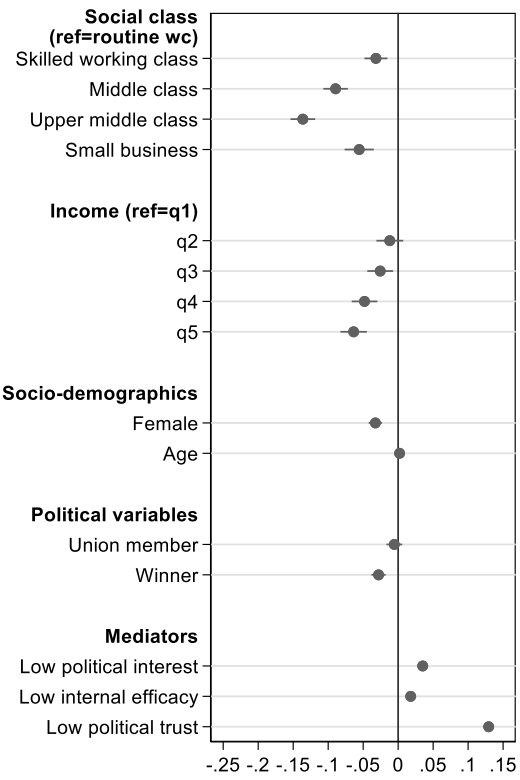
	strongly agree	agree	neither	disagree	strongly disagree	N
routine working class	24.6	32.4	15.7	17.5	9.7	6,343
skilled working class	20.4	31.9	17.5	21.7	8.4	14,486
middle class	14.3	27.1	18.2	30.1	10.3	10,184
upper middle class	10.9	23.5	17.9	35.1	12.6	11,482
small business	19.5	29.5	16.8	24.4	9.7	4,563

Figure 1: Average marginal effects of class, income and other determinants on agreeing with the no-influence statement, 5-class schema



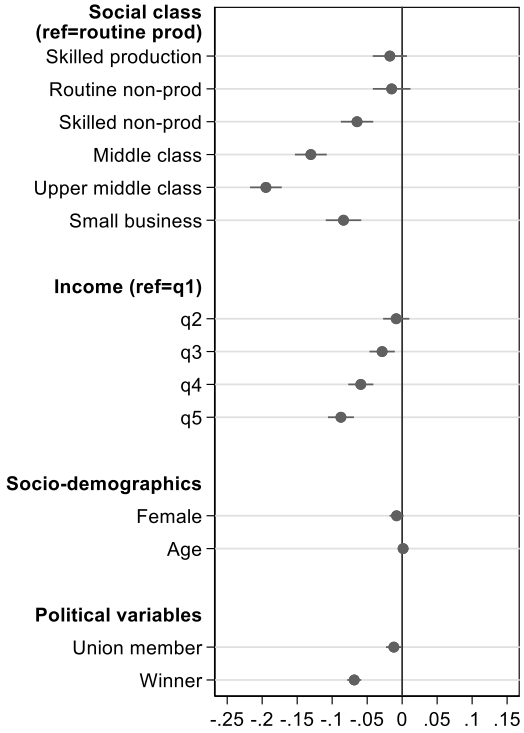
Note: See Table A.2 for full regression results.

Figure 2: Average marginal effects, 5-class schema, with additional variables



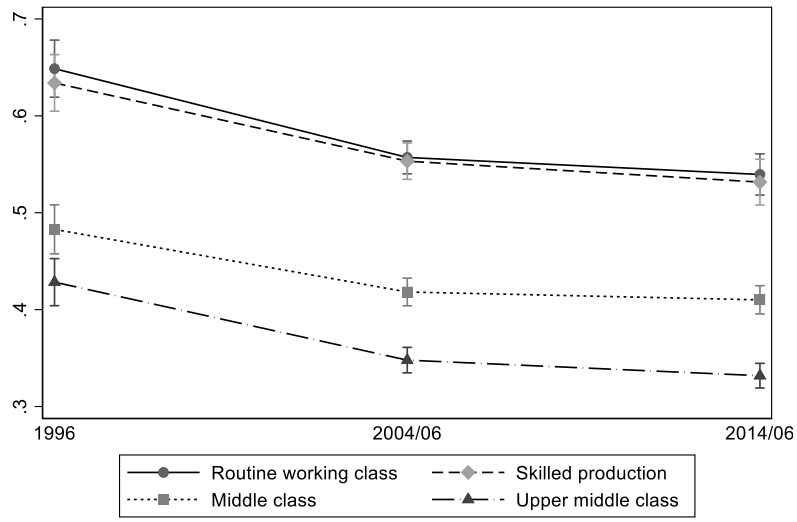
Note: See Table A.2 for full regression results (Model 4).

