The Social Divisions of Politics:

How Parties' Group-Based Appeals Influence Social Group Differences in Vote Choice

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Abstract:

Social groups often differ in vote choice, but differences vary significantly between elections. Recent work argues that political parties shape group differences by the policies they propose. I posit that differences also depend on how parties use group-based appeals. This proposition is tested with a unique dataset on group-based appeals, policy-based appeals, and voter preferences in Britain from 1964 to 2015. Focusing on social class as one prominent group membership, I show how class differences in vote choice respond to policy-based as well as group-based class appeals: the gap between voters from opposing classes widens or narrows depending on how much the Labour Party emphasizes 'old' symbolic ties to workers and 'new' ties to businesses. These effects are robust and compare to the policy effects highlighted in previous work. Overall, this implies a revised view on how political parties influence the social divisions of electoral politics.

Keywords:

Social groups, class politics, vote choice, party strategy, election manifesto

Online Appendix:

Supporting information for this article is available in an online appendix on the JOP website.

Data and Replication Materials:

Replication files necessary to reproduce the results are available in the JOP Data Archive on Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/OHHVPY).

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Introduction

Electorates around the world are often socially divided. Since Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948: 27) remarked that "a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially," studies from comparative political research to political psychology have argued that group memberships and social identities shape citizen preferences and produce social group differences in political behavior (e.g., Beramendi et al. 2015; Carnes and Lupu 2016; Cramer 2016; Evans and De Graaf 2013; Heath 2015; Klar 2013; Kinder and Kam 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008; Tilley 2015). Although the importance of groups in electoral politics has been questioned at times (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992), a strong view is reemerging that "group loyalties are the primary drivers of vote choices" (Achen and Bartels 2016: 299).

But the social divisions of electoral politics are not constant. Why are group differences in vote choice sometimes large and other times small? The literature on group politics has focused more on *why* groups differ than on *when* they differ, but this is changing. Kinder and Kam (2009) argue that group-centrism is context-dependent and often activated by political elites. Other work focusing on race (Jackson 2011), religion (Evans and De Graaf 2013), and education (Stubager 2010) as group memberships also point to an elite perspective on group politics. Most strikingly, however, a growing line of research on social class now shows how political parties shape class voting by the policies they propose (Elff 2009; Evans and Tilley 2012a; 2012b; 2017; Jansen, Evans, and De Graaf 2013; Oskarson 2005; see Heath 2015 for a different view). In this perspective, group differences in voting depend on how political parties use *policy-based appeals*.

This article suggests another possibility that has been largely overlooked: group differences depend on how parties use *group-based appeals*. While policy-based appeals inform voters whether parties are for or against specific policies and mobilize group differences because individual group members demand similar policies due to shared life

circumstances (Evans and Tilley 2012b); group-based appeals tell voters whether parties are associated or dissociated with particular social categories and mobilize group differences in a symbolic way as a matter of group representation. I assume that voters know whether they are black, Catholic, or working class but require a clear perceptual link between group and party for group-based voting to occur (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Margolis 2018; Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; Nelson and Kinder 1996). For many politically important groups, this link already exists. If asked, people know which party best represents the working class, racial minorities, or religious groups (Ahler and Sood 2018; Dalton 2014; Nicholson and Segura 2012). Yet a party's *group image* can be more or less salient to voters. I argue that political parties use group-based appeals to emphasize certain group ties over others, rendering their images as representatives of specific groups more or less clear – this in turn influences how pronounced group differences in vote choice will be.[2]

Importantly, I am not suggesting that policies do not matter. Yet once we distinguish between the material, policy-based interests and the symbolic, identity-based concerns that underpin group politics at the individual level (Huddy 2013: 751–3), it becomes clear that they are not all that matter. Policy-based and group-based appeals target different aspects of voter decision-making, each mobilizing group politics in their own way (Dickson and Scheve 2006). Policy statements shape group politics, but I expect group-based appeals to have their own impact.

[2] A few recent studies take up a similar idea, but this article differs from them. Heath (2015) also stresses voter sensitivity to group cues, but tests whether the share of party candidates with certain social backgrounds makes parties more (or less) appealing to voters with identical (or different) social backgrounds. Thau (2019) shows that parties use group-based appeals in accordance with electoral incentives but does not consider the individual-level effects on voters. Lastly, Evans and Tilley (2017) discuss if group-based voting may be contingent on the group rhetoric of media and party elites, as well as on policy positions, but only offer an empirical test of the policy-centered explanation.

The empirical analysis relies on a unique dataset on group-based appeals, policy-based appeals, and voter preferences covering a 50-year period. I focus on class politics as an illustrative case because there is significant variation in class voting over time and because the change to class voting has been a long-standing puzzle in comparative politics (e.g., Dalton 2018; Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992; Knutsen 2006). I focus on the British context as it represents a hard test of the core proposition: support for the dominant policy-centered explanation has been particularly strong for Britain. To parallel the data on policy-based appeals used in previous work, I collected new data on group-based appeals by hand-coding all of the election manifestos of the two main British parties from 1964 to 2015 sentence by sentence. Overall, the results support the propositions in three ways. First, they show that social classes become more similar or different in vote choice depending on how much the Labour Party emphasizes its 'old' working class or 'new' business ties. Second, they show that the effect of group-based class appeals compares to and sometimes outweighs the effect of policy-based class appeals. Lastly, I show that class voting seems to respond to class appeals rather than the other way around and that results are robust across alternative measures and model specifications.

This article extends the literature on why the social divisions of politics vary. I argue that recent work has largely overlooked the symbolic aspects of group politics and particularly the role of parties' group-based appeals. While departing from the dominant policy focus, however, I agree with the broader point in Evans and De Graaf (2013) and recent comparative political research (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, n.d.; Beramendi et al. 2015; Kriesi et al. 2008) that party electoral strategy is the key driver of group politics. The finding that both policy-based and group-based appeals matter may indeed imply that the social divisions of politics are even more sensitive to party elite behavior than previously believed.

