

## What Remains of Class Voting?

Nonna Mayer

► **To cite this version:**

Nonna Mayer. What Remains of Class Voting?. Pascal Perrineau; Luc Rouban. Politics in France and Europe, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.167 - 181, 2009, 9781403962164. hal-02299019

**HAL Id: hal-02299019**

**<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02299019>**

Submitted on 27 Sep 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## CHAPTER 10

---

# What Remains of Class Voting?

*Nonna Mayer*

According to the thesis put forward by the sociologist Seymour M. Lipset in his book, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, the electoral game is essentially a reflection of the class struggle: “In virtually every economically developed country, the lower-income groups vote mainly for parties of the Left, while the higher-income groups vote mainly for parties of the right.”<sup>1</sup> However, almost thirty years later he is one of the first people, along with Terry Clark, to predict the disappearance of social classes and of the privileged link between left-wing parties and people from working-class backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

The stakes are high. Despite the rise of the middle classes, the so-called working classes continue today to represent the majority of the electorate. And these are the classes that the radical and populist Extreme-Rights developing in Europe today are trying to win over. Does the notion of a “class vote” still have meaning? If so, what are the theoretical and empirical bases for it? This chapter will address these questions from a comparative perspective, looking at France in a European context and paying particular attention to questions of definition and measurement. The Marxist approach stresses the position of individuals in the process of production, the relationship to capital and to work, domination, and conflict. It sees social classes as collective actors, equipped with a class conscience and with political representation. On the other hand, the Weberian approach stresses the unequal access of individuals to economic, social, and political resources without these latter being necessarily cumulative or producing a sense of class consciousness. Rather than classes, it identifies social strata according to their position on scales based on income, qualifications, and prestige. These two approaches will be combined here, taking both the relationship to the means of work and social position into account.

## The Origins of Class Voting

### *The Sociological Model*

Electoral sociology really came into its own in the United States after the Second World War with opinion polls and the groundbreaking work of Paul Lazarsfeld and his team at Columbia University.<sup>3</sup> They carried out a survey to measure the impact of the 1940 presidential election among a representative panel of inhabitants of Erie County in Ohio. The panel was questioned on seven different occasions and the results revealed, to their great surprise, that the electoral campaign had only a limited effect on the political choices made. The majority of voters had made their minds up well before the campaign started and remained faithful to their initial choices which corresponded to their social and professional background. Three variables played a key role: economic and social status,<sup>4</sup> religion, and place of residence. Three out of four rich protestant farmers voted for the Republican candidate and 90% of the urban Catholic labor force voted for the Democratic candidate: “People think, politically, as they are, socially. Social characteristics determine political characteristics,” such is the main conclusion of their study.<sup>5</sup> This sociological model was nonetheless rapidly called into question first by researchers at the University of Michigan who placed the psychological mechanisms of “party identification” at the heart of their model and then by economic approaches to voting. In Europe, on the contrary, the idea that politics is the reflection of social structures imposed itself durably both under the influence of Marxism and because, unlike American parties,<sup>6</sup> European parties were built on the bases of class.

This is what Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan showed in their groundbreaking book, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*.<sup>7</sup> They link the genesis of European parties to four basic conflicts. The first two are the product of a “nation-building” process which saw the nation-state progressively impose itself against both local, regional, and linguistic particularities (the center-periphery cleavage) and the influence and privileges of the Church. The second two are the result of the industrial revolution which first opposed the rising bourgeois industrial class to landowners and then workers to capitalist owners. The sequential interaction between these four cleavages gave birth to the partisan and electoral cleavages of today (table 10.1). The political parties were seen as agents for the transformation of these social conflicts into long-lasting political divisions which they would then contribute to maintaining. The first three cleavages gave rise to parties which differed from one country to another as the building of the nation-state, the rate of industrialization, the shock of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation did not occur at the same time or indeed at the same pace. However, the same cleavage along the lines of class was to be found everywhere with left-wing parties defending the working classes and conservative parties defending the middle and upper classes.

### *The Working-Class Vote*

The English sociologist, Robert Alford measured this “class vote” with the help of a simple indicator named after him which was to be used worldwide.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 10.1** The four stages in the formation of party systems

<i>Cleavage</i>	<i>Critical Period</i>	<i>Issue</i>
Center/periphery	Reformation— Counter-reformation: sixteenth–seventeenth centuries	National vs. supranational religion; national language vs. Latin
State/Church	National (French) Revolution: post-1789	Secular vs. religious control of mass education
Land/industry	Industrial Revolution: nineteenth century	Tariff levels for agricultural products; Control vs. freedom for industrial enterprise
Owner/worker	Russian Revolution: 1917	Integration into national polity vs. commitment to international revolutionary movement

*Source:* Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p. 47.

