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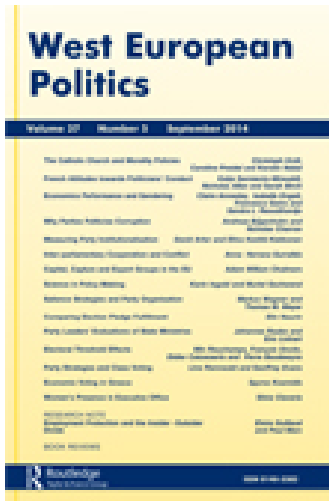
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# When Supply Creates Demand: Social Democratic Party Strategies and the Evolution of Class Voting

LINE RENNWALD and GEOFFREY EVANS

*This paper focuses on the policy strategies adopted by social democratic parties and their impact on the class basis of their support. It is argued that political appeals matter for explaining the development of class voting. This argument is tested through a comparison of the policy strategies of social democratic parties in Austria and Switzerland and the evolving patterns of class voting in the two countries. Using election surveys and data on the policy positions and media representation of the political parties from the 1970s to the 2000s, the article finds that the Social Democratic Party in Austria maintained a strong working class base. In contrast, the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland facilitated a major transformation of the class basis of its support by emphasising new cultural issues. It became the party of the 'new middle classes', leaving the working class to realign in support of the Swiss People's Party.*

How are we to understand the patterning of social class divisions in social democratic party voting? More than any other party family, the class basis of social democratic party support has been thought to have been undermined in recent decades. With the decline of the industrial sector since the mid-1970s in Western Europe, social democratic parties have seen a sharp erosion of their core electoral constituency in the industrial working class. The enlargement of social democratic parties' constituencies and its electoral consequences constituted the topic of major debates in the 1980s and 1990s (Kitschelt 1994a; Przeworski and Sprague 1986).

The new working class basis of radical right parties has attracted much attention over recent years (e.g. Rygdren 2013). However, little systematic research has been undertaken on the class basis of social democratic parties, and particularly on the impacts of the changing political programmes and appeals of this party family. In contrast this article treats social democratic parties as primary actors in changes of class voting patterns. By analysing their

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policy strategies, we seek to understand patterns of realignment in the class basis of left-wing party support which consequently facilitated the emergence of stronger or weaker working class support for radical right parties.

Recent advances in the empirical study of class voting have tried to explain over time and comparative variations in the strength of social cleavages (Elff 2009; Evans and De Graaf 2013; Evans and Tilley 2012a, 2012b; Evans *et al.* 1999; Oskarson 2005). In this context, two different approaches have been emphasised: one taking a ‘bottom-up’ perspective and the other ‘top-down’. In the former, changes in the social cleavages derive from processes of modernisation which weaken the distinction between social classes. In the latter, political parties shape the evolution of social cleavages by providing the voters choices that permit the preferences of the social classes to be articulated politically. Developing on this thesis, the paper assesses the efficacy of these two competing approaches with respect to understanding the evolution of class voting in two similar countries with different outcomes for patterns of class voting: Austria and Switzerland.

As small European and neighbouring countries, Austria and Switzerland have often been compared (e.g. Katzenstein 1984; Lehbruch 1967). They share several characteristics of political systems: they have important features of consensus democracies (e.g. Lijphart 1984) – notably the existence of grand coalitions – and have a high level of integration of economic interest organisations in economic decision-making (‘corporatism’) – Austria being the social variant of corporatism, Switzerland the liberal one (Afonso and Mach 2011; Katzenstein 1984). More important for our purpose is the fact that party systems have been shaken in the same way over recent decades. Despite initial differences – the Austrian party system approaching a two-party configuration, the Swiss one being more multiparty – both saw the emergence of same competitors since the 1980s: the Greens and radical right parties – the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) as result of a transformation of existing parties in both cases. Consequently, social democrats have faced the same competition for votes among their working class constituencies (from the radical right) and for new targets among middle class segments (from the Greens). This makes a comparison of the changes in the social democratic parties’ class basis particularly fruitful: the context in which party competition occurs can to some degree be held constant, thus facilitating inferences concerning the consequences of social democratic party strategies.

The working class basis of radical right parties in both countries has been established in several studies (for the SVP: Kriesi *et al.* 2005; Mazzoleni *et al.* 2005; Oesch and Rennwald 2010a, 2010b; Rennwald 2005; for the FPÖ: Aichholzer *et al.* 2014; Plasser and Ulram 2000, 2008; for a comparison: McGann and Kitschelt 2005). In Switzerland it has also been established that segments of the salaried middle class became the new stronghold of the Social Democratic Party in the 1990s and 2000s (Oesch and Rennwald 2010a; Sciarini 2010). However, no study has demonstrated how the differing evolution of the

class basis of support for the social democratic parties in the two countries has emerged in response to the strategies adopted by these parties.

Our results point to the importance of a ‘top-down’ approach for understanding class voting. The diverging evolution of the social democratic parties’ class basis between both countries – the socio-cultural specialists form the new basis of the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland, while the working class remains the relatively solid base of the Social Democratic Party in Austria – is to be explained by differences to the priorities of social democratic parties, namely the relative emphasis put on new cultural issues.

The structure of the article is as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework of the study with competing hypotheses relating to bottom-up and top-down approaches. As part of this endeavour we elaborate and refine the mechanisms contained within the category of ‘top-down’ to develop a more nuanced set of hypotheses than has hitherto been tested. This is followed by a description of methods and data. The first empirical section then establishes the explanandum: how the class basis of social democratic parties has transformed over time and the pattern of the differences between Austria and Switzerland. The following empirical sections test the bottom-up (differences in attitudes between classes) and top-down (differences in the appeals of political parties) explanations. Reasons for the different strategies adopted by the left parties in the two countries are considered in the conclusions.

### **The Evolution of Class Voting: Bottom-up or Top-down?**

Following a long tradition in political sociology (e.g. Lipset 1960), Evans and Tilley (2012b) and Evans and De Graaf (2013) argue that class voting is to a substantial degree an expression of the different economic, left–right preferences of classes. Class has an impact on voting because the working class has preferences for redistribution and therefore support left-wing parties advocating such redistributive policies, the middle classes seek to protect their economic advantages by supporting more right-wing parties. Hence, according to the authors, the strength of class voting stems from two different sources. From a bottom-up perspective, class voting is mainly the result of differences in citizens’ class preferences. From a top-down perspective, it is mainly the result of the parties’ political supply.<sup>1</sup>

If we apply this theoretical framework to the study of social democratic parties in a cross-national comparison, we would expect that from a bottom-up approach the extent of class voting varies across countries because class differences in economic preferences are more or less pronounced. From a top-down perspective, we would expect that class voting varies across countries because the positions and appeals of political parties differ. We can therefore develop competing hypotheses relating to the implications of these explanations for cleavage evolution in Austria and Switzerland.