Supply and Demand Politics

Political parties influence mass political behavior. This is no less true when it comes to group politics. In seminal work, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) noted that social divisions in electoral politics mainly result from the mobilization strategies of competing parties (see also Bartolini and Mair 1990). Indeed, as Przeworski (1985: 101) argued in his study on class politics, "voting behavior is an effect of the activities of political parties."

This classic 'top-down' perspective has been extended in a more recent line of comparative political research, advancing a 'supply and demand' view on politics. For example, Kriesi et al. (2008) argue that a new electoral cleavage between winners and losers of globalization has emerged in European politics partly due to the issue strategies of competing parties. This illustrates a broader point that electoral stability and change depend on the (mis)match between voter demand and party supply. The argument is not that parties can instill preferences in voters that are not already there, but, rather, that potential voter divides need elite articulation to gain political significance (Kriesi et al. 2008: 9-10; see also Kriesi, Grande and Dolezal 2012). This general idea has since been substantiated in many other studies on right-wing populism (Bornschier 2010), multi-dimensional issue agendas (Dalton 2018), policy outcomes (Beramendi et al. 2015), and party system change (Hooghe and Marks 2018), Although dealing with macro-level topics, this comparative literature usefully suggests that individual-level voting patterns are not determined in a vacuum: the nature of party choices shapes which social cleavages are latent and which are manifest.

Research focusing specifically on group politics has also adopted a 'top-down' perspective, agreeing that once group differences are politicized at the elite level, they often follow at the mass level (e.g., Evans and De Graaf 2013; Evans and Tilley 2017; Kinder and Kam 2009). Although it is still diverse, this literature is seemingly also starting to agree on *how* political parties mobilize group differences: party elites offer policies with differential

appeal to individuals belonging to opposing social groups. This idea is hardly novel (Lipset 1981), but only with the arrival of high-quality data on party policy statements has empirical testing really begun (e.g., the Manifesto Project Dataset, see Volkens et al. 2018). For example, in the most comprehensive study so far, Evans and De Graaf (2013) demonstrate how both religious and social class divisions in party support depend crucially on the policies that parties offer on moral and redistributive issues. Following spatial models (Downs 1957), this assumes that policies represent the currency in the electoral market: political parties offer policies to win support; voters support parties based on the policies they offer. According to this view, group differences are policy-responsive.

The Social Micro Foundation of Group Politics

Although citizens likely consider policy promises, when deciding which party to support, they consider other things as well. Extensive research has shown that people inherently rely on collective identities and social categorization to make political decisions (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Ahler and Sood 2018; Carnes and Lupu 2016; Huddy 2013; Kinder and Kam 2009; Margolis 2018; Tilley 2015). They do so because politics is complicated and sometimes seems irrelevant, whereas group life and social relations are intuitive and meaningful. Such group-centric, shortcut reasoning, Popkin (1994: 218) argues, represents "an inescapable fact of life" that occurs "no matter how educated we are, how much information we have, and how much thinking we do." In politics, "people are naturally group-oriented" (Achen and Bartels 2016: 215).

If group membership is to guide electoral choice, voters must obviously see a link between the group and one or more political parties. Voters mostly know which social groups they belong to and how they feel about other groups. What they need to figure out is who best represents "people like me." In other words, one key consideration behind party preferences is

which parties represent which groups: these perceptual group–party ties allow voters to use intuitive feelings toward social groups to guide decision-making (Achen and Bartels 2016: 301; Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991: 1147). For many politically important groups, such ties already exist. Research consistently finds that, when asked, most people know that some parties represent the working class and poor people, for example, whereas other parties stand for the self-employed and the rich. The same goes for racial or ethnic minorities and many religious groups (Ahler and Sood 2018; Dalton 2014; Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; Nicholson and Segura 2012). Yet although voters know of certain group–party ties when asked, they do not necessarily come to mind when voting. As with any other considerations, this depends on the context—on whether voters receive the right group cues (Converse 1964; Jackson 2011; Margolis 2018; Nelson and Kinder 1996).

Voter sensitivity to group cues provides political parties with an incentive to incorporate them in their electoral strategies. Just as political parties change their policy image (Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011) when competing for votes, they also change their group image to fit strategic concerns (Thau 2019). I argue that parties do so by referring explicitly to different social groups in their electoral appeals. Such group-based appeals involve political elites associating (or dissociating) themselves (or others) with categories of people like women, blacks, or workers. Ultimately, political parties use group-based appeals to win additional votes. Whether these appeals are actually successful at this remains an open question. However, the literature is much clearer in suggesting how they influence the group basis of party support. Both social identity/self-categorization theories (Turner et al. 1987) and theories of ethnocentrism (Kinder and Kam 2009) predict that the behavioral relevance of any one group membership depends on it being salient. And according to Huddy (2013), party elite communication offers a particularly powerful way of raising group membership salience. This squares well with public opinion research showing that elites often prime group-centric

reasoning using group rhetoric (Jackson 2011; Kinder and Kam 2009; Klar 2013; Margolis 2018; Nelson and Kinder 1996).

Building on this, I assume that as parties emphasize linkages with certain groups, citizens are primed to think about politics in terms of these same group categories and how they relate to parties. In turn, I expect vote choice to be more strongly rooted in a specific group membership if emphasized. Moreover, group-based appeals should exert an effect independent of the effect that policy-based appeals may exert because they target different aspects of voter decision-making (Dickson and Scheve 2006). Although voters likely infer information on both policy position and group representation from each electoral appeal, policy proposals should primarily speak to material self-interest, whereas claims of group representation should speak more to the symbolic concerns tied up in people's social identities (Huddy 2013: 751–2). I therefore expect that group-based appeals can shape group differences in vote choice on their own.