Figure 3: Average marginal effects, 7-class schema



Note: See Table A.2 for full regression results (Model 5).

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of agreeing with the no-influence statement by class and time (6-class model), 1996-2016



Note: See Table A.3 for full regression results (Model 6). Results for skilled non-production workers and small business owners not shown.

Figure 5: Predicted probabilities of agreeing with the no-influence statement by class and time (6-class model), 1974-2016

Note: See Table A.3 for full regression results (Model 7). Results for skilled non-production workers and small business owners not shown.

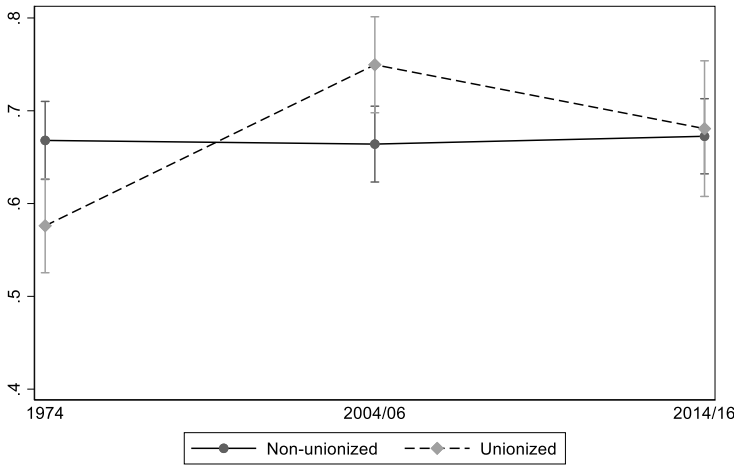
Table 2: Class differences and changes in class differences (in predicted probabilities), with p-values in parentheses, 1974-2016

	1974	2004/6	2014/6	change 1974=>2014/6	change 1974=>2014/6
routine WC minus MC	.130 (.000)	.142 (.000)	.173 (.000)	.013 (.679)	.043 (.168)
routine WC minus upper MC	.228 (.000)	.250 (.000)	.296 (.000)	.022 (.488)	**.068 (.032)**
skilled production WC minus MC	.097 (.000)	.165 (.000)	.167 (.000)	**.068 (.028)**	**.070 (.033)**
skilled production WC minus upper MC	.196 (.000)	.273 (.000)	.290 (.000)	**.077 (.014)**	**.095 (.004)**

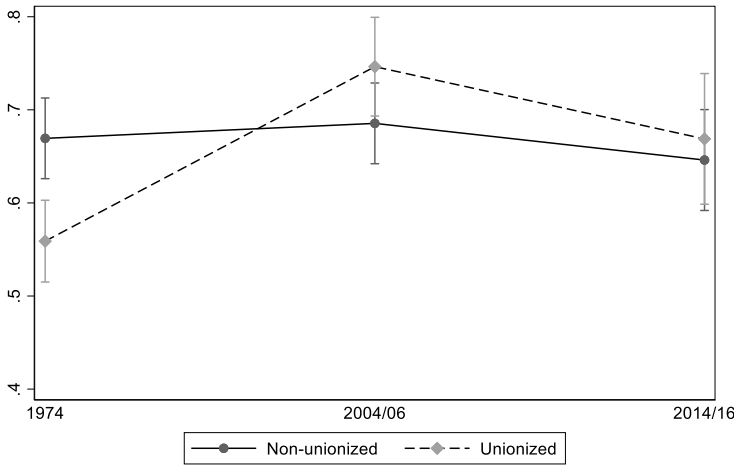
Note: P-values based on t-test of equality hypotheses for differences.

