Class Is Not Dead—It Has Been Buried Alive: Class Voting and Cultural Voting in Postwar Western Societies (1956–1990)

JEROEN van der WAAL, PETER ACHTERBERG,
AND DICK HOUTMAN

By means of a reanalysis of the most relevant data source—the International Social Mobility and Politics File—this article criticizes the newly grown consensus in political sociology that class voting has declined since World War II. An increase in crosscutting cultural voting, rooted in educational differences rather than a decline in class voting, proves responsible for the decline of traditional class-party alignments. Moreover, income differences have not become less but more consequential for voting behavior during this period. It is concluded that the new consensus has been built on quicksand. Class is not dead—it has been buried alive under the increasing weight of cultural voting, systematically misinterpreted as a decline in class voting because of the widespread application of the so-called Alford index.

Keywords: *death of class debate; old versus new politics; political change; class analysis; realignment versus dealignment*

No one suspected . . . or had reason to suspect, that she was not actually dead. She presented all the ordinary appearances of death. The funeral . . . was hastened, on account of the rapid advance of what was supposed to be decomposition.[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

With their polemically titled article, "Are Social Classes Dying?" Clark and Lipset[2] put the cat among the pigeons of class analysis by defending the thesis that the relevance of class had declined substantially since World War II. Their article sparked a lively debate, yielding publications with titles such as *The Death of Class*,[3] *The Promising Future of Class Analysis*,[4] and *The Breakdown of Class Politics*.[5] One of the key arguments in this so-called death of class debate is that once class has no more relevance for voting behavior, it may just as well be considered a concept without use—a dead concept. To examine this relevance of social class, the direct relationship between class and voting behavior therefore has been studied intensively. Some initially rejected Clark and Lipset's claim about the diminishing relevance of class, mainly pointing at methodological issues and arguing that there was nothing more to see but a "trendless fluctuation" in the ties between class and voting behavior.[6] However, after Nieuwbeerta's publications using advanced statistical methods, analyzing data from twenty Western countries in the postwar period, it has become generally accepted that the strength of the relationship between class and voting has indeed been declining.[7] "With respect to politics, social classes are certainly not dead, but the rumors of their imminent death are not all that exaggerated," as Nieuwbeerta[8] summarizes this new consensus.[9]

And yet a remarkable set of research findings suggests that this consensus may be built on quicksand. Whereas Nieuwbeerta[10] has demonstrated that in the United States, the relationship between class and voting has declined in the postwar era, others, relying on different class measures, have demonstrated that class voting has not become weaker at all during this period.[11] Consistent with the latter findings, the salience of class issues has not at all declined since World War II, and the strength of the relationship between class and voting does not depend on the salience of class issues.[12] Perhaps most surprising and again suggesting that something is seriously wrong, contextual hypotheses derived from the class approach to politics prove strikingly impotent in explaining the strength of the relationship between class and politics.[13]

Taken together, those findings raise the question of whether the erosion of the traditional alignment of the working class with the left and the middle class with the right since World War II has really been caused by a decline in class voting. In what follows, we therefore develop and test an alternative explanation.

2. CLASS VOTING AND CULTURAL VOTING: A RECONCEPTUALIZATION

2.1. The Conventional Approach to Class Voting: The Alford Index

Ever since Robert Alford's path-breaking work in the 1960s, studies of class voting have relied on what has come to be known as the "Alford index." This index measures the strength of the relationship between class and voting "by subtracting

the percentage of persons in nonmanual occupations voting for 'Left' parties from the percentage of manual workers voting for such parties."[14] It is based on the assumption that class-based economic interests produce working-class support for leftist parties and middle-class support for rightist ones: "A relation between class position and voting behavior is a natural and expected association in the Western democracies for a number of reasons: the existence of class interests, the representation of these interests by political parties, and the regular association of certain parties with certain interests. Given the character of the stratification order and the way political parties act as representatives of different class interests, it would be remarkable if such a relation were not found."[15]

When Clark and Lipset sparked the so-called death of class debate in 1991,[16] they did so by demonstrating that between 1947 and 1986, the Alford index had decreased in all the countries they had data on: Sweden, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and the United States. Clark and Lipset were subsequently critiqued by Hout, Brooks, and Manza,[17] who rejected their conclusions and argued for the need to use more fine-grained class distinctions than the crude manual-nonmanual dichotomy and to rely on log-odds ratios. Such a revision leaves the Alford index theoretically intact; however, because the resulting "kappa index" still boils down to the idea that the degree to which class drives the vote can be measured as the strength of the bivariate relationship between class and voting. It is indeed telling that Nieuwbeerta's extremely large-scale study of between-country and over-time variations in class voting,[18] covering no less than twenty Western countries, has not only demonstrated that the relationship between class and voting has decreased in most of these countries since World War II but also that the kappa index, as proposed by Hout, Brooks, and Manza, produces basically similar findings as Alford's original index: "The main finding is that the various measures of class voting [yield] the same conclusions with respect to the ranking of the countries according to their levels of class voting and according to the speed of declines in class voting."[19]

Indeed, such pleas for more statistical sophistication that leaves the underlying theoretical logic intact merely serve to underscore that the measurement of class voting as the strength of the bivariate relationship between class position and voting behavior stands out as almost universally accepted in political sociology. It is not only relied on by Clark and Lipset[20] as well as their critics Hout, Brooks, and Manza,[21] but also by a variety of researchers who have contributed chapters to the two principal edited volumes that have been published about the death of class debate: *The End of Class Politics?*[22] and *The Breakdown of Class Politics*.[23]