He identified two classes: one made up of workers and one made up of non-workers. He also identified two types of vote: a left-wing vote (Labor) and a right-wing vote (Conservative). The indicator is calculated by subtracting the proportion of workers from non-workers who vote Left. If during a given election all the workers vote to the Left and none of the non-workers do, the indicator takes on the value of 100 (100%-0%) resulting in a perfect class vote. If the proportion of workers and non-workers who vote Left is identical, then the index falls to 0 and there is no class vote. Should the proportion of non-workers voting to the Left be higher than the number of workers voting Left, then there is a negative index or inverse class vote. He compared the results of 53 electoral surveys carried out between 1936 and 1962 in the United States, in Britain, in Canada, and in Australia and found that the British case, where the index went up to + 40 was the purest example of “class voting,” whereas it fell to + 16 in the United States and was non-existent in Canada. In their analysis of British elections between 1963 and 1970, Butler and Stokes<sup>9</sup> confirm the privileged bond between British workers in the 1960s and the Labour Party, which was seen as the “defender of the workers.”

A similar phenomenon can be observed in France. The non directive interviews carried out by Guy Michelat and Michel Simon at the end of the 1960s,<sup>10</sup> reveal two antagonistic sub-cultures: the Catholic sub-culture defined by religion on the one hand and a non-religious sub-culture of workers defined by class antagonism on the other. The latter defined themselves as workers, fighting against capitalist bosses, they believed in the virtues of collective action, they preferred left-wing parties and trade unions, above all the Communist Party (PC) which was seen as the natural ally of the working “class.” The following interview extract demonstrates this clearly:

It seems to me that any self-respecting worker has to have communist tendencies all the same, he has communist ideas—it goes without saying. He is a communist sympathiser, necessarily, because he works for a boss, he works for some guy who gets rich by the sweat of your brow, automatically you're a communist, you're a communist sympathiser, that's all there is to it.<sup>11</sup>

Their survey took these results further. The right-wing vote was higher among people who practiced a religion. The left-wing vote increased depending on the degree of integration in the working class as measured by the number of working-class connections or attributes possessed (being a worker oneself, having a working-class father or spouse, etc.). It went from 18% amongst women who were without any connection to 55% for workers whose fathers were also workers. The effects of “objective” social class were seen to combine with those of the “subjective” social class, i.e. the class individuals feel they belong to.<sup>12</sup> Identification with the working class increased with the number of working-class attributes. The communist vote was the most frequent amongst people who accumulated objective and subjective belonging to the working class (43%). But it was the subjective class which exercised decisive influence over political choice. Among the people surveyed, those who did not have any attachments to the working class but who identified with it nonetheless voted communist more often than the working-class sons of workers who did not share this feeling (31% as against 22%).

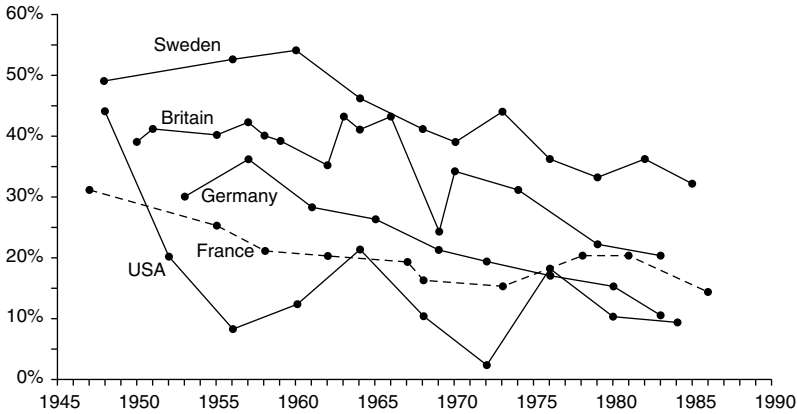
Using the same categories of cleavages—professional, religious, and territorial—as those highlighted by Lipset and Rokkan, a comparative survey carried out by Richard Rose in fifteen countries confirmed the determining influence of religion and social class on political choice.<sup>13</sup> Average variance explained by these three factors was 25% with a peak of more than 45% in Austria and more than 50% in the Netherlands. The religious variable was top of the list in “pillarised”<sup>14</sup> countries such as the Netherlands (50%), Belgium (23%), Austria (30%) and Catholic countries like Italy (22%) and France (28%). Social class had the strongest effect in the Scandinavian countries, with Sweden and Finland at 32% followed by Norway and Denmark. On first glance, the results seemed to confirm the thesis that cleavages were “frozen” and that the party system of the 1960s largely reflected the structure of cleavages in the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