*The Bottom-up Hypothesis: Comparing Austria and Switzerland*

To develop our bottom-up hypothesis, we rely on differences in the development of the class cleavage, differences that could have an effect on the extent to which classes differ on left–right economic attitudes. In Switzerland, the class cleavage has often been described as weak (e.g. Lijphart 1979). The early introduction of universal male suffrage in 1848 and the salience of the religious cleavage had the consequence that many workers had already developed political ties with either liberal or Catholic organisations when the socialist movement entered in the party system (see Bartolini 2000: 428). Additionally, the existence of the linguistic divide did not facilitate the organisation of the working class. As summarised by Lipset and Rokkan (1990 [1967]: 131): ‘The marked cultural and religious cleavages reduced the potential for the Socialist parties’.

In Austria the Catholic political movement had strong class-based support among the urban middle classes and the peasants from the beginning: ‘In contrast to the other continental cases, Catholic mobilisation in Austria did not pre-empt or cut across class appeals, but rather reinforced the dividing line of the latter’ (Bartolini 2000: 458). The state–church cleavage, the class cleavage and the urban–rural cleavage were superimposed on each other (Müller 1997).

In contrast to the reinforcing nature of social cleavages in Austria, then, the structure of divisions in Switzerland is best described as one involving cross-cutting cleavages. The cultural divisions cut across the class cleavage. We should therefore expect class differences in political attitudes to be greater in Austria than in Switzerland. Being cross-pressured, voters in Switzerland are likely to have a less clear-cut class basis to their left–right attitudes.<sup>2</sup> The following hypothesis can therefore be advanced:

*H1: Class position has weaker effects on economic left–right attitudes in Switzerland than in Austria. Therefore, in Switzerland, the working class is less likely to vote for the Social Democratic Party, and the middle class is more likely to do so, when compared with Austria.*

*Top-down Hypotheses*

In a top-down approach, we elaborate on three mechanisms: the impact of economic positions, cultural positions and issue salience.

*Economic positions.* Parties need to diverge on relevant class issues in order to have class differences in voting behaviour. If parties converge on left–right economic positions, this weakens the motivation for the voters to choose parties on the basis of class position (Evans and Tilley 2012a, 2012b; Evans and De Graaf 2013). Conversely, polarisation on issues relevant to class interests should increase the association between social position and party choice. In

response to the decline in the size of the working class, social democratic parties have typically moderated their economic positions – in an attempt to find an intermediate way between social democracy and neoliberalism ('Third Way') – in order to appeal to middle class voters.

Empirical evidence on the effects of party position convergence on class voting has been established in several countries. In Britain, Evans and Tilley (2012a) show that party position convergence can account for the decline of class voting from the 1970s. In Denmark, Arndt (2013) shows that the Social Democratic Party lost working classes core voters to the Danish People's Party after having engaged in 'Third Way' welfare state reforms in the 1990s.

Some authors (Fagerholm 2013; Keman 2011; Ladner *et al.* 2010) have described the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland as remaining more left-wing on economic policy than those in other countries. In contrast, commentators have noted a move to the centre on economic issues since the second half of the 1980s by the Austrian Social Democratic Party (e.g. Bischof *et al.* 1999). The positional argument thus implies higher levels of class voting in Switzerland than in Austria.

*H2: In Austria (but not in Switzerland), the Social Democratic Party has converged towards the position of its main right-wing opponent on the economic left–right dimension. Therefore, in Austria, the middle class has increased its support for the social democrats, while the working class support has decreased, in comparison with Switzerland.*

*Cultural positions.* The political space has often been conceptualised as two-dimensional: cultural positions cross-cut the economic positions of the left–right axis. Various authors have emphasised the growing importance for party competition of the cultural (or 'libertarian–authoritarian') dimension and its transformation over time (Kitschelt 1994a; Kriesi *et al.* 2006), producing a fundamental dilemma for social democratic parties (Kitschelt 1994a). White-collar employees are, in part due to their relatively high levels of education, more likely to hold libertarian attitudes (Achterberg and Houtman 2006; Evans *et al.* 1996; Kitschelt 1994a: 17ff). This applies particularly to employees in 'work situations' where they deal with 'human individuality' on a daily basis and are involved in 'intense communicative experiences' (Kitschelt 1994a: 17). This segment of the middle class corresponds to the 'socio-cultural specialists' who are clearly distinguished from the 'managers' who hold 'organisational authority' (Güveli *et al.* 2007; Heath *et al.* 1991; Kriesi 1998; Müller 1999; Oesch 2006).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the working class holds a more conservative position on social issues and a more restrictive position towards immigration (Kitschelt 1994a: 23–5). Therefore, the more strongly a social democratic party holds a libertarian position, the less likely working class voters will be to support the party and more likely they will be to turn to radical right parties advocating



authoritarian positions (Kitschelt 1994a: 33); conversely, socio-cultural specialists are more likely to support social democratic parties. In Switzerland, the Social Democratic Party has been shown to have a stronger liberal cultural position as compared to other European social democratic parties (Lachat and Kriesi 2008: 279–81). We test to what extent this is the case and what influence it can be argued to have on class voting:

*H3: In Switzerland (but not in Austria), the Social Democratic Party has adopted a more liberal cultural position. Therefore, in Switzerland, support for the social democrats amongst the socio-cultural specialists has increased, while amongst the working class it has decreased, in comparison with Austria.*

*Issue salience.* Issue ownership and issue salience theories posit that parties do not confront on the same issues, but rather compete by selectively emphasising issues on which they have a reputation, able to bring them an electoral advantage (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). However, parties cannot ignore prominent (but unfavourable) issues on the political agenda. They also react to new issues emerging on the political agenda and engage with issues that they do not ‘own’ (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Spoon *et al.* 2014).

One of the major challenges to mainstream left-wing parties – who traditionally ‘own’ economic, class-related issues (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004; Meguid 2005) – over recent decades has been the increasing salience of the issues put on the agenda by the new social movements (ecology, gender, societal issues) of the 1970s and 1980s, which deeply divided social democratic parties (Sassoon 1996: 647–90). This in turn has been accompanied by an increase of issues (e.g. immigration) coming from the right, in part as a reaction to the New Left (Bornschieer 2010; Ignazi 1992, 1996; Kitschelt and McGann 1995).

What signals do the social democratic parties send to voters? Are they signals that articulate left–right economic preferences (and therefore their class interests) or their cultural preferences? Even if they hold left-wing economic positions, if social democrats emphasise the latter to a greater extent this should weaken their appeal to working class voters. The *relative salience* of economic versus cultural issues thus provides a further possible mechanism by which parties influence levels and patterns of class voting.