2.2. The Vagaries of the Alford Index

And yet, the measurement of class voting as the strength of the bivariate relationship between class position and voting behavior is highly debatable from

a theoretical point of view. Its shortcoming is that it does not actually ascertain the validity of its key assumption: that it is indeed class-based desires for economic redistribution (among the working class) and aversion to such a policy (among the middle class) that drive voting behavior. This assumption is not so much plainly wrong but rather one-sided. As it happens, it is not only economic liberalism/conservatism rooted in people's economic class positions that drives the vote but also political values that relate to issues of individual liberty or maintenance of social order: social conservatism/liberalism.[24,25] As is well known, among the public at large, basically no relationship exists between these two value domains.[26]

The point is not that social conservatism/liberalism is empirically unrelated to the distinction between manual and nonmanual occupations, of course. It obviously is. Ever since Lipset addressed working-class social conservatism in the 1950s[27] and Inglehart middle-class postmaterialism in the 1970s,[28] the circumstance that it is not the working class but rather the middle class that stands out as politically progressive when it comes to these "cultural" or "noneconomic" values has often been taken to indicate class differences. In Lipset's classical formulation, "Economic liberalism refers to the conventional issues concerning redistribution of income, status, and power among the classes. The poorer everywhere are more liberal or leftist on such issues. . . . On the other hand, when liberalism is defined in noneconomic terms—so as to support, for example, civil rights for political dissidents, civil rights for ethnic and racial minorities, internationalist foreign policies, and liberal immigration legislation—the correlation is reversed."[29]

This can, however, not simply be taken to indicate that social conservatism/liberalism, just like economic liberalism/conservatism, can be explained by one's class position. From a theoretical point of view, after all, class constitutes a shared economic position that determines life chances in general and income in particular. Indeed, the ability of newly composed class schemas to explain income differences is typically considered the litmus test for their validity and explanatory power,[30] with income differences between classes regarded as solid evidence for the continued existence of classes in the classical Marxist sense of *Klassen an sich* rather than *Klassen für sich*.[31]

Given this close link between class and income, it is quite significant that income does not affect social conservatism at all. Any number of studies point out that it is not so much those with low incomes who are socially conservative but rather those who are poorly educated. The other way around, it is not the rich but the well educated who invariably turn out to be less socially conservative, more tolerant of nonconformists, and less racially prejudiced.[32] In other words, if we conceive of classes as occupational categories that obviously differ strongly with respect to education too, we should not be surprised to find a working class that is more economically liberal and socially conservative than the middle class, but this does not mean that economic liberalism/conservatism and social conservatism/liberalism can both be explained by class in an economic sense.

Following Wright's objections to the use of occupational categories as measures of class,[33] one of the authors has shown elsewhere that such a measurement of class tends to operate as a "black box" that hides two radically different explanatory mechanisms.[34] Working-class economic liberalism, consistent with what the class approach to politics has claimed all along, can indeed be explained by its class-based economic interests. It is precisely their economic vulnerability—their low income, wage dependence, job insecurity, and low level of education—that leads members of the working class to endorse economic liberalism.[35]

Working-class social conservatism, on the other hand, cannot be explained by its weak position in economic life. Neither a low income, nor wage dependence, nor job insecurity produces social conservatism, while a low level of education does—and strongly so. Moreover, limited participation in high-status culture does not produce economic liberalism, but—just like a high level of education—strongly detracts from social conservatism. Those who embrace social liberalism, then, are not those who are economically privileged but rather those who have ample cultural capital. Education is after all not only strongly related to high-status cultural participation[36] but is (for precisely this reason) also often regarded as an indicator for cultural capital nowadays.[37]

Education's culturally liberalizing consequences have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some have argued that education undermines belief in the existence of such a thing as a "natural" social order,[38] others that education reduces social conservatism through an increase in cognitive complexity,[39] and yet others that education only reduces social conservatism in liberal-democratic societies, where education instills democratic values.[40] Which of these interpretations actually holds and whether they actually exclude one another or can perhaps be synthesized into an overarching theory are questions that go way beyond the purposes of the present article. The vital point to underscore is simply that all of these interpretations boil down to the position that education does not operate as a vessel for class-based economic interests but rather as a cultural resource that deeply affects people's worldview. Precisely because this cultural dimension of education is at stake here, it needs to be distinguished as "cultural capital" from class in an economic sense. Our position, in short, is that education cannot be taken to indicate class just like that—it can when the explanation of economic liberalism is at stake, but it cannot when we are dealing with the explanation of social conservatism/liberalism.