The Case of Class Politics

I study social class as one prominent group membership with relevance to vote choice. While the core proposition is broader, social class is well-suited for empirical illustration. Few other groups have been as politically significant across the advanced industrial democracies. As Lipset (1981: 230) once put it, "on a world scale … parties are primarily based on either the lower classes or the middle and upper classes" (see also Dalton 2018). Also important, class differences in vote choice have varied substantially over time, particularly among the classes that once differed most: the working class and the self-employed. While working-class and self-employed voters still vote differently in most countries, the gap between them has shown

both short-term fluctuation and long-term decline (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006).[3] Thus, I ask: do parties' group-based class appeals help explain why class differences are sometimes large and other times small? And do they add any explanatory power beyond that of policy-based class appeals?

I study this in the context where the policy-centered explanation currently stands strongest: Britain. The British case holds particular interest for scholars due to the notable shift in strategy by the Labour Party – which was motivated by a shrinking working class and a growing middle class with other issue priorities – as well as the pronounced decline in class voting.[4] While Pulzer (1967: 98) once remarked that "class is the basis of British party politics: all else is embellishment and detail," voters from different social classes have since become more alike (Clarke et al. 2004; Denver, Carman, and Johns 2012; Evans and Tilley 2017; Green 2007). Class differences endure but the gap between the working class and other classes has clearly waned over time (see the Supporting Information (SI): Figure A1). For example, for working class and self-employed voters—the two most distinct groups—the difference in Labour support was halved from 1964 to 2015. But the story is also one of ups and downs. What accounts for such ongoing changes to the group basis of politics?

The answer appears clear: class voting in Britain responds to the policies proposed by political parties. This has been demonstrated in a comparative setting (Jansen, Evans, and De Graaf 2013), but the British evidence has been particularly strong. In several recent studies, Evans and Tilley (2012a; 2012b; 2017) develop and find support for the so-called 'political

[3] The debate about changing class voting is extensive and not reviewed in detail here (see Evans and De Graaf 2013 or Knutsen 2006).

[4] In comparative perspective, the British case is often highlighted as the single best example of how West European politics has changed from unidimensional class politics to multidimensional catch-all politics (e.g., Mair, Müller, and Plasser 2004).

choice model.' Drawing on ideas of spatial voting, this model treats class voting "as the rational expression of individual differences in (primarily) economic interests that cluster as a result of shared characteristics deriving from similar incomes and conditions of employment" (Evans and Tilley 2012b: 974). Class politics is rooted in "differences between classes in preferences for more or less redistributive policy programmes" (Evans and Tilley 2012a: 141) and so class divisions in party support vary due to "differences in the redistributive policy choice offered to voters" (Evans 2000: 411).

Specifically, scholars have argued that policy-based class appeals matter in two ways, both of which have found support in the British case. First, the left–right policy positions adopted matter. And since class politics has revolved mainly around working-class loyalty to leftist parties, it matters in particular which left–right, redistributive policies the leftist parties offer (Jansen, Evans, and De Graaf 2013; Kitschelt 1994). Accordingly, "the relative salience of class as a determinant of voting behavior is a cumulative consequence of strategies pursued by political parties on the left" (Przeworski 1985: 100). Thus, the more left-wing the policies of leftist parties like Labour, the more pronounced the class gap should be, and vice versa.

Second, it also matters how *different* the main party options are in terms of left–right policy (Elff 2009; Evans and Tilley 2012a; 2012b). Leftist parties are almost always more left-wing on redistributive policy than rightist parties, so the working class should therefore always prefer a leftist party like Labour over a rightist party like the Conservatives, just as the self-employed should prefer the Conservatives over Labour. But if leftist and rightist parties converge on redistributive policy, it becomes difficult for voters to determine which party is most proximate to their redistributive policy preferences. For class differences to emerge, "the parties must adopt distinctive positions," thereby sending clear policy signals (Evans and Tilley 2012b: 964). Without these, "it seems only natural" that social class membership will "become less important in guiding voting behavior" (Dalton 2014: 164). Thus, the larger the

left–right policy difference between the main leftist and rightist parties, the more pronounced the class gap should be, and vice versa.

I argue that social class divisions in voting are not merely policy-responsive. The idea about "instrumental class voting" (Evans and Tilley 2012a: 141) misses the symbolic, identity-based underpinnings of class politics. Like group voting more broadly, class voting builds not only on individual economic interests but also on collective understandings about symbolic representation. Classes differ most when symbolic class–party ties are salient to voters. In particular, I consider the role played by leftist parties, because they were the ones to institutionalize and subsequently politicize class politics (e.g., Bartolini and Mair 1990; Kitschelt 1994; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; see Dalton 2014).

This idea should hardly be surprising to scholars of class politics. For example, Evans and Tilley (2012a: 160) allude to "an alternative interpretation emphasizing group-based heuristics" rather than policy considerations, and Evans and Tilley (2017: 160) show that the class cleavage has historically been strongest among voters, who perceive Labour as a working class party. Indeed, in 2015, workers and self-employed voters only differed in Labour support if they also believed that Labour represented the working class (see SI: Figure A2).