## Death and Resurrection of Class Voting

### *From Cleavage Voting to Issue Voting?*

And yet, at the same moment, the first signs that the model was losing impetus began to appear. The Alford index which until then supported the thesis of the “class vote” was only used from then on by those who announced its decline as shown in the diagram below which was printed in a great number of publications (figure 10.1). This phenomenon varied from one country to another. The fall of the index was particularly precocious and brutal in the United States, gradual in France and late and relatively limited in Sweden where in 1985 the Alford index still reached + 35. However, the shape of the curves in the graph was generally the same, seeming to prefigure the disappearance of class voting.

During the same period, electoral “volatility” seemed to be on the rise. This was true whether it was measured at the level of individuals by tracing their electoral itinerary through opinion polls or at a collective party level by calculating



**Figure 10.1** Changes in the Alford Index

Source: Clark et al., 1993.

the gains accumulated by all parties between two consecutive national elections.<sup>16</sup> The trend was toward electoral de-alignment,<sup>17</sup> and toward a questioning among voters of their usual habit of voting for the party assimilated to their class or religious preference.

This decline in the link between social and political cleavages is generally associated with changes brought about by the shift from the industrial to the postindustrial society that modified the balance between classes and the way people relate to politics. The fact that the economy became so much more service oriented reduced the number of workers to the benefit of the middle classes and white-collar workers. Economic growth, improvements in standards of living, and the fact that they could buy their own home made workers more individualistic and less concerned about solidarity. In parallel to their “embourgeoisement”<sup>18</sup> the “proletarianisation” of routine non manual employees and a subsequent blurring of class borders could also be observed. More generally, the rising levels of education and particularly of higher education, the role of the media, the rise in “post-materialist” hedonistic and anti-authoritarian values theorized by the American sociologist, Ronald Inglehart,<sup>19</sup> are all factors which have encouraged the political emancipation of individuals. Better informed, more politically aware, they have become less dependent on political parties and better able to make up their minds depending on issues specific to the election and to the candidates presented. The individual has become “individualistic,” “rational,”<sup>20</sup> “able to choose.”<sup>21</sup> In the long run, “issue voting” would compete with the religious or socio-professional based “cleavage voting.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, the political supply, the parties on offer changed. These same post-materialist values were shaking up the system of party alignment, giving rise to new demands which had not been taken into account and favoring the emergence of new left-wing parties (ecologists and alternatives). They also encouraged the emergence of Extreme-Right and populist parties<sup>23</sup> in reaction to a society judged to be too permissive and too open. The old parties

themselves reinforced the decline of the class vote by changing their political discourse to widen their electoral base, thereby running the risk of losing their initial electorate. By opening up to the middle classes and by focusing on post-materialist issues, the working-class parties in particular blurred their image and lost some of their power of attraction among workers.

There are two variants of the thesis according to which class voting is declining. According to the first, socio-professional cleavages do not disappear: they change. Quite a lot of work has been done analyzing the fragmentation of the British working class, contrasting the old industrial working class of northern England and Scotland with a new class in the south of the country. This new class was better qualified, better off, worked in light industry, had developed a more instrumental and less collective vision of the trade unions and of politics and was more interested in the private sphere of activity. Dunleavy and Husbands<sup>24</sup> developed this distinction between public and private sector workers which also distinguished between consumers of public goods (social housing, public transport, and state health care) and consumers of private goods (car ownership, private housing, private health care). The first group tend to vote Labor and the second Conservative. Other authors pointed out the cleavages linked to education and the shift toward the Left of the new middle classes who had knowledge but not power and who were particularly sensitive to post-materialist issues, leaning toward the new left-wing parties.<sup>25</sup> The other variant argued that social and professional cleavages were declining. According to this view, political cleavages today are drawn only around post-materialist issues and values.<sup>26</sup> It argued that belonging to a given generation, gender, and ethnic identity have become increasingly important when deciding how to vote, transcending the barriers of class.

### *The Indicators Battle*

However, these results were rapidly called into question because of weaknesses in their methodological bases. Results always depend of course on how the measures are taken. Having studied 300 elections in 12 European countries taking place over a century, Bartolini and Mair<sup>27</sup> support the opposite thesis: in the long term, it is electoral stability which dominates with the volatility observed being an optical illusion resulting from the fact that the period studied was too recent and also from the indicators used. If the notion of cleavage is studied with rigor, if one reasons in the long term starting with the end of the nineteenth century, if one retains only the volatility between blocks rather than movement within each camp then electoral mobility seems much stronger during the inter-war period.