And yet sociologists have always tended to combine occupation, education, and income into measures of socioeconomic status or occupational class. The circumstance that Erik Wright's neo-Marxist class measures,[41] which are not based on occupational categories, hardly affect social conservatism has even been taken to indicate that they are invalid.[42] In fact, however, it is precisely this failure to explain social conservatism—just like income but unlike education—that underscores that they are actually more valid than the widely used occupation-based ones. Rather than merging occupation, income, and education, in short, the vital distinction between two types of political values needs to be supplemented with
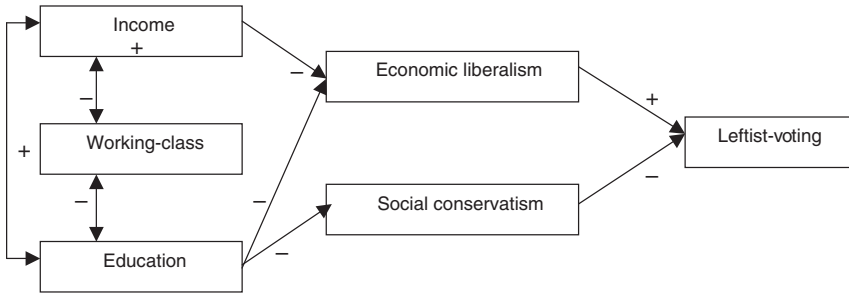
Figure 1.   Class voting distinguished from cultural voting.

an equally important distinction between classes in an economic sense and cultural capital. While a weak class position produces economic liberalism, it is limited cultural capital that is responsible for social conservatism.[43]

2.3. Disentangling Cultural Voting and Class Voting: Hypotheses

The foregoing implies that a bivariate relationship between an occupation-based class position and voting behavior effectively mixes up class voting, that is, voting for a leftist (rightist) party on the basis of economic liberalism (conservatism) that is rooted in a weak (strong) class position, with what we shall henceforth call *cultural voting*, that is, voting for a rightist (leftist) party on the basis of social conservatism (social liberalism) that is rooted in a limited (large) amount of cultural capital.[44] The latter type of voting needs to be distinguished from the former, because it is driven by a cultural rather than an economic voting motivation, stems from cultural capital rather than class in an economic sense, and cross-pressures the electorate to vote contradictory to its class-based economic interests.

Figure 1 disentangles both types of voting. The upper part denotes class voting and the lower part crosscutting cultural voting. It points out that the strength of the bivariate relationship between class and voting tells us basically nothing about the degree to which class affects the vote. This is because both types of voting work in opposite directions and may vary independent of one another. A preference for economic redistribution that is rooted in a weak class position and that drives leftist voting, perfectly consistent with the logic of class voting, can thus be canceled out by an equally strong tendency among those with limited cultural capital to vote for rightist parties, driven by high levels of social conservatism.

The convention of measuring class voting as the strength of the bivariate relationship between occupation-based classes and voting behavior thus easily produces the mistaken conclusion that class does not affect the vote. And worse, this is not a hypothetical construction but a realistic image of what occurs on the

ground in the real world. Although in the Netherlands no relationship or hardly any relationship exists between class position and voting behavior, this does not mean that class does not affect the vote, as the conventional measurement of class voting would lead one to conclude. It rather means that class voting is about equally as strong as cultural voting yet working in the opposite direction. In other words, a failure to distinguish cultural voting from class voting tends to produce a serious underestimation of the latter.[45] Failing to make this distinction can even produce the flawed conclusion that class voting has declined when it has in fact increased. This occurs when class voting and cultural voting have both increased but the latter more so than the former.

It is not clear at all, in short, whether the decline of the familiar alignment of the working class with the left and the middle class with the right since World War II, convincingly documented by Nieuwbeerta, has really been caused by a decline in class voting. It is certainly possible that it has, but it may also have been caused by an increase in cultural voting. And indeed, three sets of research findings point in the direction of the latter possibility.

First and contradicting the claim of a decline in class voting, Stonecash has demonstrated that the relationship between income and voting behavior has become stronger rather than weaker in the United States since World War II.[46] Research by Brooks and Brady has also pointed out that income differences have not become less electorally consequential in the United States at all.[47] "Rather than class divisions fading in relevance, they are likely to be a staple of American politics for some time," Stonecash rightly concludes on the basis of this evidence.[48] Conclusions about whether class voting has declined thus seem strongly dependent on whether class is measured as income or as occupational class. And indeed, this is not a trivial difference, as our discussion above has pointed out. Income categories, unlike occupational categories, are after all not susceptible to the problem of mixing up class voting and cultural voting, because no relationship exists between income and social conservatism/liberalism. With these two operationalizations of class producing such radically different findings, the decline of the traditional class-party alignments that Nieuwbeerta has demonstrated more likely denotes an increase in cultural voting than a decline in class voting.

Second, if a decline in class voting had taken place since World War II, we would expect that class issues would have become less politically salient during this period. This is not the case, however,[49] but it is equally clear that cultural issues of individual liberty and social order have become more salient during this period.[50] Moreover, the salience of class issues proves not to affect the strength of the relationship between class and voting at all, whereas this relationship is substantially weaker in periods and countries in which cultural issues are more salient.[51] This suggests again that we have not been witnessing a decline in class voting but rather an increase in cultural voting since World War II.

Third and perhaps even more significant, class analysis proves remarkably impotent in predicting the periods and countries in which the relationship between class and voting is weakest. Hypotheses derived from the class approach to politics, predicting the circumstances under which class distinctions are more or less salient, are rejected almost without exception.[52] If differences in the bivariate relationship between class and voting are taken to indicate differences in levels of class voting, those findings are obviously very surprising. Although it is of course conceivable that the class approach to politics is completely flawed, we consider it more likely that differences in the bivariate relationship between class and voting indicate differences in levels of cultural voting instead. If this is the case—and this is precisely what the two other clusters of findings that we have just discussed suggest—the failure of hypotheses derived from the class approach to politics ceases to be surprising.