We do not have clear attempts on differences in the issue salience of social democrats in both countries, given that they face the same competition from parties which ‘own’ cultural issues (Greens and radical right). Nevertheless, some hints should be given. The strong framework of social corporatism in Austria and the existence of (cross-cutting) cultural cleavages in Switzerland should make the Austrian social democrats more likely to emphasise economic

issues than in Switzerland. Additionally, literature on Swiss social democrats highlights their openness towards the agenda of the new social movements (Degen 2012; Kriesi 1986; Zimmermann 2007). We should therefore expect that the salient political appeals of the social democrats relate more to the new cultural issues in Switzerland than in Austria:

*H4: In Austria (but not in Switzerland), the salient political appeals of the Social Democratic Party relate more to economic class interests. Therefore, in Austria, the working class is more likely to vote for the Social Democratic Party, and the middle class is less likely, in comparison with Switzerland.*

*H5: In Switzerland (but not in Austria), the salient political appeals of the Social Democratic Party relate more to new cultural issues. Therefore, in Switzerland, the working class is less likely to vote for the Social Democratic Party, and the socio-cultural specialists are more likely to do so, in comparison with Austria.*

## Methods

We have outlined above the potential influence of various factors that could account for differences in class voting between Austria and Switzerland. In Table 1, we present more explicitly the evidence that would be consistent with our hypotheses.

A bottom-up explanation is consistent with a positive finding for H1 and a null finding for the other hypotheses. A top-down explanation is consistent with positive findings for H2, or H3, or H4, or H5 and a null finding for H1. If neither of these two configurations occurs, we will not be able to determine the superiority of one explanation over the other.

Various empirical material is presented on both voters and parties including a detailed measure of class position and information on both party positions and issue salience. Due to the long time span covered (1970s to 2000s), our strategy has been to gather information on parties and voters independently. In the end, the data on voters and parties do not match precisely, but we are above all interested in long-term trends in class voting. The hypotheses are (qualitatively) assessed by linking trends in class voting with changing party positions and appeals (for the top-down hypotheses) and with the class pattern of attitudes (for the bottom-up hypothesis).

### Surveys

To assess class voting, we rely on national election surveys when available. For Switzerland, we use the Swiss election studies conducted since 1995, and

TABLE 1  
A SUMMARY OF THE HYPOTHESES BEING TESTED

|    | <b>Evidence consistent with the hypotheses</b>  | <b>Corresponding class voting patterns</b>  |
|----|---|---|
| H1 | Class pattern of attitudes more polarised in AT (than in CH)                            | Social Democratic Party (SP) class basis remains more working class in AT (than in CH)                                  |
| H4 | SP salient political appeals relate more to economic class interests in AT (than in CH) |   |
| H3 | SP occupies a liberal cultural position within the party system in CH (but not in AT)   | SP class basis remains more working class (and less oriented towards the socio-cultural specialists) in AT (than in CH) |
| H5 | SP salient political appeals relate more to new cultural issues in CH (than in AT)      |   |
| H2 | SP convergence towards its main right-wing opponent in AT (but not in CH)               | SP class basis remains more working class in CH (than in AT)  |

other electoral surveys for previous elections. In Austria large national election surveys do not exist before 2008; we therefore rely on social and cross-national surveys (Sozialer Survey and European Social Survey).<sup>4</sup> In the end, we dispose of a detailed class variable for six elections in each country from 1970 to 2008. Table A1 in the appendix presents the data used.

*Class Position*

We use a more detailed class measure than has typically been employed in studies of, in particular, the Austrian case.<sup>5</sup> Starting from the class schema of Oesch (2006), we use a parsimonious six-class version which comes close to the adjusted Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema proposed by Güveli (2006). In detail, the six classes are:

- (1) working class (manual and service workers, e.g. mechanics, assembly line operators, shop assistants) (size in the sample: 47 per cent in the 1970s on average for both countries; 33 per cent in the 2000s);
- (2) higher-grade technocrats and traditional bourgeoisie (e.g. managers, engineers, self-employed professionals and large employers) (7 per cent; 14 per cent);
- (3) small business owners (e.g. shop owners, farmers) (17 per cent; 12 per cent);
- (4) socio-cultural specialists (e.g. teachers, nurses) (6 per cent; 13 per cent);
- (5) technicians, supervisors and commercial employees (e.g. technicians, lower management, higher-level clerks) (10 per cent; 12 per cent);
- (6) clerks (e.g. secretaries) (13 per cent; 16 per cent).

These positions are constructed using current or past occupation of the respondent based on the international standard classification of occupations of the International Labour Organization (versions isco68 and isco88) and current

or past employment status in order to distinguish employers and self-employed from employees. If the respondent reports never having had a job, class position is derived from the partner's present or past employment, and/or from the main household earner's present or past employment.

Party choice is measured by a question on the vote at the last national parliamentary election.<sup>6</sup> Measures of attitude are presented in the corresponding sections. Two socio-demographic variables are included as controls: sex and age, coded in three categories, 18–34 years old, 35–64 years old, 65 years old and over.

### *Party Positions and Issue Saliency*

For the parties, we use data on the media representation of political parties collected by the project of Hanspeter Kriesi and his team on 'National Political Change in a Globalising World' (Kriesi *et al.* 2008, 2012). These data allow clearer differentiation between issue positions and issue saliency than alternative measures such as those in the comparative manifesto project. Moreover, given that citizens are mainly informed about political parties by the media, such media data are particularly suitable for studying linkages between parties and voters (Helbling and Tresch 2011).<sup>7</sup>

The data are collected for six countries, among them Switzerland and Austria, for one election in the 1970s and numerous elections in the 1990s and 2000s. During the two months preceding election day, all articles in selected newspapers concerning the election or politics more generally are coded according to the subject (which political actor), the object (which issue) and the direction of the relationship between them, using a scale ranging from -1 to +1, with -0.5, 0 and 0.5 as intermediary positions (see Dolezal 2008a for the presentation of the data).

The measure of position of the parties is the average score of positive and negative mentions of an issue. The measure of saliency is the proportion of electoral statements referring to an issue. Four categories of issues are used, with the aim of distinguishing the redistributive left-right issues from the new 'cultural' issues. The first category groups social and economic issues: welfare state, redistribution, labour market, employment, economic regulation, public service, finances and taxes. The second groups together ecology, gender and societal issues – issues put on the agenda by the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. The third category regroups together immigration and crime – issues often raised on the agenda by radical right parties. The fourth category is residual and groups issues that do not relate clearly to economic or new 'cultural' issues.

### **What Happened to Class Voting in Switzerland and Austria? The Transformation of the Class Basis of Social Democratic Parties**

How has class support for social democratic parties changed over time? To estimate this we ran logistic regressions for both countries with pooled datasets

combining the different surveys (11,475 for Austria and 24,411 cases for Switzerland), with a vote for the Social Democratic Party (yes/no) as the dependent variable. In addition to class as an independent variable, election year and an interaction between election year and class have been entered, as well as control variables for sex and age. The results are presented in Figure 1 in the form of predicted probabilities of voting for the Social Democratic Party by social class for a man of middle age (35–64 years old).<sup>8</sup>

The probabilities for Austria in 1971 demonstrate a high level of support among the working class for the Social Democratic Party; and a low level of support among the high technocrats and small business owners. Over time, we see a decline of class voting. The ‘kappa’ index (Brooks and Manza 1997: 940), whose calculation provides us with an overall measure of strength of class differences in social democratic party voting, declines from 0.19 in 1971 to 0.09 in 2008. Nevertheless, in 2008, there was still an important gap between the working class and small business owners (the log odds ratios for the working class is 1.68). Support for the Austrian social democrats remained strongly determined by a traditional configuration; a long way removed from the disappearance of class voting.