Figure 6: Time-varying effects of union membership by social class (6-class model), predicted probabilities of agreeing with the no-influence statement, 1974-2016

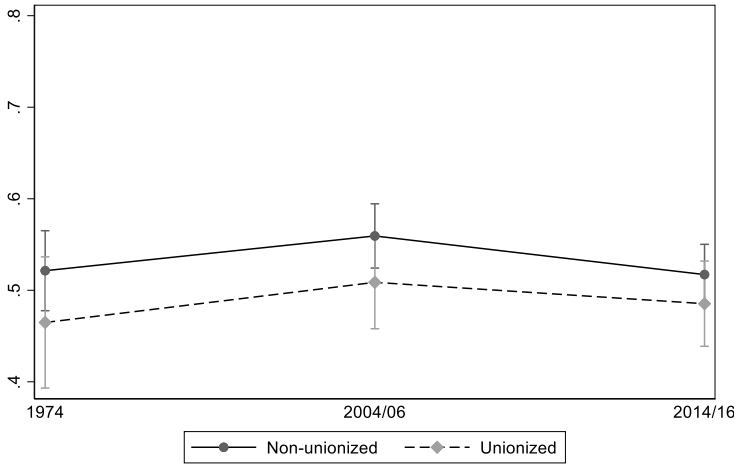
a) Routine working class



b) Skilled production workers



c) Lower middle class



Note: See Table A.3 for full regression results (Model 8).

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APPENDIX

Table A.1: Survey-based estimates distribution of respondents in paid work across six social classes (with country weights)

	1974	1996	2016
routine working class	19.2	12.9	11.9
skilled production workers	19.8	14.2	8.9
skilled non-production workers	21.0	20.7	19.8
middle class	14.1	19.6	22.5
upper middle class	11.7	22.2	26.1
small business	14.2	10.4	10.8

Note: The estimates for 1974 are based on 7 countries while the estimates for 1996 and 2016 are based on 12 and 14 countries respectively.