Yet, these symbolic underpinnings of class politics are usually only noted in passing, and there are virtually no attempts to theorize and test how political parties actively play a role in mobilizing classes as groups rather than individuals. One recent exception is Heath (2015), who argues that Labour chose to run fewer working-class candidates, pursuing a catch-all strategy. The associated decline in working-class Labour MPs in turn meant that working class voters and voters from other classes became more similar in vote choice in Britain (see also Evans and Tilley 2017; Heath 2018). I build on Heath's view that voters are driven by social identities, but I advance an explanation centering on party electoral appeals,

which seem to offer parties more strategic flexibility. Whereas parties use policy-based and group-based appeals to adjust their policy and group image when appealing for votes, they are less likely to campaign from one election to the next by adjusting up and down the share of MPs with certain class backgrounds. In fact, as Heath also shows, the number of working class MPs has steadily declined for the past 50 years (Heath 2015: 182). While individual candidates may obviously highlight or downplay their own class backgrounds as they see fit, the share of working-class MPs in a party changes more gradually and is not exclusively a strategic choice (e.g., it could also result from changes in voter preferences, decreasing candidate supply, and the professionalization of politics in general).

In sum, as with group politics in general, class politics in Britain and elsewhere is increasingly considered policy-responsive. I hypothesize instead that class differences in vote choice depend on group-based class appeals. When Labour's 'old' stereotypical ties to workers are emphasized, working-class and self-employed voters will diverge; when 'new' atypical business ties are emphasized, they instead converge. Although I focus primarily on the role played by the Labour Party, the clarity of group signals should also matter (just as the clarity of policy signals matters). I expect class differences to be most pronounced when the two main parties differ in class emphasis. Either way group-based class appeals should work independently of Labour's economic policy position and the economic policy difference between Labour and the Conservatives.

Data and Measures

To study if the social divisions of electoral politics depend on how party elites use group-based appeals, I combine voter survey data with party manifesto data on Britain from 1964 to 2015. The survey data covers all 14 elections in the period studied and comes from the high-quality British Election Study series (BES). The pooled sample has around 23,000

observations with valid scores on all of the relevant variables with an average of 1,625 observations in each survey (ranging from 1,242 to 2,320).

Vote choice. The dependent variable is recalled vote choice. Following previous work, I focus on the respondents who supported one of the two major parties, the Conservatives or Labour, as this is where the class divide has been in British politics (Heath 2015: 178). In other words, I analyze how likely voters in different class positions are to support Labour as opposed to the Conservatives. The sample distribution is 51% Labour supporters and 49% Conservative supporters.

Social Class and Individual-Level Controls. Social class, the independent variable, is measured by occupation.[5] Like others, I use a simplified version of the Erikson–Goldthorpe occupational-class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) and distinguish four categories: the 'working class' (skilled and unskilled manual workers including foremen/supervisors), the 'routine non-manual' workers, the 'salariat' (professional and managerial workers), and the 'petty bourgeois' (self-employed, small businessmen, and farmers).[6] Measuring class using household income instead of occupation leads to the same conclusions, as shown below. The models I specify mean to estimate the effect of group-based class appeals on class differences in vote choice; they do not mean to test all the prevalent explanations of individual voting behavior. Therefore the models only account for factors that could confound the estimates of interest. I control for birth cohort and sex, as they possibly relate to both class and party

[5] There are various measures of occupational class (e.g., Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Kriesi et al. 2008; Oesch 2006), but they tend to predict the same voting behavior (Knutsen and Langsaether 2016).

[6] This collapses the working-class categories and the higher and lower professional categories in the original seven-class schema. However, these categories are indistinguishable in terms of vote choice and not crucial in operationalizing the Erikson–Goldthorpe schema, according to Evans and Tilley (2012a). Occupational class has been coded from the 19-category socio-economic group (SEG) to retain consistency across time.

support. The main results are robust to the inclusion of additional controls (e.g., race, educational attainment, religion, and trade union membership), but since these variables are only available for some respondents, the main models exclude them. I follow the conventional view in the class voting literature (Evans and De Graaf 2013; Evans and Tilley 2017; Knutsen 2006), and the broader idea about the funnel of causality (Campbell et al. 1960), that attitudinal variables, like voters' left–right, ideological orientations, mediate rather than confound the class–party relationship. So, to avoid post-treatment bias in the estimated class effect, the models do not control for any attitudinal variables (Wooldridge 2010).[7]

Policy-Based Class Appeals. The party-level data comes from content analysis of election manifestos. I rely on manifestos as a source because of their unparalleled time coverage and because they represent a political party as a unitary actor (Helbling and Tresch 2011). For policy-based appeals, I use data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), now continued as MARPOR (Volkens et al. 2018). The CMP codes policy statements in election manifestos into different policy categories and measures the percentage of all statements related to each of these policies. This allows scholars to construct policy position estimates, which have been widely used to examine how party policy influences voters (e.g., Abou-Chadi and Wagner, n.d; Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011; Evans and De Graaf 2013) and correlate strongly with alternative estimates based on expert judgements or voter perceptions (Helbling and Tresch 2011). I use the indicator of economic or redistributive

[7] Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) usefully discuss the causal ordering of social class position and ideological preferences. They argue that class precedes preferences, but elude to a potential selection issue, where people choose occupations based on personality traits and core beliefs that are also correlated with political orientations. This issue is particularly relevant in regards to *horizontal* differences in job tasks *within* the service or professional class (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014: 1681; see also Oesch 2006). However, it seems less relevant in regards to *vertical* class distinctions (e.g., working class versus self-employed), which are less based on choice.

position suggested by Bakker and Hobolt (2013), as it speaks directly to the instrumental aspects of class voting. Specifically, Labour's economic *position* is measured as the sum of the percentage scores of the 'left-wing' economic policy categories minus the sum of the percentage scores of all 'right-wing' ones. The economic policy *difference* between the Conservatives and Labour is measured as the difference between the economic positions of each party. Since other studies have focused on general left–right positions (e.g., Evans and De Graaf 2013, Evans and Tilley 2017, Heath 2015), which include both economic and cultural policies, I also checked, and found, that results are robust using the common left–right index (RILE) suggested by Laver and Budge (1992).