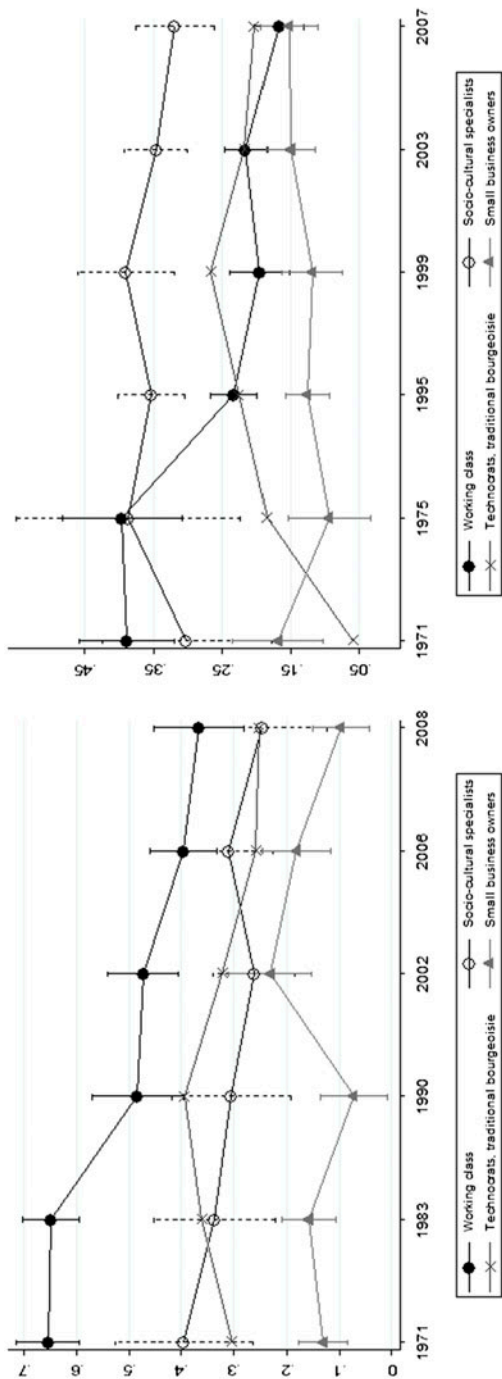
Although we lack data for every election, it can be seen that most of the decline of class voting occurred between 1990 and 2002. The level of class voting then remained relatively similar in the three elections of the 2000s. This also suggests that the level of traditional class voting is uncorrelated with the electoral performance of the radical right: the 2002 election was a severe defeat for the Austrian Freedom Party, but not the 2008 election.

In Switzerland in 1971 there was a high level of class voting: support among the working class for the Social Democratic Party was strong, while support among high technocrats and small business owners was low.<sup>9</sup> Over time, however, there was a transformation of the class voting pattern. In 1995, the gap between the working class and the high technocrats disappeared. In 2007, the gap between the working class and small business owners likewise. Nevertheless, this did not signify the end of class voting:<sup>10</sup> the socio-cultural specialists now display a high level of support for the Social Democratic Party. Class remains important, but not in the direction expected, i.e. not in an opposition between the working class and the middle classes.

Interestingly, the gap in the support for the Social Democratic Party between the working class and the middle classes had already reduced by the 1995 election, which corresponds to the first electoral increase of the Swiss People’s Party (from 11.9 per cent in 1991 to 14.9 per cent in 1995, then 28.9 per cent in 2007). This is in line with previous findings in the literature that the Social Democratic Party did not change its class profile between 1995 and 2003/07 (Sciarini 2010; Selb and Lachat 2004).

In order to assess more precisely the decisive elections for the change in the class basis of the Social Democratic Party, Figure A1 in the appendix shows the results for additional elections with a reduced class schema opposing the working class to employers and self-employed persons (white-collar

FIGURE 1  
PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC VOTING BY SOCIAL CLASS



Note: Predicted probability of voting for the Social Democratic Party in Austria (Switzerland) for a man of middle age (35-64 years old), 95% confidence intervals. The probabilities for the technicians, commercial employees and the clerks are not shown. For readability reasons confidence intervals are only shown for three classes, but can be provided by authors if needed. Data: election surveys (see table A1). Number of cases: Austria 1971: 1471; 1983: 1769; 1990: 904; 2002: 1992; 2006: 2155; 2008: 904. Switzerland 1971: 1825; 1975: 1299; 1995: 7012; 1999: 3028; 2003: 5383; 2007: 3878.

workers not shown). A traditional class voting pattern can still be observed at the 1979 election, but the 1987 and 1991 elections show a reduction in the gap between the working class and employers/self-employed.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that the Social Democratic Party had already seen a change in the class basis of its support before the electoral increase of the Swiss People's Party. This suggests that the social democratic parties were the primary influence on the change in class voting patterns.

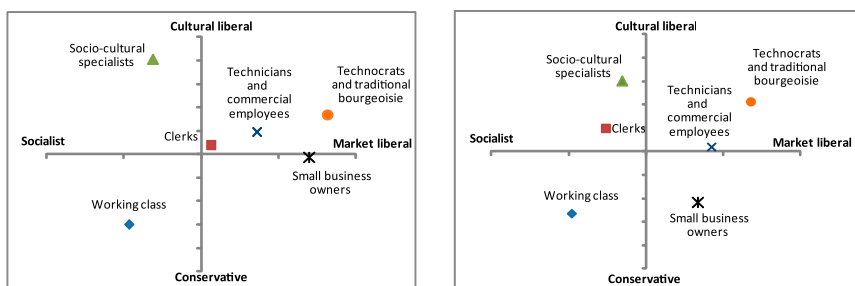
**Economic and Cultural Attitudes of Classes: A Bottom-up Perspective**

How can we explain these differences between Austria and Switzerland? From a bottom-up perspective, we assess to what extent the class pattern of voters' preferences varies between both countries. The analysis is performed towards the end of the period studied. In order to have similar variables on attitudes between the countries, we use the European Social Survey 2002.<sup>12</sup>

We choose two items indicative of redistributive left-right politics and two indicative of cultural preferences. A principal component analysis confirms the two-dimensional underlying structure of these attitudes in each country (Table A2 in the appendix presents the factor loadings). Thus, the first factor score relates to an economic axis of the political space and the second to an orthogonal cultural axis. For each factor score extracted, we calculate the classes' mean position in this two-dimensional space. The results presented in Figure 2 show a high similarity between the positions of classes in both countries.