To find out whether the declining alignment of the working class with the left and the middle class with the right has been caused by a decline in class voting or by an increase in cultural voting, we reanalyze Nieuwbeerta's data in this article. We test two hypotheses. The first one tests whether a decline in class voting has occurred. It predicts that the decline of the relationship between occupational class and voting behavior has been caused by a decline of the tendency of those with low incomes to vote for parties on the left and those with high incomes to vote for parties on the right. The second hypothesis tests whether an increase in cultural voting has taken place. It predicts that the decline of the relationship between occupational class and voting behavior has been caused by a decrease in the tendency of the well educated to vote for parties on the right and the poorly educated to vote for parties on the left.

3. DATA AND MEASUREMENT

3.1. Data

As mentioned above, we reanalyze the data Nieuwbeerta has used to demonstrate the decline of the traditional alignment of the working class with the left and the middle class with the right.[53] Because of two deviations from Nieuwbeerta's measurement of voting behavior, to be discussed below, we analyze data about 93,567 respondents, who have been sampled in fifteen different countries between 1956 and 1990, adding up to a total of eighty combinations of country and year (see Table 1).

3.2. Measurement

Class. Like Nieuwbeerta, we measure class by means of the EGP class schema, which assigns seven different class positions on the basis of occupation, supplemented with self-employed status and number of people supervised.[54] It is

Table 1
Number of Data Files for Each of the Combinations of Country and Period (1956–1990; N = 80)

Country	1956–1970	1971–1980	1981–1990	Total	Period
Australia	1	—	3	4	1985–1987
Austria	—	1	3	4	1974–1989
Belgium	—	1	—	1	1975
Canada	—	—	1	1	1984
Denmark	—	1	—	1	1972
Finland	—	2	—	2	1972–1975
France	—	1	—	1	1978
Germany	1	2	6	9	1969–1990
Great Britain	—	2	6	8	1974–1990
Ireland	—	—	1	1	1990
Italy	1	1	—	2	1968–1975
The Netherlands	1	6	7	14	1970–1990
Norway	1	2	4	7	1965–1990
Switzerland	—	1	—	1	1976
United States	7	8	9	24	1956–1990
Total	12	28	40	80	1956–1990

important to emphasize that the seven EGP classes do not constitute a simple hierarchy.[55] The three nonmanual classes (higher professionals, lower professionals, and nonmanual workers) and the three manual ones constitute two separate hierarchies to be sure, but the hierarchical relationship between these two is undetermined. The same goes for the relationship between each of those hierarchies and the petty bourgeoisie. The higher professionals, the lower professionals, and the petty bourgeoisie can be classified unambiguously as middle class, while the classes of skilled manual workers on one hand and semiskilled and unskilled manual workers on the other together constitute the working class. The third and most privileged manual class constitutes "a latter-day aristocracy of labour or a 'blue collar' elite."[56] It consists of lower-grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers and can as such be distinguished from the "real" working class. Likewise, the least privileged nonmanual class, that is, that of nonmanual workers, can be distinguished from the real middle class as consisting of "white-collar proletarians."[57] In interpreting the statistical results, in short, especially the voting behavior of the higher professionals, lower professionals, and petty bourgeoisie on one hand (middle class) and the skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled manual workers on the other (working class) is important. EGP class is entered into the analysis as a series of six dummy variables, using the higher professionals as the reference category.

Income. Following Erikson,[58] net household income is used to determine income levels. To allow for a comparison of the strength of the regression coefficient for income with those of the other variables, this variable has been standardized first for each country and year combination separately.

Education. To standardize the educational classifications in the fifteen countries, education has first been recoded into the number of years minimally required to attain the level of education at hand and has next been standardized in the same way as income.

Voting behavior. Like Nieuwbeerta,[59] we have used data about the party one would vote for if elections were held today (or soon), about the party one has voted for in the past, and the party one identifies with. If valid answers to all of these three questions were available, we used the first one, that is, voting intention. If valid answers to only the last two were available, we used party identification. We do not use Nieuwbeerta's crude left versus nonleft distinction, because it creates more-or-less arbitrary decisions in coding parties in the political center. We instead scale all political parties according to the average left-right self-placement of their constituencies so as to produce a continuous variable with high scores indicating rightist voting.[60] It is quite remarkable, for that matter, that Nieuwbeerta codes new-leftist parties as nonleft parties. Given massive support for those parties from the middle class,[61] it needs no further argument that this decision produces a less dramatic decline of the relationship between class and voting than has actually occurred.

4. RESULTS

We apply multilevel regression analysis, conceiving of country, year, and respondent as three different levels of analysis. To safeguard readability, we display only the coefficients that are relevant for our argument in the main text; the full tables can be found in the appendix.

Before testing our two hypotheses, we demonstrate that EGP class, education, and income are related in ways that make EGP class too ambiguous a variable in the study of class voting. Table 2 points out that substantial income differences exist between the seven EGP classes (Model 1). The class of higher professionals has the highest average income, and the classes of skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled manual workers the lowest. In Model 2, we included education as an independent variable. Its strong and positive coefficient shows there is a clear relationship: the highly educated earn higher incomes.