Group-Based Class Appeals. For group-based appeals, I rely on data from an original content analysis of the same sample of election manifestos used to measure policy-based appeals. Although the CMP contains a few categories referring to groups (e.g., categories 701, 703, and 706), it is unclear what precisely they measure and their reliability has been shown to suffer (Mikhaylov, Laver, and Benoit 2012). All Labour and Conservative election manifestos between 1964 and 2015 were therefore coded anew to measure how much they emphasize specific group categories. Based on Dolezal et al.'s (2014; see also Kriesi et al 2008) methodology, each document was coded sentence by sentence using group-based appeals as the unit of analysis. This unit consists of a *subject* (some party), an *object* (some group), and a *relation* between the two (whether they are associated or dissociated). On average, around seven such appeals were found on each page and a total of 10,000 group-based appeals were recorded (see SI: section B and C for details on codebook and inter-coder-reliability tests; Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.86$ for unitizing, 0.81–0.96 for coding). One example would be Labour claiming "to bring about a fundamental change in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families" (Labour 1979). A more recent example is the Conservative commitment to "giving young people power and opportunity"

(Conservatives 2015). Overall, the content analysis provides detailed data on how parties associate or dissociate themselves (or other parties) with 97 different group categories over time. For its purposes, this article focuses specifically on how the parties *associate* themselves with the group categories. As indicators of group-based class appeals, I use the percentage of all group-based appeals targeting *workers* and *businesses*. These are the two categories most obviously implicating the laborer/owner divide, and they are both among the most frequently targeted categories in the content analytic data (see SI: Table A1 for descriptives).

During the 50-year period studied, the policy-based and group-based class appeals of the Labour Party show both short-term fluctuations and general decline – the changes being particularly marked in the 1990s (see SI: Figure A3 for developments). The two types of class appeals are clearly related, although not perfectly so. Worker and business emphasis correlates strongly ($r = –.55$) and the class emphasis indicators also relate to the policy indicators, albeit to varying degrees. Labour's business emphasis, for example, is only weakly related to its economic position ($r = .22$), while worker emphasis is more closely related to it ($r = –.42$). Most strongly correlated are the two policy indicators ($r = –.69$) (see SI: Table A2 for correlations). This suggests that while group-based and policy-based appeals may be different tools in the party strategic repertoire, Labour has used both in an overall strategy to moderate its class image. It also suggests that class politics in Britain does indeed represent a hard test case as much of the variation in class voting is already accounted for. Only if group-based appeals matter over and above policy-based appeals, should we observe an effect.

Main Results

When are group difference in vote choice large and when are they small? I posit that the answer lies not only in the policies that parties propose but also in how they use group-based appeals. For class politics in Britain, I expect the party preferences of workers and self-

employed people to differ most when Labour emphasizes ties to the working class, and vice versa. I also expect classes to become more alike when Labour breaks with stereotypical group–party alignments and emphasizes business ties, and vice versa.

The propositions are tested in a multilevel analysis. To deal with the potential auto-correlation originating from a hierarchical data structure in which individuals are nested in surveys, I specify a series of random effects logit models that predict Labour support relative to Conservative support (Wooldridge 2010). Table 1 reports the results from four different models. Focus is on the interactions between class and the party-level variables as they speak to the core proposition, while the direct effects are reported in the Supporting Information instead (see SI: Table A3). Model 1 estimates how Labour's worker emphasis influences class differences based on the interaction between social class and worker emphasis as well as the constitutive terms (and individual-level controls). Model 2 does the same with respect to Labour's business emphasis. Models 3 and 4 then add class-wise interactions for Labour's policy position and the Labour–Conservative policy difference to the previous models to control for the alternative, policy-centered explanation. In all four models social class is included with workers as the reference category and so negative coefficient estimates tell us that other classes are *less likely* to support Labour compared to the working class.

[Table 1 about here]

So, do group-based class appeals influence the class cleavage in voting? It appears so. Beginning with model 1, the negative and significant interactions between voter class position and worker emphasis show that working-class voters become more distinct from voters from other classes, the more Labour emphasizes its working class ties. As we would expect, Labour's worker emphasis polarizes most the working class and the two upper classes (i.e., the salariat and self-employed). These effects are non-trivial. For example, holding other individual-level characteristics constant, we would predict that when working class emphasis

is around its highest observed value of 9.2% (as in 1974), workers and the self-employed differ by 49% in Labour support compared to a gap of only 38% when worker emphasis is at the lowest observed value of 0.5% (as in 2005). Class differences clearly respond to the extent to which Labour targets workers in its group-based appeals.

A similar mobilization effect is found for Labour's business emphasis, but in the opposite direction (as expected). Model 2 gives a positive and significant interaction between class and business emphasis. As Labour emphasizes ties to businesses—as under Tony Blair's leadership in the late 1990s—social class membership loses salience as a predictor of voting, and the working class becomes more similar to other classes in the choice between Labour and the Conservatives. Specifically, moving from the lowest (0% as in 1970) to the highest (6.5% as in 1997) degree of business emphasis reduces the gap in Labour support between workers and self-employed voters from 45% to 35%. Taken together, these results lend initial support to the idea that political parties influence the social class divisions in electoral politics using group-based class appeals.[8]

However, I posit that group-based appeals are more than proxies for policy statements. Indeed, if group-based appeals target symbolic concerns rooted in social identities, they should influence class differences independent of policy-based appeals, which instead target the material concerns coming from self-interests. In Table 1, models 3 and 4 test this by controlling for the moderating effect of Labour's economic policy position and the economic policy difference between Labour and the Conservatives, respectively. Notably, all of the

[8] While I focus on the two most distinct classes here—workers and self-employed—others have focused on the divide between workers and the salariat (e.g., Evans and Tilley 2012a; Heath 2015). Predictions for this divide are similar: based on models 1 and 2 in Table 1, the working class–salariat gap in Labour support changes from 32% to 44% over the observed range of worker emphasis and from 40% to 30% over the observed range of business emphasis.