Figure A.1: Average marginal effects by country, 1996-2016

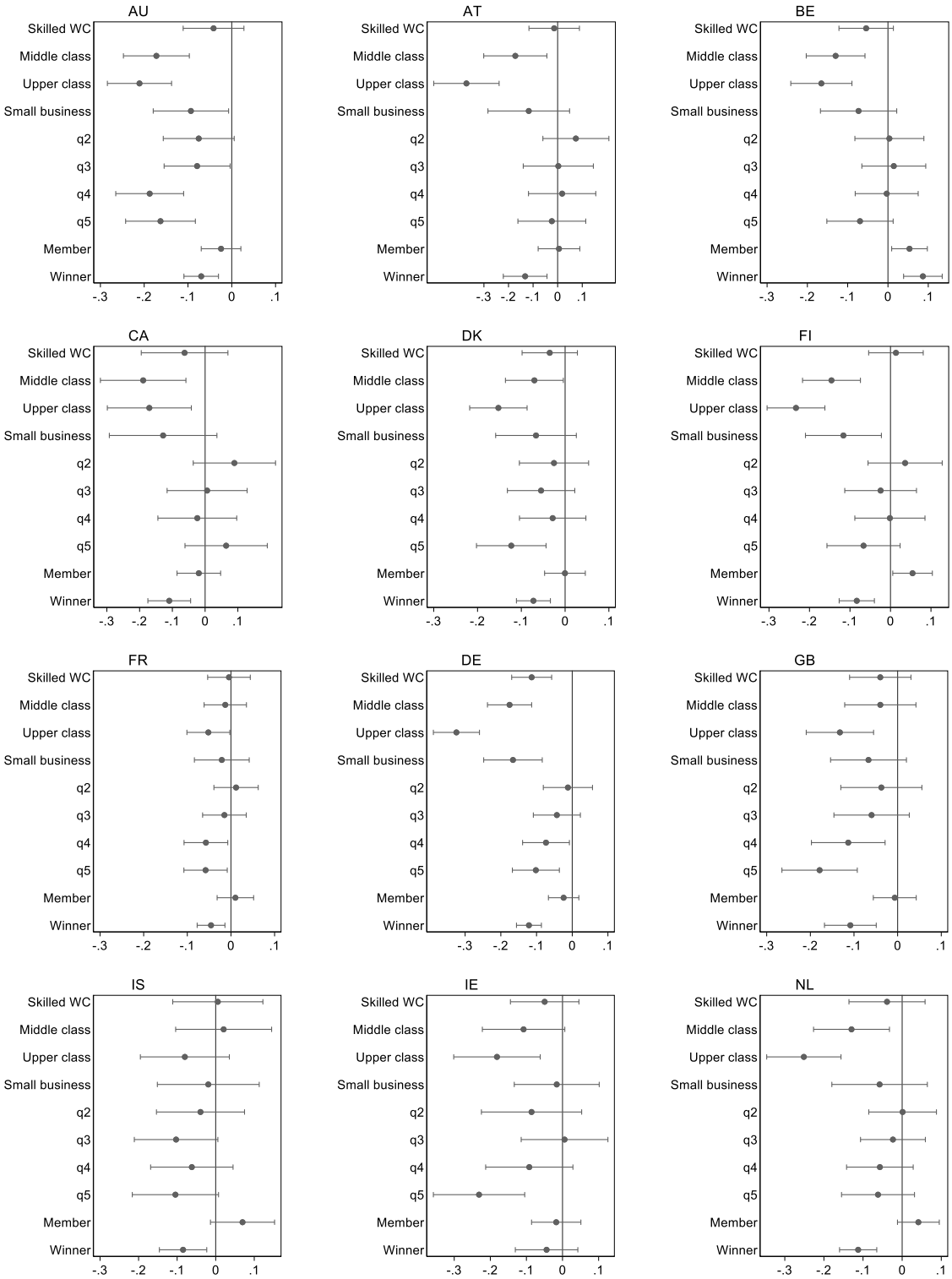


Figure A.1 continued

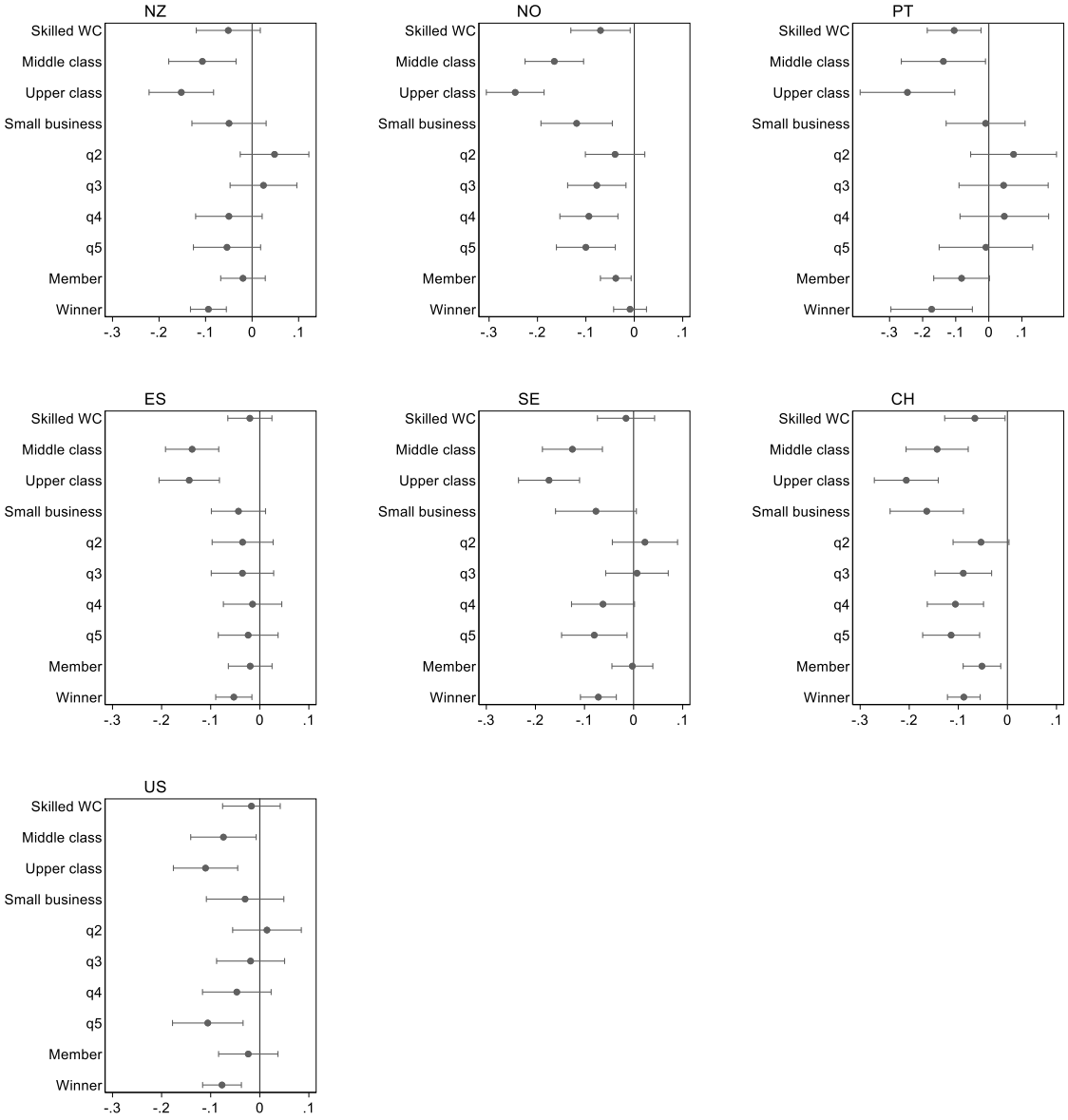


Table A.2: Effects of social class and other determinants on agreeing with the no-influence statement, logistic regression models with ISSP data (1996-2016)

	M1 Class	M2 Income	M3 Class + Income	M4 + Mediators	M5 Class (7-class schema)
Class (Ref=Routine working class)					
Routine production	-	-	-	-	Ref
Routine non-production	-	-	-	-	-0.066
					(0.06)
Skilled working class	-0.208***		-0.167***	-0.148***	-
	(0.03)		(0.04)	(0.04)	-
Skilled production	-	-	-	-	-0.077
					(0.05)
Skilled non-production	-	-	-	-	-0.280***
					(0.05)
Middle class	-0.619***		-0.523***	-0.418***	-0.565***
	(0.04)		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Upper middle class	-0.963***		-0.815***	-0.642***	-0.853***
	(0.04)		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Small business	-0.379***		-0.328***	-0.259***	-0.363***
	(0.04)		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Income (Ref=Q1)					
Quintile 2		-0.081+	-0.037	-0.056	-0.037
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Quintile 3		-0.234***	-0.126**	-0.121**	-0.126**
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Quintile 4		-0.438***	-0.262***	-0.228***	-0.260***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Quintile 5		-0.688***	-0.393***	-0.303***	-0.387***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Female	-0.062**	-0.067**	-0.075***	-0.156***	-0.035
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	0.005***	0.006***	0.006***	0.010***	0.006***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Union member	-0.057*	-0.019	-0.047+	-0.026	-0.053*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Winner status	-0.317***	-0.319***	-0.306***	-0.134***	-0.304***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Low political interest				0.168***	
				(0.01)	
Low internal efficacy				0.086***	
				(0.02)	
Low political trust				0.619***	
				(0.01)	
Survey year dummies	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Country dummies	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constant	0.773***	0.627***	0.856***	-2.204***	0.875***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.08)
N	47059	47059	47059	43499	47059
Pseudo R2	0.0695	0.0609	0.0723	0.1222	0.0728
AIC	61123.3	61690.0	60946.1	53192.8	60920.5
BIC	61394.9	61961.5	61252.7	53522.7	61244.6

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.3: Time-varying effects of social class and other determinants on agreeing with the no-influence statement, logistic interaction models with ISSP data and PAC data