Although this positive relationship between education and income is not surprising in itself, of course, it strongly reduces the income differences between the manual classes and the higher professionals, indicating that the seven classes differ strongly with respect to both income and education. This makes EGP class too ambiguous a variable for the study of class voting, because whereas income and education both drive class voting, as we have argued above, it is education alone that constitutes the driving force behind crosscutting cultural voting. Hence, to prevent an underestimation of class voting because of the use of an

Table 2

Income Explained by EGP Class and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation; N = 93,567 respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Independents				
Higher professionals (= ref.)	0		0	
Lower professionals	−.222***	(.011)	−.206***	(.011)
Nonmanual workers	−.568***	(.012)	−.380***	(.012)
Petty bourgeoisie	−.427***	(.009)	−.242***	(.010)
Higher working class	−.179***	(.008)	−.089***	(.008)
Skilled workers	−.612***	(.011)	−.368***	(.011)
Semi- and unskilled workers	−.867***	(.011)	−.545***	(.012)
Education			.587***	(.008)

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

occupational class measure, one should at least statistically control for educational differences between these classes so as to eliminate crosscutting cultural voting from the measurement of class voting.

Using rightist voting as the dependent variable and six EGP class dummies as the independent variables, we next turn to the relationship between EGP class and voting behavior and the way this relationship has changed in the postwar era. It is evident that the skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled workers vote for leftist parties more often than the middle class, given their strong negative coefficients (see Table 3, Model 1).

In Model 2 we entered cross-level interaction effects. The effects of these multiplications of EGP classes with year demonstrate that the traditional alignments between class and voting have weakened across time. The positive and significant coefficients for the skilled workers and semiskilled and unskilled workers point out that compared to the middle class, these classes have increasingly come to vote for rightist parties since World War II. This is not a surprising finding, of course. It is merely a replication of the principal finding of Nieuwbeerta's aforementioned study (which is based on the same data), on which so much of the newly grown consensus in political sociology about a decline in class voting is based.[62] This decline in the relationship between EGP class and voting behavior cannot be interpreted as indicating a decline in class voting just like that, however, as Table 4 points out.

The positive and significant coefficients for income and education in Model 1 indicate that those with high incomes and those with high levels of education are more inclined to vote for rightist parties, which is, of course, consistent with the class theory of voting. However, both of those relationships have changed across time, albeit in radically different directions. The significant cross-level

Table 3

Rightist Voting Explained by EGP Class (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation; N = 93,567 *respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)*

	Model 1		Model 2	
Fixed effects				
Higher professionals (ref.)	0		0	
Lower professionals	−.086***	(.018)	−.090***	(.018)
Nonmanual workers	−.139***	(.022)	−.141***	(.022)
Petty bourgeoisie	.058	(.029)	.055	(.029)
Higher working class	−.083***	(.023)	−.084***	(.023)
Skilled workers	−.313***	(.052)	−.313***	(.052)
Semi- and unskilled workers	−.307***	(.057)	−.308***	(.057)
Year	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)
Interactions				
Year × Higher professionals (ref.)			0	
Year × Lower professionals			−.011	(.008)
Year × Nonmanual workers			.019*	(.009)
Year × Petty bourgeoisie			.013	(.008)
Year × Higher working class			.011	(.008)
Year × Skilled workers			.037**	(.009)
Year × Semi- and unskilled workers			.033**	(.010)

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4

Rightist Voting Explained by Income and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation; N = 93,567 *respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed effects						
Income	.099**	(.027)	.098**	(.027)	.101**	(.028)
Education	.104*	(.048)	.100*	(.048)	.099*	(.046)
Year	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)
Interactions						
Education × year			−.037**	(.009)	−.040**	(.009)
Income × year					.024*	(.010)

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

interactions of education and income with year (Models 2 and 3) point out that those with low levels of education have come to vote more rightist, while those with low incomes have come to vote more leftist across the years. Both coefficients are significant, but while the former is negative, the latter is positive.

Figure 2 depicts these trends to visualize our findings. The dotted line indicates the increasing strength of the relation between income and rightist voting,
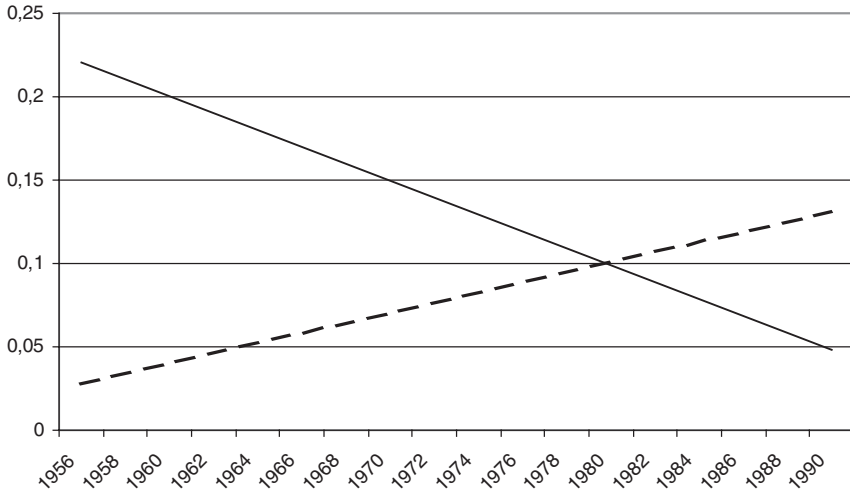
Figure 2.   Trends in the relationship of income (dotted line) and education with rightist voting.

while the solid line shows the decreasing strength of the relationship between education and rightist voting. Put differently, since World War II, the rich (poor) increasingly voted right (left) wing, while the higher (lower) educated increasingly voted left (right) wing. This is obviously not what one would expect if both of these variables unambiguously indicated class. Indeed, as explained above, whereas the former development can be interpreted as an increase in class voting, the latter rather needs to be interpreted as an increase in cultural voting. This brings us to our final question: has the decline of the relationship between EGP class and voting behavior indeed been caused by this increase in cultural voting?