interaction terms concerning worker emphasis remain significant and in the right direction after accounting for the policy effects. For business emphasis, the interaction term referring to the worker–self-employed gap remains significant. Controlling for economic policy position and difference does soak up some of the impact of Labour's class emphasis, which is unsurprising since the indicators of policy-based and group-based class appeals are correlated. Yet, the mobilization effect of group-based class appeals clearly remains, particularly for the contrast between workers and self-employed.[9] To get a better sense of this, I plot the marginal difference in Labour support between working-class and self-employed voters at varying degrees of worker and business emphasis while also controlling for the policy effects (see Figure 1). This time the self-employed are the reference category, meaning that the marginal effect tells us how much more likely workers are to support Labour compared to self-employed voters.

In Figure 1, the left-side plot shows how the 'class gap' in vote choice depends on how Labour emphasizes workers. As seen from the upward slope of the marginal effect line, it matters how strongly Labour emphasizes its working-class ties. Holding policy effects constant, we would predict a substantially larger class gap at the higher end of worker emphasis than at the lower end. In fact, the gap responds roughly as before: it changes from 39% when worker emphasis is lowest to 50% when highest. The right-side plot concerns Labour's business emphasis. We see a declining marginal effect of class over the range of business emphasis, as expected. Working-class and self-employed voters become more alike when Labour—the old working-class party—appeals to businesses. Again, even after controlling for the effects of Labour's economic policy position and the economic policy

[9] It makes no difference for the results whether economic policy position and difference are added as controls at the same time or one at a time.

difference between Labour and the Conservatives, we would predict a mobilization effect that is similar to before. When business ties are emphasized the least, the working and the self-employed differ by 45%; when business ties are emphasized most, the gap drops to 37%. Group-based class appeals amplify and reduce the class cleavage in electoral politics.

[Figure 1 about here]

Just how pronounced are these effects? Do they match the policy-based appeals that previous work has shown drive class politics in advanced industrial democracies—not least in Britain? One way of gauging this is to standardize the policy-based and group-based class appeals on the same scale and compare the effects. To do so, I specify four new models, each estimating the interaction between class and worker emphasis, business emphasis, economic position, or economic difference, respectively. When estimating the effect of each of the group-based appeals, I control for both policy indicators; when estimating the effect of each of the policy-based appeals, I control for both worker and business emphasis.[10] Figure 2 plots the results and shows how much the gap in Labour support between workers and self-employed changes when each of the four moderating variables increases one standard deviation from its mean.

Overall, we see that the influence of group-based appeals outweighs that of policy-based appeals. It is not economic policy difference—the main factor highlighted in recent work—that seems most influential. Rather, as indicated by the dots furthest away from the 0-line, Labour's worker and business emphasis have the strongest effects. For a one standard

[10] The models are random effects linear probability models predicting Labour support, meaning that the reported interaction terms are expressed in probabilities of supporting Labour. Specifying logit models gives identical results. Also, specifying models that include the group and policy indicators in alternative constellations gives the same substantial results (e.g., controlling for one policy indicator at a time, when estimating the worker emphasis effect).

deviation change in Labour's worker emphasis (2.1%), the gap between the self-employed and the working class changes by 3.1% (percentage points). For business emphasis, a one standard deviation change (2.1%) is also associated with a 2.8% change in the class gap. To some surprise, for Labour's economic policy position and the Labour–Conservative economic policy difference we would predict 0.2% and 1.5% change to the gap, and the estimates turn out insignificant as one controls for group-based class appeals.

[Figure 2 about here]

What if we focus not on Labour's own class emphasis but on how much the two main parties differ? Prior studies have argued that the party difference in policy positions matters, but does the Labour-Conservative difference in worker and business emphasis also matter? Figure A4 in the SI shows the results of four models identical to the above, only they now include the party difference in class emphasis instead of Labour's own class emphasis. This time economic policy difference matters, supporting previous findings (e.g., Evans and De Graaf 2013; Evans and Tilley 2017). The class gap is estimated to grow 3% as the Labour–Conservative economic policy difference increases by one standard deviation. The Labour-Conservative difference in class emphasis also matters, however. For a one standard deviation change in worker emphasis, we would predict a 2.5% change to the class gap, while for business emphasis, the predicted change to the class gap is 2.2%. Labour's own economic position does not seem to matter in this specific model set-up. Taken together, all this suggests that a group-centered explanation does not just add marginally to the existing policy-centered one. It has just as much—and something distinct—to offer.

Model Robustness, the Economy as an Omitted Variable, and Reciprocal Effects

How robust are the results? The models above predict recalled vote choice in election years. Yet, some studies on the effect of party policy on class voting have used partisanship as the

dependent variable in order to include data from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys for non-election years (e.g., Evans and Tilley 2012a). Under the assumptions that partisanship and vote choice are almost identical in Britain, and that values on the party-level variables can be interpolated between elections without bias, this serves to boost the number of observations and increase model efficiency. In the SI, Figure A5 shows that the main results concerning group-based appeals are practically the same if we replace vote choice with partisanship and use the larger sample (n= 88,000). The estimates concerning policy-based appeals, which were small and insignificant in the vote choice models in Figure 2, now turn out significant. Specifically, for a one standard deviation change in the party-level variables, we would predict the class gap to change 3.6% for worker emphasis, 2% for business emphasis, 1.3% for economic policy position, and 2.4% for economic policy difference, respectively.