Working class voters have a relatively left-wing position on the economic axis, but a conservative position on the cultural dimension. The higher technocrats and traditional bourgeoisie stand at the opposite end of the political space. The socio-cultural specialists are relatively to the left on the economic axis, but show the most liberal position on the cultural axis. Small business owners are both more conservative and less economically right-wing than the

FIGURE 2  
CLASSES' MEAN POSITION IN A TWO-DIMENSION POLITICAL SPACE IN 2002



Data: European Social Survey 2002.

technocrats and traditional bourgeoisie in both countries. In general, then, the divergent evolution in the class basis of social democratic parties between these countries cannot be explained by differences in the preferences of the classes.<sup>13</sup>

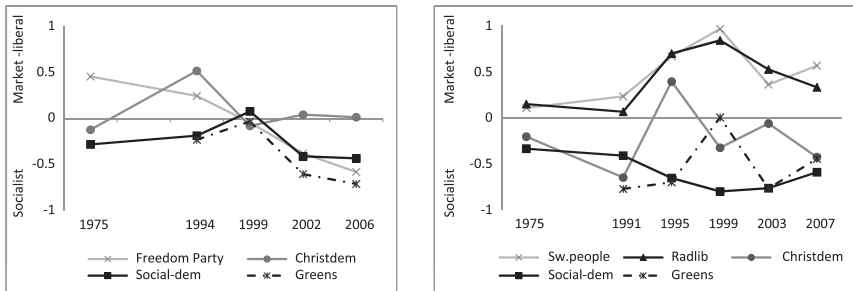
As noted earlier, in the Swiss case language divisions are also likely to affect the impact of class by cross-cutting class interests. We therefore need to assess to what extent language divisions weaken the class effect on economic left–right attitudes in Switzerland. Results of ordinal regressions<sup>14</sup> shown in Table A3 in the appendix indicate that this is not the case. French and Italian speakers are significantly more likely to have economic left-wing attitudes than German speakers, but this does not affect the class divide. The same message can be taken from the equivalent analysis of cultural preferences.<sup>15</sup> These analyses confirm the similarity of the class pattern of attitudes between Switzerland and Austria observed in Figure 2. Therefore, the first hypothesis specifying the implications of a ‘bottom-up’ approach must be rejected. Differences in voting outcomes between the two countries cannot be explained by differences in the class polarisation of attitudes.

### The Positions and Appeals of Social Democratic Parties: A Top-down Perspective

Using data on the media representation of the political parties we first show the positions of the main Austrian and Swiss parties on economic left–right issues (Figure 3). A score of 1 indicates a market economic liberal position, whereas –1 indicates a socialist interventionist position.

In Austria, there is a pattern of convergence until 1999 between the Social Democratic Party and its main right-wing opponent, the Christian Democratic

FIGURE 3  
POSITIONS OF THE MAIN AUSTRIAN AND SWISS PARTIES ON ECONOMIC LEFT–RIGHT ISSUES



Note: Data on the media representation of the political parties: Kriesi et al. (2010), National political change in a globalizing world, Supply side data on national election campaign, University of Zurich and Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich. Number of statements (minimal and maximal) used to calculate the party positions: Austria: ÖVP: between 134 and 244; FPÖ (together with the BZÖ in 2006) 39–114; SPÖ: 118–237; Greens 13–55. Switzerland: SVP: 29–193; FDP (abbreviated Radlib here): 124–201; CVP: 29–108; SPS: 45–170; Greens: 20–43.



Party (ÖVP), then a pattern of divergence in the 2000s. The difference is particularly weak at the 1999 election, which corresponds to the end of the 1987–2000 grand coalition government. The period of the grand coalition is generally recognised as a period of important changes for the Social Democratic Party. The Austrian social democrats broke with the economic policy of ‘Austro-Keynesianism’ developed under the chancellorship of Kreisky (1970–83), regarded as one of the most ambitious social democratic policies in Europe, which consisted of promoting employment by the state ownership of key industries (see Lauber 1992; Rosner *et al.* 1999; Seeleib-Kaiser *et al.* 2008). Nevertheless, there is no clear pattern of convergence over time, as the Social Democratic Party comes to differentiate more clearly from the ÖVP in the elections of 2002 and 2006, a trend already noted by Dolezal (2005, 2008b).<sup>16</sup> None the less, the pattern of convergence until 1999 is associated with a reduction in class voting in the 1990s, which is consistent with the second hypothesis concerning the impact of economic policy convergence on levels of class voting.

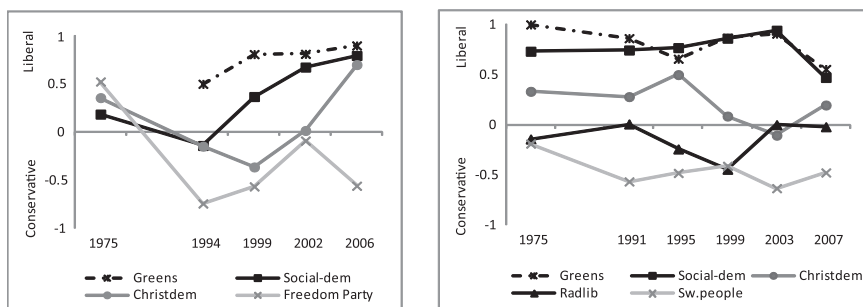
For Switzerland we see a pattern of divergence over time. During the 1990s, the Social Democratic Party moved further to the left. The mainstream right-wing Radical Liberal Party moved further to the right, together with the Swiss People’s Party. Clearly, the economic positions of the parties fail to explain the pattern of change in class voting in Switzerland. Economic polarisation should lead to a higher level of traditional class voting, but this is not the case. On this basis, the second hypothesis on the impact of economic convergence on class voting is rejected: it fails to explain differences between Switzerland and Austria. We turn now to examine the cultural positions of the parties.

The cultural dimension is measured using all issues relevant to the New Left (ecology, gender, societal issues) and all issues relevant to immigration and crime (issues put on the agenda by the radical right), both kinds of issues being representative of a new cultural conflict in Western Europe (see Bornschier 2010; Kriesi *et al.* 2006). A score of 1 indicates a cultural liberal position (pro-New Left issues and open immigration policy), whereas –1 indicates a position opposed to the concerns of the New Left and a restrictive position on immigration. The results are presented in Figure 4.

The Social Democratic Party in Austria occupies a liberal cultural position within the party system. The party moves to a more liberal cultural position over time, and thus closer to the position of the Greens. Nevertheless, this ‘liberal’ movement is not matched by any increase in the support of the socio-cultural specialists for the Social Democratic Party in Austria, nor with an increasing gap between working class voters and socio-cultural specialists.<sup>17</sup>

In Switzerland, the Social Democratic Party also has a liberal cultural position within the party system. It is consistently closer to the Greens, in comparison to its Austrian counterpart. Nevertheless, in both countries, social democratic parties occupy the same liberal cultural position within the party system. Cultural liberal positions cannot explain differences in the voting

FIGURE 4  
POSITIONS OF THE MAIN AUSTRIAN AND SWISS PARTIES ON CULTURAL ISSUES



Note: Data see Figure 3. N Austria: Greens 26–39; SPÖ 29–136; ÖVP 14–147; FPÖ (with the BZÖ in 2006) 21–141. N Switzerland: Greens 15–73; SPS 30–194; CVP 24–104; FDP (abbreviated Radlib here) 48–205; SVP 40–222.