The Alford index was the one to receive most criticism for a number of reasons. It doesn't take variations in numbers within each class over time and within the electorates considered into account. Nor does it take into account the complexity of social structure in postindustrial society which can not be reduced to two classes. Finally, it does not take account of the complexity of the political landscape and especially within multi-party systems. Using more

sophisticated statistical methods together with more finely tuned and more subtle socio-professional and political divisions, other research has put the decline of the class vote into perspective. In England, Anthony Heath and his colleagues at Oxford<sup>28</sup> carried out research using loglinear models based on the calculation of odds ratios. The odds of workers having voted Left rather than Right ( $O_L/O_R$ ) is related to the odds of non-workers having voted Left rather than Right ( $\bar{O}_L/\bar{O}_R$ ). The further the value is from 1, the stronger the class effect is. Rather than confining themselves to the worker/non-worker dichotomy, the authors returned to the more elaborate classification put forward by John Goldthorpe and Robert Erikson.<sup>29</sup> This classification takes account of the degree of autonomy in the workplace, the level of expertise and the exercise of authority to distinguish the service class from routine non manual employees and manual workers. They conclude that, in England, there is no linear decline in class voting but rather “trendless fluctuations” where class voting decreased between 1964 and 1979 and then rose again. The specific context of each election must be taken into account, the decline in the working-class vote, for example, usually sanctions a long period of Labour government.

The most sophisticated model is the one proposed by Michael Hout, Jeff Manza, and Clem Brooks<sup>30</sup> in their analysis of class voting in the United States. Using presidential elections between 1948 and 1992 they measure what they call, “the total class vote” as opposed to the “traditional class vote” as measured by the Alford index. They take account of all possible electoral choices including abstention and ballots for independent candidates. They distinguish six socio-professional categories, based on Goldthorpe’s classification and they use a synthetic indicator, the kappa index which summarizes a series of multinomial logistic regressions. They conclude that class voting has not disappeared in the United States. On the other hand, important realignments have taken place as workers have detached themselves from the Democratic Party, company owners have stressed their support for the Republicans and professionals and managers<sup>31</sup> have shifted toward the Democrats.

The controversy has not yet been settled as Geoffrey Evans’ collective book illustrates,<sup>32</sup> bringing together fervent opponents and defenders of the class vote thesis, all of them camping on their own positions.<sup>33</sup> More recently, the major studies of Knutsen<sup>34</sup> and Thomassen<sup>35</sup> reassess transformations in cleavage voting in Europe and Jeroen Van de Waal, Peter Achterberg, and Dick Houtman even conclude that there has been a revival of class voting, drawing from the data of the International Social Mobility and Politics File.<sup>36</sup>

### France in the European Mirror

In the light of these debates, the major electoral surveys carried out at the Cevipof enable an in-depth study of change in class voting in France from the presidential election of 1978 to the 2002<sup>37</sup> presidential election to be undertaken. During this period, social structure changed enormously.<sup>38</sup> The overall level of qualifications rose. From 1980 to 2002 the proportion of young people aged 20–24 in higher education increased from 18% to 43%. The proportion



**Table 10.2** Correspondence between Goldthorpe's and the INSEE's classification

<i>Goldthorpe and Erikson (1992)</i>	<i>The INSEE's Socio-professional Groups</i>
Self-employed	<i>Agriculteurs, commerçants, artisans</i>
Upper service class	<i>Cadres, professions intellectuelles supérieures, chefs d'entreprise</i>
Lower service class	<i>Professions intermédiaires</i>
Routine non-manual employees	<i>Employés</i>
Skilled workers, unskilled workers	<i>Ouvriers</i>

Source: Cevipof post-electoral surveys and the French Electoral Panel, 2002.

of self-employed receded. Farmers represented 20% of the active population in 1954 and less than 5% in 2002 and the share of artisans and shopkeepers dropped from 12% to 5%. The proportion of workers fell from more than 30% to 25%, while the number of routine non-manual employees doubled to reach 30%. The number of people in the upper service class quadrupled and the lower service class doubled. Today, taken as a whole, professionals and managers make up one third of the workforce. Finally, mass unemployment, mostly affecting routine non manual employees and workers began in 1974 and varied between 8% and 12% throughout the period as against less than 2% in the 1960s. This was also a politically volatile period which witnessed the arrival of the Left in power followed by its defeat, the implantation of the *Front National* (FN) in the French political landscape, the return of the Left as a result of the surprise dissolution in 1997, three periods of cohabitation, and the return of the Right as a result of the political “earthquake” on the April 21, 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen beat the socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin in the first round of the presidential election thus qualifying for the second round.