To further probe the robustness, I also ran models with alternative measures of the core explanatory variables of the analysis: social class position, group-based appeals, and policy-based appeals. Since it is not uncommon in political science to think of social class in terms of income (e.g., Bartels 2008; Evans and Tilley 2012a), I first specified models that use household income rather than occupation to measure class position (see SI: Table A4). This reproduces results: income groups differ more when Labour emphasizes working-class ties and less when business ties are emphasized. Second, I specified two models that test if Labour's emphasis of ties to the poor activate the same group differences as its emphasis of workers (see SI: Table A5). I find that it does. Controlling for policy effects, we would predict that when Labour's emphasis of poor people is highest (4.9%), working-class and self-employed voters differ by 54% in Labour support; when it is lowest (1.1%), the two only differ by 38%. Likewise, the gap in Labour support between voters in the first and fifth income quintiles changes from 14% to 32% over the observed range of poor people emphasis.

Third, I replaced the economic policy indicators based on the Bakker/Hobolt index, which focuses only on economic/redistributive policy statements, with the general Laver/Budge left–right index (RILE) used in several recent studies (Evans and De Graaf 2013, Evans and Tilley 2012a; Heath 2015). This generally retrieves the same pattern of results, although the estimates on both group-based and policy-based appeals are more certain in models predicting partisanship than in models predicting vote choice (see SI: Figure A6).

Another issue worth addressing is whether any omitted macro-level variables might bias the observed relationship between group-based class appeals and class voting. The economy seems the most likely contender, the hypothesis being that economic recession should increase the salience of social class in both party electoral strategy and individual vote choice. Since the main models already control for policy-based class appeals, the estimated effect of group-based class appeals can only be biased if the economy influences how parties use policy-based and group-based appeals in different ways. This seems implausible, but to rule out the possibility I specified two models that use World Bank data on gross domestic product per capita growth (see SI: Table A6). Controlling for GDP growth, we would predict that the gap in Labour support between working class and self-employed voters changes from 38% to 53% over the observed range of worker emphasis. For business emphasis, the class gap changes from 46% to 35% over the observed range when controlling for GDP growth. These findings are practically the same as the main results.

A final concern revolves around the reciprocal relationship between voters and political parties: voters react to what elites say, but elites also take stock of how voters behave. This reciprocity poses a problem for the reported findings to the extent that parties react to how different the preferences of social groups are. As Heath (2015: 183) argues, this seems unlikely. Although parties tailor strategies with an eye to the electorate, they probably care more about the changing size of social group constituencies than about between-group

differences (i.e., they react to *compositional* rather than *correlational* changes; Best 2011). Even so, we can address the reverse effects issue empirically by testing how exogenous Labour's class emphasis is to class voting. In the absence of individual-level panel data, I aggregate the data—now using elections as the unit of analysis—and construct a new variable measuring the marginal difference in Labour support between workers and self-employed in each election year. I then apply the Granger test, which evaluates reciprocity between two variables in a time-series (Granger 1969; Gujarati and Porter 2009: 652). We should ideally observe stronger evidence that class emphasis Granger-causes class voting than the opposite. In addition to worker and business emphasis, I also include the indicator of poor people emphasis introduced earlier in this section.

The results are a bit mixed, but generally support that group-based class appeals influence class differences in Labour support (see SI: Table A7). On the one hand, Labour's worker emphasis in the preceding campaign has a positive and significant effect on subsequent class voting and so does Labour's poor people emphasis (controlling for lagged class voting). The business emphasis estimate shows the expected sign and size but is insignificant. On the other hand, class voting in the previous election is positively related to subsequent worker emphasis but unrelated to both business and poor people emphasis (controlling for lagged class emphasis). If we increase sample size using the BSA data and focus on partisanship, only the effects of class appeals on class voting are significant (see SI: Table A8). In sum, there is consistent evidence that class appeals impact class voting, while the evidence that class voting impacts class appeals is weaker and more inconsistent.

Conclusion and Discussion

Why do the social divisions of electoral politics vary? I have shown that one key to the puzzle lies in how political parties use group-based appeals. People have longstanding perceptions

about which parties go with what groups. When such group ties are made salient, people are primed to vote along stereotypical lines and group differences emerge. In contrast, when the ties are cross-cut or simply not emphasized, group differences wane, as voting is likely based on other considerations.

This extends ongoing debates about the changing class basis of electoral politics. The literature has focused on parties' policy-based appeals, assuming that class differences are rooted in economic interests. Like Heath (2015), I believe this neglects the symbolic aspects of class politics. Extending Heath's work on descriptive representation, I offer an account that centers on party electoral appeals. The evidence supports Evans and De Graaf's (2013) point that parties use policy-based appeals to adjust their policy image in competition for votes. Yet, parties also use group-based appeals to adjust a more symbolic group image, and this article shows that class voting responds to both. Even in the British case, where the policy-centered explanation dominates, a group-centered explanation has much to add.

The findings also hold implications for our understanding of group politics in general. In recent years, the social group perspective has reemerged on the agenda of political behavior research (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Carnes and Lupu 2016; Tilley 2015). While we know that individual group-centrism is context-dependent (Kinder and Kam 2009), existing studies say surprisingly little about how "politically relevant cleavages" are structured by the "macro-social world of politics" (Achen and Bartels 2016: 230). Motivated by 'top-down' class politics studies, and the 'supply and demand' perspective of comparative research (Beramendi et al. 2015; Kriesi et al. 2008; Dalton 2018), I suggest to focus on party electoral strategy and examine parties' policy-based and group-based appeals. Like class, groups based on race, religion, or place are symbolically tied to different parties and demand different policies. I suspect that such social divides also depend on the policy and group images that competing parties choose to present, but this requires empirical testing.