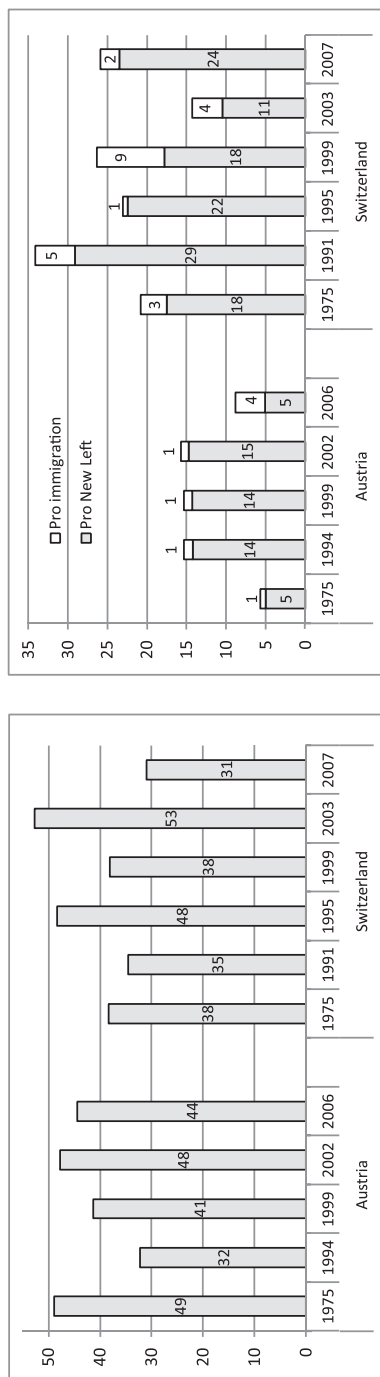
outcomes between Switzerland and Austria, as was predicted in the third hypothesis.

Finally we turn to the analysis of salience. Figure 5 shows the share of economic issues among the electoral statements of the social democratic parties in Austria and Switzerland. On average, the Social Democratic Party in Austria emphasises economic issues more than its Swiss counterpart (43 per cent for all elections on average in Austria versus 40 per cent in Switzerland). In Austria, the 1994 election is clearly an outlier: in all other elections, the proportion of economic issues is above 40 per cent. In Switzerland, there is a higher variation across elections: in 1991 and 2007 the Social Democratic Party emphasises these kinds of issues only modestly compared to the 1995 and 2003 elections. Nevertheless, the difference between the countries is not striking.

Concerning the pro-cultural liberal issues, pro-New Left issues (ecology, gender, societal issues) have a far higher level of salience in the campaigns of the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland in comparison to Austria (20 per cent on average in Switzerland, versus 11 per cent in Austria). At the 1991 election in Switzerland and to a lesser extent at the 2007 election, pro-New Left issues reach almost the same proportion as economic issues among the electoral statements of the Social Democratic Party.<sup>18</sup> Generally, the New Left issues are more present on the political agenda in Switzerland than in Austria. But even taking this element into account, the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland emphasises these issues systematically to a higher than average degree, whereas this is not the case in Austria (Rennwald 2013).

Pro-immigration issues do not make up a high proportion of electoral statements of social democratic parties in both countries. In relative terms also, immigration issues are less salient in the electoral campaigns of social democratic parties than on the general political agenda in the two countries (Rennwald 2013).<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 5  
 SHARE OF GIVEN ISSUES (IN %) IN THE ELECTORAL STATEMENTS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES IN AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND



Note: Data see figure 3. Overall number of social democrats statements: SPÖ: between 295 and 496. SPS: 118-549.

The limited differences between the Austrian and Swiss social democratic parties in their political appeals on economic issues does not account for why the working class still forms the class basis of the Austrian social democratic electorate, but not that of the Swiss. The fourth hypothesis is therefore rejected. In contrast, the fifth hypothesis on the salient political appeals on cultural issues is supported. The salient political appeals of the Swiss social democrats concern liberal cultural issues whereas this is not the case in Austria. This is the only marked difference between the two countries in the explanatory mechanisms we have examined and it provides an explanation for their divergent patterns of evolution in class voting.

### **Conclusions: Why Have the Social Democratic Parties Taken Different Paths?**

This article has investigated the explanations of the different patterns of social class divisions in social democratic voting between Switzerland and Austria. In Switzerland, the socio-cultural specialists have become the new class basis of the Social Democratic Party, whereas in Austria the working class has remained the strongest supporter of the Social Democratic Party. We have considered whether this cross-national variation can be best explained by differences in attitudes (relative to a ‘bottom-up’ approach of social cleavage studies) or by differences in the social democratic positions and appeals (relative to a ‘top-down’ approach).

A ‘bottom-up’ explanation was not supported. Both countries have the same class-based pattern of policy orientations. Class attitudes are not more polarised in Austria than in Switzerland, and the existence of linguistic divisions in Switzerland does not appear to affect class differences in attitudes. Hypothesis 1 can therefore be rejected. The analysis of parties’ political positions also shows few differences between the countries. Both social democratic parties occupy a liberal cultural position and no clear trend of economic convergence is found on the economic left–right position. Moreover, the noticeable polarisation on economic positions in Switzerland should perhaps indicate a higher level of difference between the working class and employers in social democratic voting, but that is not the case. Hypotheses 2 and 3 are not supported. With respect to the impact of party emphasis, there is no striking difference in the emphasis put on economic issues, thus leading to the rejection of hypothesis 4. *Rather, the key difference between the countries lies in the relative emphasis put on new cultural issues by social democrats.* Hypothesis 5 is therefore supported. The Swiss Social Democratic Party emphasises these issues much more than the Austrian Social Democratic Party. This can therefore account for the difference between the countries in the socio-cultural specialists versus working class basis of social democratic support. The class profile of the social democrats comes close to that of the Greens in Switzerland (Oesch and Rennwald 2010b; Sciarini 2010), precisely because the social

democrats have emphasised the issues typically put on the agenda by the new social movements in which the Green Party has its origins.

A top-down approach seems therefore the most promising explanation of differences in class voting between Switzerland and Austria. The choices offered by the parties are important for shaping the patterns of class voting. Nevertheless, by showing the importance of issue emphasis, this research points to a new explanatory mechanism. Previous literature has emphasised the importance of party positions for the shaping of class voting (Elff 2009; Evans and De Graaf 2013; Evans and Tilley 2012a, 2012b; Evans *et al.* 1999; Oskarson 2005). Here we place the responsibility more precisely in the degree of emphasis given to these issues: e.g. salience plus position rather than position *per se*.

Some qualifications are inevitably in order. The case study design of our research restricts the generalisation of the results, and further research on the general applicability of the issue salience thesis is needed. Moreover, though issue salience has proven to be the key element explaining differences between the countries, we do not deny the importance of parties' positions in also affecting class voting. Taken independently, the case of Austria indicates the relevance of the economic convergence thesis. It comes close to the British case (Evans and Tilley 2012a, 2012b), where the convergence of political parties' positions was associated with a decline in class voting. Finally, because of the difficulty in obtaining appropriate data for the same elections on both voters and parties and the use of univariate patterns of association for testing hypotheses, the analysis remains to some extent exploratory and further research could usefully be undertaken to further develop the argument.