Two indicators of social class were used. The first of these was the interviewee's occupation using the INSEE's nomenclature of six socio-professional groups (SPG) which is quite similar to Goldthorpe and Erikson's classification (table 10.2). The second indicator used was the socio-professional status which distinguishes between the self-employed and employees who work for a boss. This includes both public sector employees whose employer is the state and private sector employees. The unemployed, retirees and women who have given up paid employment were reclassified according to their last job, the effects of the professional background on electoral behavior being prolonged beyond the temporary or definitive cessation of activity. Lastly, on the political front, the emergence of the *Front National* was taken into account and a distinction was made between votes for the Left, the Center-Right, and the Extreme-Right.

### ***Class Dealignments and Realignment***

During the period studied, the privileged bonds between workers and left-wing parties were effectively eroded (table 10.3). In 1978, seven out of ten workers voted for them.

In 2002, only 43% of them did so. Although the left-wing vote remained the largest among them, the gap with non-worker employees practically disappeared.

The Alford index which was at 23 in 1978 was at zero in 2002. This receding of the Left was linked to transformations within the working-class landscape which was greatly affected by industrial restructuring and unemployment. This partly benefited the *Front National*. It obtained its highest score from workers in the 1995 presidential election or more precisely from those workers who did actually vote as the abstention rate was highest<sup>39</sup> amongst this section of the electorate. Between 1978 and 2002, the total number of votes cast by workers for the Extreme-Right increased from 1% to 26%. Harnessing the disappointment aroused by the arrival of the Socialists in power in 1981, the FN portrayed itself as the privileged defender of the little guy against the great and powerful, the people against the elites. Conversely, the salaried middle classes—a category with a high proportion of young people, urban dwellers, well-educated people, non church goers, and sensitive to post-1968 values—moved closer to the Left and in particular to the Socialist Party which had been renovated in 1971. This switching of political allegiances drew the new socio-professional cleavages.

The first of these distinguishes between employees and the self-employed. Four out of five of the latter prefer the right-wing to left-wing parties who, to their minds, defend employees against owners and reinforce state intervention in economic life. In 2002, the level of left-wing votes among the two groups was still separated by 23 points as against 32 in 1978 (table 10.3). A second cleavage has appeared between private and public sector employees. The latter are more likely to vote Left that has remained the dominant political force amongst them throughout the period studied. During the same period,

**Table 10.3** The left-wing vote by socio-professional group and status (%)

	<i>Leg. election</i> 1978	<i>Pres. election</i> 1988	<i>Pres. election</i> 1995	<i>Leg. election</i> 1997	<i>Pres. election</i> 2002
<i>Socio-professional group</i>					
Farmers	26	29	20	27	18
Owners	31	32	19	31	20
Executives and Managers	45	41	46	46	43
Mid-level employees	57	48	45	51	50
Routine non manual employees	54	52	38	52	39
Workers	70	63	49	52	43
<b>Alford Index</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>Status</i>					
Self-employed	28	30	22	29	21
Salaried	60	54	44	51	44
<b>Gap</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Sector</i>					
Private	58	52	40	47	39
Public	64	58	52	57	51
<b>Gap</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Total</i>	53	49	41	48	43
<i>Numbers</i>	3,867	3,091	3,149	1,963	2,826

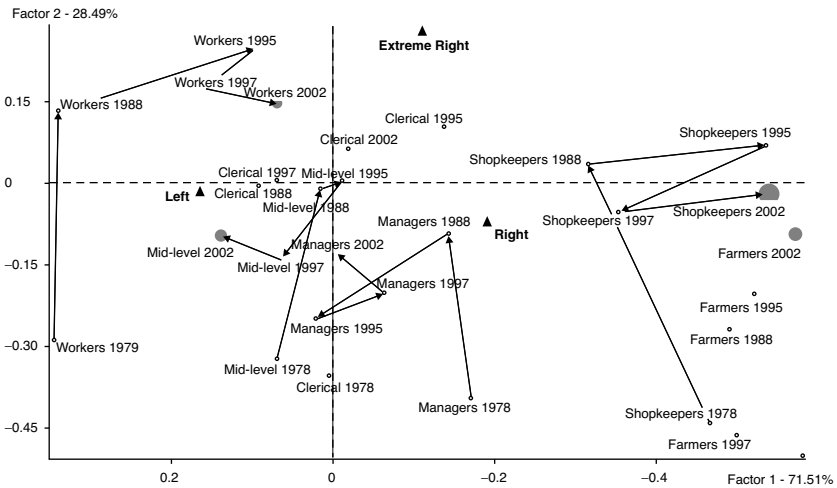
Source: Cevipof post-electoral surveys and the French Electoral Panel, 2002.