	M6 1996-2016, 19 countries	M7 1974-2016, 7 countries	M8 1974-2016, 6 countries
Class (Ref=Routine workers)			
Skilled production workers	-0.069	-0.148	0.006
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.14)
Skilled non-production	-0.306***	-0.306***	-0.367**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.13)
Middle class	-0.733***	-0.567***	-0.640***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.14)
Upper middle class	-0.967***	-0.981***	-1.189***
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.14)
Small business owners	-0.339***	0.010	-0.111
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.14)
Female	-0.014	0.070*	0.046
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Age	0.006***	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Union member	-0.081***	-	-0.409**
	(0.02)		(0.15)
Winner status	-0.316***	-0.441***	-0.462***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
	Ref=1996	Ref=1974	Ref=1974
2004/06	-0.413***	0.151	-0.019
	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.14)
2014/16	-0.490***	0.120	0.021
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.14)
2004/06#Skilled production	0.052	0.263+	0.095
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.20)
2004/06#Skilled non-production	0.049	0.058	0.219
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.18)
2004/06#Middle class	0.135	-0.071	0.178
	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.18)
2004/06#Upper class	0.054	-0.109	0.258
	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.19)
2004/06#Small business	0.110	-0.408**	-0.127
	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.20)
2014/16#Skilled production	0.035	0.121	-0.129
	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.21)
2014/16#Skilled non-production	0.037	-0.082	-0.079
	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.18)
2014/16#Middle class	0.176+	-0.194	-0.038
	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.18)
2014/16#Upper class	0.055	-0.304*	-0.068
	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.18)
2014/16#Small business	-0.123	-0.664***	-0.487*
	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.19)
2004/06#Union member			0.840***
			(0.23)
2014/16#Union member			0.448+
			(0.25)

Member#Skilled production			-0.079
			(0.20)
Member#Skilled non-production			0.290
			(0.21)
Member#Middle class			0.173
			(0.23)
Member#Upper class			0.553*
			(0.26)
Member#Small business			0.213
			(0.33)
2004/06#Member#Skilled prod			-0.040
			(0.32)
2004/06#Member#Skilled non-prod			-0.640*
			(0.31)
2004/06#Member#Middle class			-0.816*
			(0.32)
2004/06#Member#Upper class			-1.096***
			(0.33)
2004/06#Member#Small business			-1.075*
			(0.47)
2014/16#Member#Skilled prod			0.145
			(0.35)
2014/16#Member#Skilled non-prod			0.022
			(0.33)
2014/16#Member#Middle class			-0.345
			(0.33)
2014/16#Member#Upper class			-0.701*
			(0.35)
2014/16#Member#Small business			-0.644
			(0.46)
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.819***	1.336***	1.014***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.13)
N	55295	19748	17462
Pseudo R2	0.0676	0.0669	0.0633
AIC	72456.7	25514.4	22833.9
BIC	72813.5	25727.5	23175.7

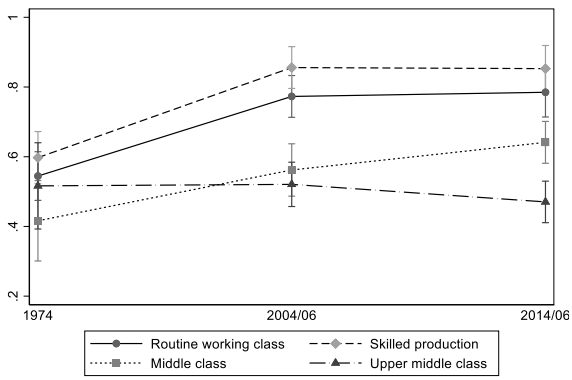
Standard errors in parentheses; $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A.2: Predicted probabilities of agreeing with the no-influence statement by class and time, without the middle response category (6-class model), 1974-2016.

Figure A.3: Predicted probabilities of agreeing with the no-influence statement by class and time (6-class model), separate estimates for each country

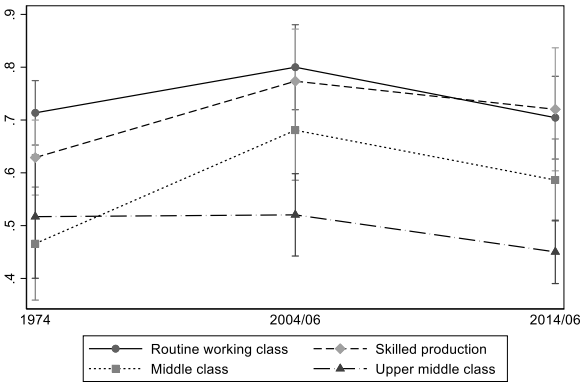
Austria:

Finland:

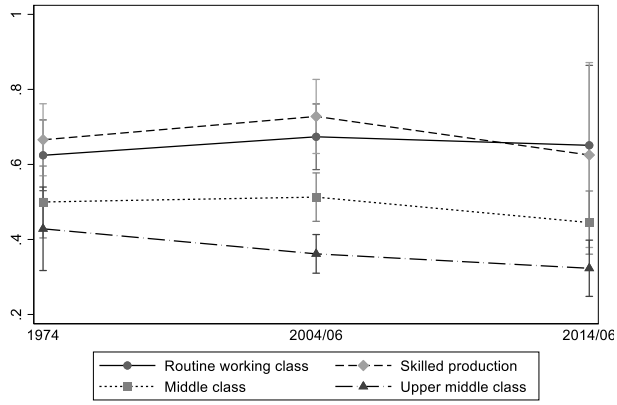


Germany

Great Britain



Netherlands



Switzerland

Figure A.3 continued

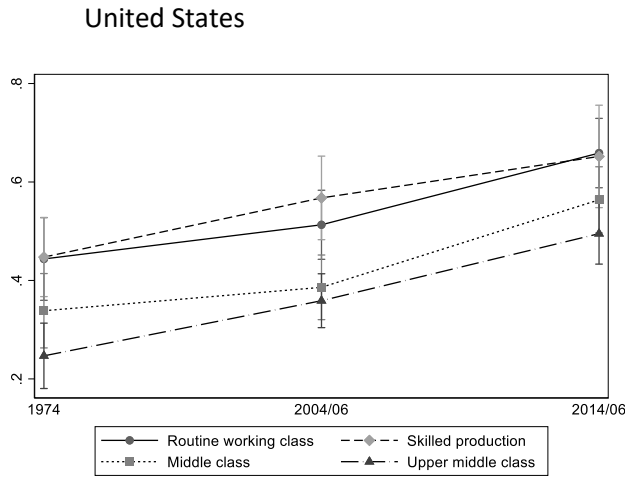
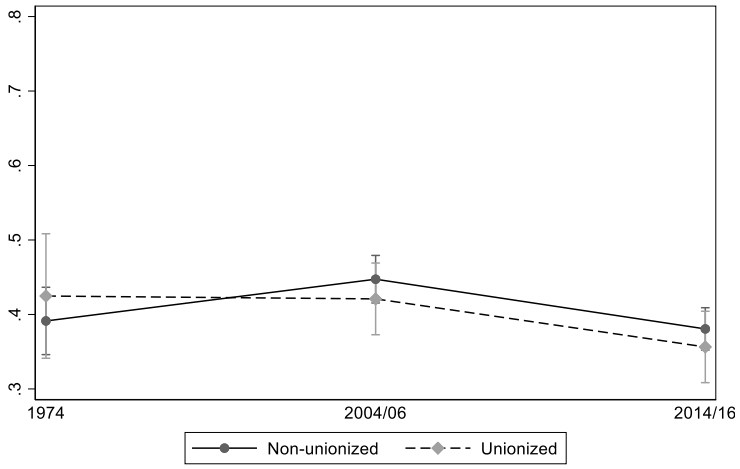
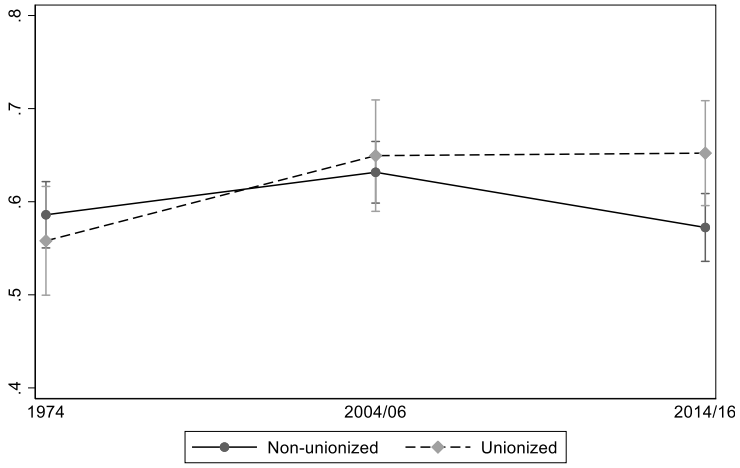


Figure A.4: Time-varying effects of union membership by social class (6 countries), 1974-2014

Upper middle class



Skilled non-production workers



Note: See Table A.3 for full regression results (Model 8).