Despite these limitations, the choices offered by the parties have been informative for understanding changes in the patterns of class voting. However, the parties are themselves potentially reacting to a change in social and political context that differs across countries. We conclude therefore by identifying the possible role of three factors in explaining the different strategies adopted by the parties: changes in the class structure of the electorate, the influence of pro-new issues activists and party competition.

The decrease of the size of the working class between the 1970s and the 2000s within the electorate has been greater in Switzerland (–37 per cent) than in Austria (–22 per cent). In the 2000s, the structure of the electorate was more proletarian in Austria than in Switzerland: the working class was a larger share of the electorate in Austria (38 per cent) than in Switzerland (28 per cent). This results in part from the exclusion from political citizenship of large segments of the working class in Switzerland. The general class bias in the composition of the electorate due to the clustering of foreign workers at the bottom of the class hierarchy is further amplified in Switzerland by the high level of foreign population (21 per cent)<sup>20</sup> (Oesch 2006: 180–82). One-quarter of skilled production workers and 40 per cent of unskilled production workers are foreigners and do not possess the right to vote at the national level (Oesch 2006: 182). The Swiss social democrats therefore faced not only the decrease

in the size of the working class as elsewhere in Western Europe, but also the specific exclusion from political rights of a large share of the working class. The Swiss Social Democratic Party thus had more electoral incentives than the Social Democratic Party in Austria to turn to new segments of the electorate.

Beyond the differences in the electorate class structure, the importance of party organisation in the strategic repositioning of parties has been highlighted by Kitschelt (1994a, 1994b). In Switzerland, the arrival in the Social Democratic Party in the 1980s of a new generation of activists coming from the new social movements (Degen 2012; Kriesi 1986) may explain why the emphasis on issues raised originally by these movements has been so high. In contrast, such an entry of new social movements' activists did not occur in Austria. Kitschelt (1994a, 1994b) described the Austrian Social Democratic Party in the 1980s as a very traditional mass party with a high level of strategic inflexibility. The particularly high members/voters ratio in Austria made it unlikely that a small group of new activists could impact on the party's politics (Kitschelt 1994b: 18).

The strong emphasis on New Left issues by the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland suggests that this party has tried to contest the Greens' issue ownership. This comes close to the 'accommodative strategy' described by Meguid (2005). In the introduction, we said that the social democrats face a similar competition from new parties in both countries. Differences in the nature of this new competition are not to be ruled out though. Due to the early mobilisation of Greens in Switzerland and the fact that the social democrats gather around one-quarter of the voters, the threat of a new Green competitor could have been perceived as more threatening in Switzerland than in Austria, providing more incentives for social democrats in Switzerland to adopt a New Left issue agenda. In both cases, we do not observe that social democrats have reacted to the radical right on immigration issues. Further work should be undertaken on the reactions of social democratic parties to their new competitors, building upon existing studies (e.g. Bale *et al.* 2010 on immigration).

Regardless of the exact role of the preceding conditions that influenced social democratic party behaviour in these countries, we can conclude that the transformation in the class basis of politics was even greater in Switzerland where no convergence on economic issues existed, in comparison with Austria. In both countries, various studies have established the working class character of voting for radical right parties (for a recent study, see Aichholzer *et al.* 2014). In a complementary way, our research indicates that the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland has found new core support among specific segments of the salaried middle class, whereas in Austria the Social Democratic Party still remains in more direct competition with the radical right among working class voters. Investigating the strategies of social democratic parties, we have highlighted the role of the emphasis put on new cultural issues by the Swiss social democrats. As a case study we need to be cautious about generalising these expectations to other contexts, but we can point to a new agenda

for research into ‘top-down’ explanations of class voting in which the role of issue salience in addition to issue position plays a potentially significant role.

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### **Notes**

1. Which is not to say that the appeals of political parties do not also reflect bottom-up influences: parties can react to the changes in the shape of the social structure and the sizes of their support bases by adapting their programmes (e.g. Przeworski and Sprague 1986).
2. The moderating effect of cross-cutting social cleavages has often been emphasised in the consociationalism literature (see Daalder 1974; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2011). Powell (1976) has shown evidence that people in cumulative cleavage positions will be stronger partisans than those in cross-cutting cleavage positions.
3. Socio-cultural specialists can be defined as ‘wage-earners in social and cultural services’ who ‘do not have major managerial responsibilities’ (Oesch and Rennwald 2010a: 346) and evolve on a daily basis in ‘interpersonal work logic’ (interactions with students, patients, clients, etc.) which make them particularly likely to hold cultural liberal views (Oesch and Rennwald 2010a: 346–47).
4. We limit the samples to national citizens.
5. It is often the broad categories (blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, civil servants) from the German tradition of the ‘Berufliche Stellung’ which are used. The importance of using a more detailed class position has been noted in the literature (Evans 1999, 2000).
6. The only exception is Austria 1990 where party preference is used. The people who do not declare any party preference have been placed among the non-voters.
7. The authors show few differences for measurement of party positions if one uses media data instead of party manifestos or expert judgements. For the salience, the indicators are less convergent, suggesting a different emphasis by the parties during election campaigns or some media influence (Helbling and Tresch 2011).
8. Alternatively, we also give information on the log odds ratio for two categories of interest, the working class and the socio-cultural specialists (small business owners = reference category). In Austria, the coefficients for the working class (respectively the socio-cultural specialists) are the following: 1971: 2.53 (1.47); 1983: 2.28 (1.00); 1990: 2.49 (1.73); 2002: 1.09 (0.17); 2006: 1.08 (0.70); 2008: 1.68 (1.11). In Switzerland: 1971: 1.15 (0.76); 1975: 1.84 (1.81); 1995: 0.75 (1.33); 1999: 0.59 (1.56); 2003: 0.44 (1.10); 2007: 0.11 (0.96).
9. The ‘kappa’ index is 0.10 in 1971. It declines to 0.05 in 2007.
10. The overall stability of the class cleavage over time in Switzerland (irrespective of which classes support which parties) has been shown by Lachat (2007).
11. Such a reduction in class voting for this period has been also shown by Hug and Trechsel (2002) and Trechsel (1995).

12. The ESS 2002 is chosen because Austria is included in this wave and it offers a second economic question on trade unions and labour market in order to construct the economic axis.
13. An additional analysis (available in the online appendix) shows the answers to the four attitude questions by class in the two countries. It confirms that both countries share a similar class pattern of preferences.
14. The dependent variable is constructed by combining the two economic questions from the principal components analysis to form an index. Accordingly, ordinal regressions are performed, with class as an independent variable, and with sex and age as controls. Language is introduced in a second model.
15. This analysis is available in the online appendix.
16. A similar trend to the left for the end of the period is reported by Jensen *et al.* (2013) on the basis of CMP data. Their results for the 1960–2005 period generally suggest fluctuations in the position of left-wing parties in Austria. With CMP data, Fagerholm (2013) distinguishes a clearer ‘neoliberal’ trend in the position of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in the period 1970–99.
17. At the voters’ level, Wagner and Kritzinger (2012) show that citizens’ positions on the socio-cultural dimension of competition is unrelated to the choice between the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party. This suggests that Social Democratic Party voters in Austria are not particularly liberal on this dimension of competition.
18. Secondary literature points to similar trends for the 1980s. Ecological issues dominated the campaign of social democrats at the 1987 election (Sidjanski 1988).
19. The inclusion of anti-immigration statements does not change the picture: immigration issues have a low salience among the social democrats’ electoral statements. The 1994 election in Austria is an outlier, as a restrictive immigration position was much emphasised by the social democrats.
20. In Austria, it was 10.7 per cent in 2009 (OECD 2011: 41).