the Left receded among private sector employees who tend to be more receptive to either Le Pen type political messages (workers and routine non manual employees) or messages from the Center Right (managers and professionals). The gap between the two groups has risen from 6 points in 1978 to 12 points since 1995. The persistence of unemployment, which has affected private sector employees massively, has made them see public sector employees as privileged as they have guaranteed jobs and better pension schemes. In the meantime, the latter are fearful of the economic liberalism of the Right and the risks of deregulation associated with the building of the European Union. Socio-professional cleavages have shifted. However, they have not disappeared.

A correspondence factor analysis allows these transformations to be visualized more synthetically (figure 10.2). This is done by projecting the six socio-professional groups onto the political landscape and following their movements in time from one election to another.<sup>40</sup> Three phenomena clearly appear. Workers have progressively moved toward the center of the graph, shifting away from their initial anchoring on the Left. Managers and the upper service class, on the other hand, have moved away from the Right. A loglinear model of these different parameters<sup>41</sup> confirms the hypothesis of a transformation and not the disappearance of class voting. To the de-alignment of workers corresponds a realignment of mid-level employees toward the Left and of the self-employed toward the Right.

**The Perturbing Effect of the Front National**

The only exception to this rule is the vote for the *Front National* which brings yesterday’s class enemies—workers and small business owners—into the same camp through their rejection of immigrants.<sup>42</sup> This blurring of boundaries



**Figure 10.2** Changes in the vote by socio-professional group in France 1978–2002  
 Source: Cevipof post-electoral surveys and the French Electoral Panel, 2002 (Cautrès and Mayer, 2004, p. 154).

**Table 10.4** The Le Pen vote by socio-professional group (%)

<i>Socio-professional group</i>	1998	1995	2002	<i>Gap</i>
Farmers	10	10	22	12
Owners	19	19	22	3
Executives and Managers	14	4	13	-1
Mid-level employees	15	14	11	-4
Routine non manual employees	14	18	22	8
Workers	17	21	23	6

Source: Cevipof post-electoral surveys and the *Panel électoral français*, 2002.

intensified again during the 2002 presidential election, when for the first time the FN leader made advances in rural and agricultural areas. The level of the Le Pen vote is identical among farmers, company owners, non manual employees and workers. The only categories to resist his influence are executives and managers (table 10.4). The specific nature of the Le Pen vote is confirmed by taking the different parameters likely to explain the vote into account.<sup>43</sup>

Religion and socio-professional status (self-employed, public sector employee, private sector employee) remain the best predictors of choice between left- and right-wing candidates in the first round. The same can not be said for the Extreme-Right. In this case, it is no longer the socio-professional status which counts but the level of education and the sex of the voter. Whatever their age, less well-educated voters gave their vote more often to Le Pen or Mégret on April 21, and men much more willingly than women. If women had been the only ones to vote on that day, Le Pen would have been in third position after Jospin and Chirac. If only men had voted, Le Pen would have taken first place, in front of Chirac and Jospin. The simplistic discourse of the *Front National* which makes immigrants the single cause of all problems in France today, and “national preference,” the miracle remedy for unemployment, is more readily listened to among the less well educated. Added to this, the physical and verbal violence that surrounds Le Pen rebuffs female voters, as does the traditional image of the woman at home which he conveys.

The *Front National* therefore appears to be a perturbing element in the French political landscape, bringing together a composite electorate by means of the federating issue of immigration. Whatever the election, this is the problem which together with insecurity is the primary motivation for this electorate. This is quite clearly a cross-cleavage and cross-class issue vote.