Obviously, the increasing tendency of the working class to vote for rightist parties cannot be explained by the increase in class voting, that is, the increasing tendency of those with low incomes to vote for parties on the left (Table 5, Model 2). In comparison to Model 1, which reproduces the decline in class voting already shown in Table 3, the working class still proves to have come to vote more rightist since World War II after income is included in the analysis. This means that our first hypothesis is rejected: the decline of the relationship between occupational class and voting behavior has not been caused by a decline in class voting, that is, a decline of the tendency of those with low incomes to vote for parties on the left and those with high incomes to vote for parties on the right.

As expected, however, the increase in cultural voting, that is, the increased tendency of those with low levels of education to vote for rightist parties, accounts for most of the shift of the working class toward rightist parties (Model 3). The coefficient for the class of semiskilled and unskilled workers falls into nonsignificance,

Table 5
Rightist Voting Explained by EGP Class, Income, and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation, N = 93,567 *respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Interactions						
Year × Higher professionals (ref.)	0		0		0	
Year × Lower professionals	−.010	(.008)	−.011	(.008)	−.012	(.008)
Year × Nonmanual workers	.019*	(.008)	.016	(.009)	.012	(.009)
Year × Petty bourgeoisie	.007	(.008)	.003	(.009)	−.002	(.009)
Year × Higher working class	.011	(.008)	.008	(.007)	.006	(.007)
Year × Skilled workers	.034**	(.009)	.030**	(.009)	.024**	(.009)
Year × Semi- and unskilled workers	.019**	(.010)	.025**	(.010)	.017	(.010)
Year × Income			.025**	(.009)	.029**	(.009)
Year × Education					−.038**	(.009)

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

while that for the class of skilled workers declines once voting on the basis of level of education is controlled for. Controlling for cultural voting, then, the relationship between EGP class and voting behavior since World War II hardly declines anymore. This confirms our second hypothesis: the decline of the relationship between EGP class and voting behavior has been caused by an increase in cultural voting—a decrease in the tendency of the well educated to vote for parties on the right and the poorly educated to vote for parties on the left.

5. CONCLUSION AND DEBATE

What Stonecash has already demonstrated for the United States applies more generally: class voting has not declined during the postwar era but has even become stronger. The suggestion to the contrary has been informed by studies of the development of the bivariate relationship between occupation-based class categories (especially the EGP class schema) and voting behavior. As it happens, this type of class measure inevitably and wrongly mixes up class voting, driven by class-based economic interests, and reverse cultural voting, driven by a cultural dynamic that is instead rooted in educational differences. It as such precludes valid conclusions as to whether the decline of the familiar alignments denotes a decline in class voting or an increase in cultural voting.

Our findings, relying on income to indicate class more validly and acknowledging the double role of education in driving class voting as well as reverse cultural voting, leave little to the imagination. The gradual erosion of the pattern of a leftist-voting working class and a rightist-voting middle class has been caused

by an increase in crosscutting cultural voting, driven by a cultural dynamic that is rooted in educational differences. Class voting, measured more validly by using income categories, has not declined but has in fact become even stronger in the postwar era.

The intellectual consensus that has emerged since Clark and Lipset sparked the death of class debate in the beginning of the 1990s does not hold that class is actually dead to be sure but rather that it is dying a slow—and perhaps painful—death. Our findings necessitate a critical reassessment of this consensus, because they point out that there is nothing dead or dying about class. We feel it is more apt to say that class has been buried alive under the increasing weight of cultural voting, systematically misinterpreted as a decline in class voting because of an invalid measurement practice that has become an intellectual routine since Alford's pioneering work in the 1960s. As a lamentable consequence, poor old class now suffers its undeserved and horrid fate, "with thoughts of the air and grass above, with memory of dear friends who would fly to save us if but informed of our fate, and with consciousness that of this fate they can never be informed."[63] Disentangling class voting and cultural voting more carefully in future empirical research is necessary to save class from this "most terrific of the ghastly extremes of agony."[64]

APPENDIX

So as not to lose ourselves in statistical details, we have chosen to report only the most relevant parts of Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the main text and to present the full tables in this appendix. We apply multilevel modeling, because people in a particular context (country/year) are likely to be more similar than people in different contexts. Multilevel analysis enables splitting up the variance of the dependent variable. This is done in the null model of Full Table 2, which demonstrates that only a small proportion of the variance of the dependent variable (income) is situated at the country level (0.77), followed by the year level (1.43), while most of the variance is situated at the individual level (5.41). This basically means that about 71 percent (5.41 / (0.77 + 1.43 + 5.41) ∗ 100) of the total variance of the dependent variable can be explained by characteristics of the respondent, 10 percent by characteristics of the country in which the respondent lives, and the remaining 19 percent by changes in time.

Multilevel regression models are always constructed in such a way that any modification to the model must yield a reduction in deviance. Given the differences in degrees of freedom and deviance, as compared to the previous model, it can be tested (using the chi-square distribution) whether the new model fits the data better than the previous one. In Full Table 2, the inclusion of the class indicators (Model 1) renders a reduction of 8,254.8. With a difference of 6 degrees of freedom, this is a highly significant improvement as compared to the null model.