### Notes on Contributors

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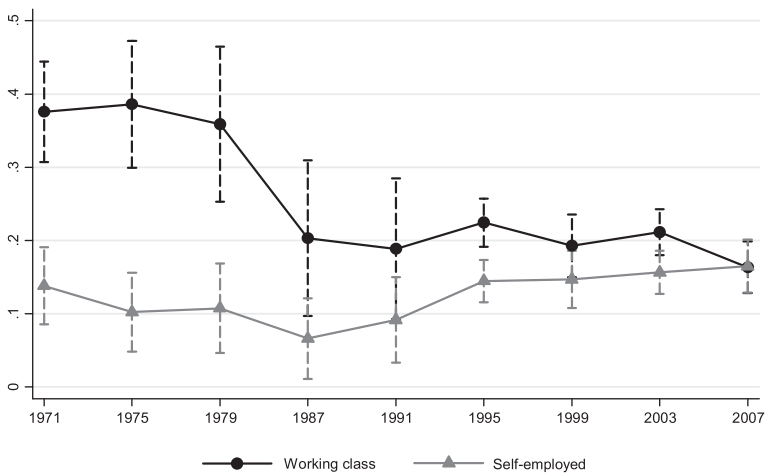
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APPENDIX  
TABLE A1  
SURVEY DATA USED

| Austria       |   |
|---------------|---|
| Election      | Data  |
| 1971          | Political Action: An Eight Nation Study, 1973–1976. Distributed by GESIS <a href="http://www.gesis.org">www.gesis.org</a> , ZA0765  |
| 1983          | Sozialer Survey 1986, Soziologische Institute der Universitäten Wien, Linz und Graz, Wiener Institut für sozialwissenschaftliche Dokumentation und Methodik, <a href="http://www.wisdom.at/Datenarchiv">www.wisdom.at/Datenarchiv</a> |
| 1990          | Sozialer Survey 1993 (ibid.)  |
| 2002          | European Social Survey Round 1 – 2002, Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data, <a href="http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org">www.europeansocialsurvey.org</a>                      |
| 2006          | European Social Survey Round 3 – 2006 (ibid.)   |
| 2008          | AUTNES (2009), AUTNES Post-Post Election Survey 2009, August 2011, <a href="http://www.autnes.at">www.autnes.at</a>   |
| Switzerland   |   |
| Election      | Data  |
| 1971          | Henry Kerr, Gerhard Schmidchen, Dusan Sidjanski: Attitudes et comportements politiques en Suisse – 1972. Université de Genève; Universität Zürich. Distributed by FORS, Lausanne, 1997  |
| 1975          | Political Attitudes 1975 (Political Action: An Eight Nation Study, 1973–1976), conducted by the Department of Political Science, University of Geneva   |
| 1995–<br>2007 | Swiss Electoral Studies (Selects) 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, Post-Election Surveys, distributed by the Swiss Foundation for research in social sciences FORS, <a href="http://www.selects.ch">www.selects.ch</a>                         |

FIGURE A1  
PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC VOTING BY SOCIAL CLASS IN SWITZERLAND WITH A REDUCED CLASS SCHEMA



Note: Predicted probability of voting for the Social Democratic Party in Switzerland for a man of middle age (35–64 years old), 95% confidence intervals. Data: election surveys (see table A1) and further information for the 1979–1991 elections under [www.selects.ch](http://www.selects.ch). N 1979: 903, 1987: 558, 1991: 611.

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TABLE A2  
 FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES IN 2002

| Variables  | Austria  |          | Switzerland |          |
|--|----------|----------|-------------|----------|
|  | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 1    | Factor 2 |
| The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels       | 0.816    | -0.026   | 0.834       | -0.142   |
| Employees need strong trade unions to protect their working conditions and wages | 0.784    | 0.131    | 0.750       | 0.260    |
| Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish          | -0.079   | 0.819    | 0.076       | 0.745    |
| Country's cultural life enriched by immigrants                                   | 0.191    | 0.749    | 0.003       | 0.768    |
| Eigenvalue   | 1.451    | 1.123    | 1.384       | 1.112    |
| Proportion of variance explained by factor                                       | 0.36     | 0.28     | 0.34        | 0.27     |

*Source:* European Social Survey 2002.

TABLE A3  
IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON ECONOMIC ATTITUDES IN AUSTRIA AND  
SWITZERLAND IN 2002

|   | Austria |       | Switzerland |       | Switzerland with language |       |
|---|---------|-------|-------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|
|   | B       | S.E.  | B           | S.E.  | B                         | S.E.  |
| Women                                   | 0.063   | 0.054 | 0.094       | 0.056 | 0.096                     | 0.056 |
| Men                                     | Ref.    |       | Ref.        |       | Ref.                      |       |
| 18–34 years old                         | 0.015   | 0.064 | –0.012      | 0.071 | –0.031                    | 0.072 |
| 35–64                                   | Ref.    |       | Ref.        |       | Ref.                      |       |
| 65 and over                             | –0.143  | 0.075 | –0.076      | 0.067 | –0.095                    | 0.067 |
| Working class                           | 0.370   | 0.098 | **          | 0.362 | 0.079                     | **    |
| Clerks                                  | 0.116   | 0.102 | **          | 0.364 | 0.095                     | **    |
| Socio-cultural specialists              | 0.318   | 0.113 | **          | 0.272 | 0.094                     | **    |
| Technicians and commercial employees    | 0.051   | 0.111 |             | 0.173 | 0.097                     | 0.169 |
| Small business owners                   | –0.107  | 0.114 |             | 0.145 | 0.095                     | 0.182 |
| Technocrats and traditional bourgeoisie | Ref.    |       | Ref.        |       | Ref.                      |       |
| French                                  |         |       |             |       | 0.441                     | 0.064 |
| Italian                                 |         |       |             |       | 0.416                     | 0.114 |
| German                                  |         |       |             |       | Ref.                      | **    |
| Pseudo $R^2$ (Nagelkerke)               | 0.028   |       | 0.022       |       | 0.056                     |       |
| $N$                                     | 1781    |       | 1637        |       | 1621                      |       |

Note: \*\*Significant at the 0.01 level; \*Significant at the 0.05 level. Coefficients are based on ordinal regressions, with the complementary log-log link function.

Source: European Social Survey 2002.