### ***European Electoral Tendencies***

The first wave of the European social survey was carried out late 2002, early 2003 in around 20 countries including France. It provided an opportunity to compare the French situation to what was happening in other European countries. There already exist several comparative studies on electoral cleavages. The one which Jacques Thomassen directed recently on the European voter, using the European electoral survey data bank of the International Committee for

Research into Elections and Representative Democracy (ICORE),<sup>44</sup> confirms a general weakening of the relationship between party choice and class membership. However, he confines himself to the six countries for which comparable data since the 1960s are available: Denmark, (West) Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Oddbjorn Knutsen's study,<sup>45</sup> using several *Eurobarometers* waves (1975–1997), includes France alongside Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Knutsen keeps to the Left-Right dichotomy using the whole range of class vote indicators to show how it reached its highest level in Denmark and its lowest in Italy and Germany. During the period under study, it declined overall by 35% (Kappa index) to 47% (Alford index) on average. The decline was highest in Denmark and the Netherlands, insignificant in Germany and middling in France. Using the ESS survey, this analysis can be continued. Our socio-professional indicator comes close to John Goldthorpe and Robert Erikson's categorization (table 10.2), distinguishing four groups of employees from executives and managers to workers and classifying the self-employed separately.<sup>46</sup> The second indicator used is the status divided into three positions distinguishing between self-employed workers and public and private sector employees.<sup>47</sup> The electoral indicator used is the reconstitution of the votes in the last national election. The question was often asked several months after the election and is understood here essentially as an indicator of political position. It correlates to the position on a Left-Right scale and degree of party alignment. France is compared to two countries where class voting was particularly high, Sweden and the United Kingdom, to Germany where it was particularly low and to Spain, a southern country where industrialization is more recent.

In three of these five countries, it can be observed that the level of left-wing voting—the ecologists are included here—increases regularly as one goes down the social scale: from company owners to senior and mid-level executives, then to clerical and sales staff, reaching its maximum among workers. In Sweden and the United Kingdom in particular, almost three quarters of workers say they voted Left and 60% do so in Spain where the group is the largest<sup>48</sup> (table 10.5). In France, on the other hand, the working-class exception is no more. There is no longer any difference between the level of left-wing votes among workers, non manual employees and mid-level employees. Finally in Germany, the Alford index is negative. The left-wing vote is higher among mid-level employees and executives and managers than among workers as had been observed in France right after the 2002 presidential election (table 10.3). But if the relationship to the means of production is taken as an indicator contrasting employees as a whole to the self-employed, the class vote clearly remains. In all five countries, including Germany, the fact of being self-employed clearly decreases the likelihood of a left-wing vote.

Finally, the cleavage between public and private sector employees is really strong only in France (the gap in the level of left-wing voting among the two groups stands at 14 points) where debate on maintaining public service has been particularly intense and to a lesser extent in Germany. It is in-existent elsewhere.

**Table 10.5** Left-wing vote by socio-professional group and by country (%)

	<i>GE</i>	<i>SP</i>	<i>FR</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>SW</i>
<i>Socio-professional group</i>					
Self-employed	33	31	37	56	40
Executives and managers, Liberal professions	58	34	50	63	48
Mid-level employees	68	41	58	63	55
Routine non manual employees	55	53	58	63	65
Workers	55	60	57	74	74
<b>Alford Index</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Status</i>					
Self-employed	33	31	37	56	40
Salaried	59	54	56	66	62
<b>Gap</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Sector</i>					
Private	57	54	51	66	61
Public	65	54	65	65	64
<b>Gap</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>3</b>

*Source:* ESS survey, 2003.

These results are based on the reconstitution of past votes whose unreliability is well known and on a simplified socio-professional nomenclature which limits the comparison. They need to be completed by national electoral surveys using much more detailed social and political indicators and notably questions on feelings of belonging to a given class. They show nonetheless that “class voting” continues to exist but in other forms. The main cleavages highlighted by Lipset and Rokkan have not disappeared. They have softened and shifted as a result of change in socio-professional structures and in the party system. This has varied greatly from one country to another. Overall, the link between belonging to the working class and voting to the Left has declined everywhere though it nonetheless remains strong in Sweden and more generally in the Scandinavian countries and in Britain (Table 10.5). On the other hand, from an electoral point of view, the Left has made progress amongst non working-class employees and has broadened its base beyond its habitual electorate amongst clerical and sales staff and mid-level employees. This can be read in either of two ways, as a class de-alignment but also as a class realignment. It can also be read as a wider opposition between the self-employed, who answer only to themselves and employees who are dependant on a boss. In other words, the socio-professional category one belongs to continues to be a factor in determining whether one votes Left or Right and more so than income or level of qualification.<sup>49</sup>

However, it is equally obvious that mid-level employees do not make up a class in the same way that yesterday’s workers did. Some of them at least—and in particular industrial workers who worked for large companies and lived in the same social housing areas—had a strong professional identity and a class culture which meant they leaned toward the left-wing unions and parties, and in particular the Communist Party. The world of non working-class employees seems much more fragmented and the notion of “middle” class less a mobilizing

force. As for the parties, they refer less and less to the notion of class and in this way contribute themselves to untying the links between social classes and votes.