After including the class dummies in the first model, the unexplained variance at the individual level drops from 5.41 to 4.95. This means that 8.5 percent of the income differences can be explained by the class dummies. Note, however, that neither in this model

Full Table 2

Income Explained by EGP Class and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation, N = 93,567 respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)

	Null Model		Model 1		Model 2	
Independents						
Constant	3.146***	(.297)	3.146***	(.297)	3.146***	(.297)
Higher professionals (= ref.)			0		0	
Lower professionals			−.222***	(.011)	−.206***	(.011)
Nonmanual workers			−.568***	(.012)	−.380***	(.012)
Petty bourgeoisie			−.427***	(.009)	−.242***	(.010)
Higher working class			−.179***	(.008)	−.089***	(.008)
Skilled workers			−.612***	(.011)	−.368***	(.011)
Semi- and unskilled workers			−.867***	(.011)	−.545***	(.012)
Education					.587***	(.008)
Variance country level	.772	(.457)	.771	(.456)	.771	(.456)
Variance year level	1.429***	(.248)	1.430***	(.248)	1.430***	(.248)
Variance individual level	5.405***	(.025)	4.948***	(.023)	4.695***	(.022)
Deviance	423871.7		415616.9		410698.2	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

nor in the next one do the unexplained variances at the country and year level decrease—which is logical, of course, because only individual-level independent variables are introduced in these models. In the final model, education is introduced, again rendering a significant decrease in deviance (from 415,617 to 410,698) and a decrease in unexplained variance at the individual level.

Full Table 3 also estimates multilevel models, because the dependent variable (rightist voting behavior by individual respondents) is again nested within countries and years. Again, variances of the dependent variable are estimated. There is an important difference from the analysis reported in Table 2, however, because in these models the effects of class are randomized. Model 1 investigates whether the effects of class vary across periods and countries—especially the former should be the case, because our starting point is that the effect of class declines. From Model 1, it can be seen that, indeed, many of the slopes of the class dummies vary significantly across time and between countries. By introducing interaction effects with year, Model 2 attempts to explain away some of the variance of these class effects. This model points out that the country-level variances of the slopes of the class dummies remain intact. The year-level variances of the slopes of the two working classes, however, decline after including the significant interaction effects. Note, however, that not all year-level variance is explained away by the inclusion of the interaction effects. This means that much of the remaining across-time variance of the class effect is nonlinear, pointing at national idiosyncrasies when it comes to the relationship between class position and voting behavior. Because our principal concern in the current article is the general decline of the latter relationship, we do not go into these national idiosyncrasies any further.

Full Tables 4 and 5 investigate whether the effects of education and income (Full Tables 4 and 5) and class (Full Table 5) on voting behavior vary significantly between

Full Table 3

Rightist Voting Explained by EGP Class (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation, N = 93,567 *respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)*

	Model 1		Model 2	
Constant	4.796***	(.191)	4.796***	(.191)
Fixed effects				
Higher professionals (ref.)	0		0	
Lower professionals	−.086***	(.018)	−.090***	(.018)
Nonmanual workers	−.139***	(.022)	−.141***	(.022)
Petty bourgeoisie	.058	(.029)	.055	(.029)
Higher working class	−.083***	(.023)	−.084***	(.023)
Skilled workers	−.313***	(.052)	−.313***	(.052)
Semi- and unskilled workers	−.307***	(.057)	−.308***	(.057)
Year	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)
Interactions				
Year × Higher professionals (ref.)			0	
Year × Lower professionals			−.011	(.008)
Year × Nonmanual workers			.019*	(.009)
Year × Petty bourgeoisie			.013	(.008)
Year × Higher working class			.011	(.008)
Year × Skilled workers			.037**	(.009)
Year × Semi- and unskilled workers			.033**	(.010)
Variance random slopes country level				
Higher professionals (ref.)				
Lower professionals	.031	(.018)	.029	(.016)
Nonmanual workers	.047	(.024)	.046	(.024)
Petty bourgeoisie	.095*	(.044)	.096*	(.044)
Higher working class	.048	(.025)	.051	(.027)
Skilled workers	.384*	(.153)	.366*	(.145)
Semi- and unskilled workers	.447*	(.177)	.437*	(.172)
Variance random slopes year level				
Higher professionals (ref.)				
Lower professionals	.010*	(.005)	.001	(.003)
Nonmanual workers	.005	(.005)	.004	(.004)
Petty bourgeoisie	.012*	(.005)	.013*	(.006)
Higher working class	.019**	(.007)	.019**	(.007)
Skilled workers	.017**	(.006)	.011*	(.005)
Semi- and unskilled workers	.019**	(.007)	.014*	(.006)
Variance country level	.523**	(.191)	.523**	(.191)
Variance year level	.040***	(.007)	.040***	(.007)
Variance individual level	2.036***	(.009)	2.036***	(.009)
Deviance	332794.4		332746.8	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

countries and across time. These tables demonstrate that these preconditions for testing whether these effects increase or decrease across time are indeed met. According to the same logic as used in Table 3, these tables also demonstrate that these variances decline after the introduction of interaction effects with year.