### Notes

1. Lipset, 1981, 234.
2. Lipset and Clark, 1991; see also Clark and Lipset, 2001.
3. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944.
4. The socioeconomic status was identified by the interviewer who placed the people interviewed on a scale of 1–5, using a synthetic indicator narrowly correlated to the professional sector, level of education and the feeling of belonging to a particular class (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944, pp.17–21).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
6. Opposition between Republicans and Democrats was essentially built around the issues of slavery and the Civil War, although a class dimension was also present.
7. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967.
8. Alford, 1963.
9. Butler and Stokes, 1969.
10. Michelat and Simon, 1977.
11. Interviews with workers who declared they had no religion, carried out in 1966 (Michelat and Simon, 1977).
12. The indicator is the following: “Do you feel you belong to a social class? If yes, which one? (free answers).”
13. Rose, 1974.
14. The term comes from the Netherlands, from *verzuijing*: pillar. Society is segmented vertically into communities (religious, ideological, linguistic, ethnic, etc.) which rely on an associative network (schools, unions, sports clubs, cultural associations, etc.). These associations and clubs take the individual in hand from birth to death and shape his/her relationship to the world and to politics.
15. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, pp. 50–56.
16. Pedersen, 1979.
17. Crewe and Denver, 1985.
18. Goldthorpe et al., 1969.
19. Inglehart, 1990.
20. Habert, 1996.
21. Rose and McAllister, 1986.
22. Franklin et al., 1992.
23. Kitschelt and McGann, 1995.
24. Dunleavy and Husbands, 1985.
25. Grunberg and Schweisguth, 1983.
26. Inglehart, 1990.
27. Bartolini and Mair, 1990.
28. Heath, Jowell, Curtice, 1985; Heath et al., 1991; Cautrès and Heath, 1996.
29. Goldthorpe and Erikson, 1992.
30. Hout, Manza, and Brooks, 1995b.
31. The “professionals” category includes self-employed people such as doctors and lawyers, etc.
32. Evans, 1999.

33. See also Hout, Brooks, and Manza, 1995a; Nieuwbeerta, 1996; Chauvel, 2002; Chopart and Martin, 2004; Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza, 2006.
34. Knutsen, 2006.
35. Thomassen, 2006.
36. Van de Waal, Achterberg, and Houtman, 2007.
37. These data are taken from the second wave of the French Electoral Panel 2002 carried out by telephone after the second round of the presidential election with a representative national sample of the metropolitan French registered voters (May 13–31, 2002, N = 4,017); three Cevipof post-electoral surveys run by the SOFRES as face to face interviews after the second round of the general election in 1978 (March 20–30, 1978, N = 4,507) and after the last two presidential elections (May 9–20, 1988, N = 4,032 and May 9–24, 1995, N = 4,078); and a survey carried out by the Cevipof, CRAPS, CIDSP, *Libération*, administered by the SOFRES by telephone between the two rounds of the 1997 general election (May 26–31, 1997, N = 3,010).
38. The following figures are based on the report on social and political change in French society drawn up by Galland and Lemel (2006).
39. If the percentages are recalculated on the basis of registered voters, on April 21 workers had the highest abstention rate at 31%, higher than votes for the Left (29%), the Right (22%) and the Extreme-Right (18%).
40. Cautrès and Mayer, 2004.
41. *Ibid.*, p.153.
42. Perrineau, 1997; Mayer, 2002.
43. Logistic regressions on left-wing, moderate Right, and Extreme-Right votes in the first round of the 2002 presidential election. Apart from socio-professional status, explicative variables include the number of links to the working class, income and assets, gender, level of education checked against age (Cautrès and Mayer, 2004, pg. 175).
44. Thomassen, 2006.
45. Oddjborn Knutsen, 2006.
46. The recoding was done by Luc Rouban on the basis of the ISCO-88 classification in 9 positions: 1–2 = Executives and higher intellectual professions 3 = Mid-level employees; 4–5 = Clerical and sales staff; 6–9 = Workers. I created a fifth category extracting the self-employed (farmers, company owners, artisans, shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers). Police and military come under mid-level employees and farm laborers under workers.
47. The distinction between public and private sector employees was reconstituted by Luc Rouban (2005) on the basis of the ESS variable “nacer1.” Civil servants, teachers, health and social services employees were classified in the public sector.
48. 45% as against 31% in Germany and between 24% and 27% in the three other countries.
49. Cautrès and Mayer, 2004.