Full Table 4

Rightist Voting Explained by Income and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation, N = 93,567 respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Constant	4.796***	(.191)	4.796***	(.191)	4.796***	(.191)
Fixed effects						
Income	.099**	(.027)	.098**	(.027)	.101**	(.028)
Education	.104*	(.048)	.100*	(.048)	.099*	(.046)
Year	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)
Interactions						
Education × year			−.037**	(.009)	−.040**	(.009)
Income × year					.024*	(.010)
Variance random slopes country level						
Income	.082*	(.042)	.082*	(.042)	.074	(.038)
Education	.308*	(.127)	.282*	(.115)	.280*	(.114)
Variance random slopes year level						
Income	.049***	(.012)	.050***	(.013)	.045***	(.012)
Education	.043***	(.011)	.029**	(.009)	.029**	(.009)
Variance country level	.523**	(.191)	.523**	(.191)	.523**	(.191)
Variance year level	.040***	(.007)	.040***	(.007)	.040***	(.007)
Variance individual level	2.114***	(.009)	2.114***	(.009)	2.114***	(.009)
Deviance	336131.1		336114.1		336108.5	

$*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.$

Full Table 5

Rightist Voting Explained by EGP Class, Income, and Education (multilevel regression analysis; entries are regression coefficients and standard errors; maximum likelihood estimation, N = 93,567 respondents and fifteen countries, 1956–1990)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Constant	4.796***	(.191)	4.796***	(.191)	4.796***	(.191)
Fixed effects						
Higher professionals (ref.)	0		0		0	
Lower professionals	−.077***	(.018)	−.072***	(.018)	−.072***	(.018)
Nonmanual workers	−.118***	(.024)	−.101***	(.022)	−.101***	(.022)
Petty bourgeoisie	.079*	(.030)	.108**	(.029)	.108**	(.029)
Higher working class	−.076**	(.023)	−.071**	(.023)	−.071**	(.023)
Skilled workers	−.284***	(.053)	−.256***	(.052)	−.256***	(.052)
Semi- and unskilled workers	−.272***	(.058)	−.244***	(.057)	−.244***	(.057)
Income	.097**	(.005)	.086**	(.019)	.086**	(.019)
Education	−.005	(.006)	.020	(.038)	.020	(.038)
Year	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)	.020	(.024)
Interactions						
Year × Higher professionals (ref.)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Year × Lower professionals	−.010	(.008)	−.011	(.008)	−.012	(.008)
Year × Nonmanual workers	.019*	(.008)	.016	(.009)	.012	(.009)

Full Table 5 (continued)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Year × Petty bourgeoisie	.007	(.008)	.003	(.009)	−.002	(.009)
Year × Higher working class	.011	(.008)	.008	(.007)	.006	(.007)
Year × Skilled workers	.034**	(.009)	.030**	(.009)	.024**	(.009)
Year × Semi- and unskilled workers	.019**	(.010)	.025**	(.010)	.017	(.010)
Year × Income			.025**	(.009)	.029**	(.009)
Year × Education					−.038**	(.009)
Variance random slopes country level						
Higher professionals (ref.)						
Lower professionals	.022	(.012)	.022	(.013)	.022	(.012)
Nonmanual workers	.013	(.010)	.014	(.010)	.013	(.009)
Petty bourgeoisie	.138*	(.060)	.138*	(.060)	.138*	(.060)
Higher working class	.044	(.023)	.044	(.023)	.043	(.023)
Skilled workers	.186**	(.078)	.188*	(.078)	.187*	(.078)
Semi- and unskilled workers	.226*	(.093)	.228*	(.094)	.227*	(.093)
Income	.038	(.022)	.032	(.019)	.031	(.018)
Education	.210**	(.090)	.209*	(.090)	.185*	(.079)
Variance random slopes year level						
Higher professionals (ref.)						
Lower professionals	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)	.000	(.000)
Nonmanual workers	.004	(.004)	.004	(.004)	.004	(.004)
Petty bourgeoisie	.013*	(.006)	.013*	(.006)	.012*	(.005)
Higher working class	.013*	(.006)	.013*	(.004)	.013*	(.006)
Skilled workers	.007	(.004)	.007	(.004)	.007	(.005)
Semi- and unskilled workers	.007	(.005)	.007	(.005)	.008	(.005)
Income	.035**	(.010)	.030**	(.009)	.029**	(.009)
Education	.037***	(.010)	.038***	(.010)	.026**	(.008)
Variance country level	.523**	(.191)	.523**	(.191)	.523**	(.191)
Variance year level	.040***	(.007)	.040***	(.007)	.040***	(.007)
Variance individual level	2.028***	(.009)	2.014***	(.009)	2.014***	(.009)
Deviance	332375.6		331881.0		331881.0	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

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Jeroen van der Waal (vanderwaal@fsw.eur.nl) is a sociologist currently working on a dissertation concerning the impact of the globalizing economy on urban inequality at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands. His research interests are broader, including voting behavior and cultural change in the West. This article is a revised version of the second part of his master's thesis.

Peter Achterberg (p.achterberg@fsw.eur.nl) is a postdoctoral fellow at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands. His dissertation, Considering Cultural Conflict, *studies the rise of the new political culture in relation to the alleged decline in class voting. Together with Dick Houtman and Anton Derks, he coauthored the book* Farewell to the Leftist Working Class *(Transaction, forthcoming), answering the question of why the working class has increasingly moved to the right.*

Dick Houtman (houtman@fsw.eur.nl) is an associate professor of sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands, and a member of the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR). Two of his recent books are Class and Politics in Contemporary Social Science *(Aldine de Gruyter, 2003) and* Farewell to the Leftist Working Class *(with Peter Achterberg and Anton Derks, Transaction, forthcoming).*