Scholars could follow up on this article in at least two ways. One important question remaining concerns the mechanism at play. Distinguishing between the symbolic and material aspects of group politics, I have shown how both policy-based and group-based appeals shape group politics. Yet how precisely this comes about remains untested. On one hand, the theory advanced suggests that group-based appeals speak mostly to symbolic concerns, while policy-based appeals speak mostly to material interests. On the other, it seems plausible that people infer some mix of policy position and group representation from both electoral appeals. Further work should disentangle these processes using, for example, a survey experimental design which would allow more detailed measures and tests of voter reactions.

Another key question remaining is how different electoral appeals relate to each other. Here, I have sought to establish that group-based appeals matter in their own right. From the party perspective, however, the most lucrative strategy probably lies in combining the two electoral appeals. In a scenario where both point in the same direction, parties might be able to send a signal powerful enough to overcome the fact that people do not always notice and respond to policy shifts alone (e.g., Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011). A preliminary test of this idea yields mixed results, but does tentatively suggest that the class (de)mobilizing effect of Labour's worker and business emphasis was largest when combined with a change in economic policy position (see SI: Table A9 for three-way interactions).

The opposite scenario is also possible. Letting policy-based and group-based appeals point in different directions may allow parties to target multiple groups of voters at once. Although Labour chose otherwise (Evans and Tilley 2017), this strategy could help secure parties the broad voter appeal often wanted in a way more subtly than moving to a centrist but vague position or offering policies that obviously clash (e.g., Somer-Topcu 2015). Both scenarios imply that political parties have considerable leverage to shape their own electoral

fortunes. In the end, this also means that the social divisions of electoral politics may be less rigid and more manipulable than has sometimes been assumed.

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Tables in the Main Article

Table 1. Random Effects Logit Models Predicting Labour Support

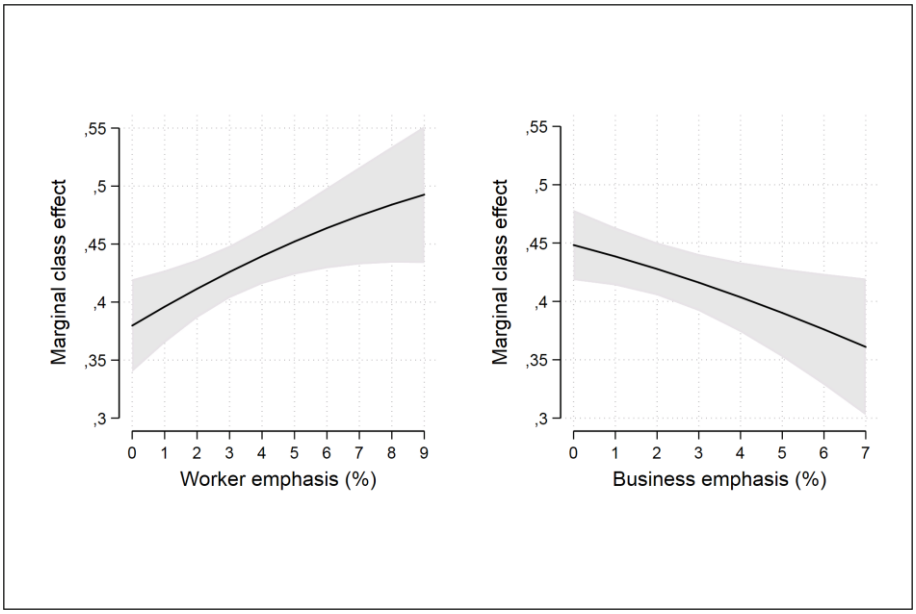
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Individual-level variables				
Routine non-manual (RNM)	-0,984*	-1,188*	-1,044*	-1,125*
	(0,058)	(0,049)	(0,109)	(0,117)
Salariat (S)	-1,377*	-1,767*	-1,243*	-1,420*
	(0,073)	(0,071)	(0,144)	(0,175)
Petty bourgeois (PB)	-1,629*	-2,084*	-1,660*	-1,928*
	(0,010)	(0,081)	(0,187)	(0,205)
Party-level variables				
Worker emphasis	-0,059		-0,025	
	(0,041)		(0,034)	
Business emphasis		0,055		0,035
		(0,052)		(0,037)
Economic position			0,006	0,007
			(0,013)	(0,013)
Economic difference			-0,013	-0,013
			(0,007)	(0,007)
Cross-level interactions				
Worker emphasis × RNM	-0,049*		-0,045*	
	(0,015)		(0,016)	
Worker emphasis × S	-0,080*		-0,049*	
	(0,021)		(0,023)	
Worker emphasis × PB	-0,094*		-0,081*	
	(0,025)		(0,027)	
Business emphasis × RNM		0,022		0,015
		(0,016)		(0,016)
Business emphasis × S		0,062*		0,036
		(0,021)		(0,022)
Business emphasis × PB		0,076*		0,068*
		(0,026)		(0,026)
Economic position × RNM			-0,011	-0,007
			(0,006)	(0,006)
Economic position × S			-0,005	-0,002
			(0,009)	(0,008)
Economic position × PB			-0,011	-0,007
			(0,011)	(0,011)
Economic difference × RNM			-0,009*	-0,010*
			(0,003)	(0,003)
Economic difference × S			-0,016*	-0,016*
			(0,005)	(0,005)
Economic difference × PB			-0,013*	-0,016*
			(0,006)	(0,006)
Constant	1,850*	1,556*	2,091*	1,979*
	(0,172)	(0,159)	(0,242)	(0,276)
Individual-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey years	14	14	14	14
Observations	22755	22755	22755	22755

Note: * $p < 0.05$. Estimated log-odds and their standard errors. Within and between-survey variance not shown. Reference category for social class is the working class. Individual-level controls include age and sex. The moderating effect of worker and business emphasis remain significant if we include race, education, religion, and trade union membership as individual-level controls, but these variables are excluded as they are unavailable

for many observations across the years.

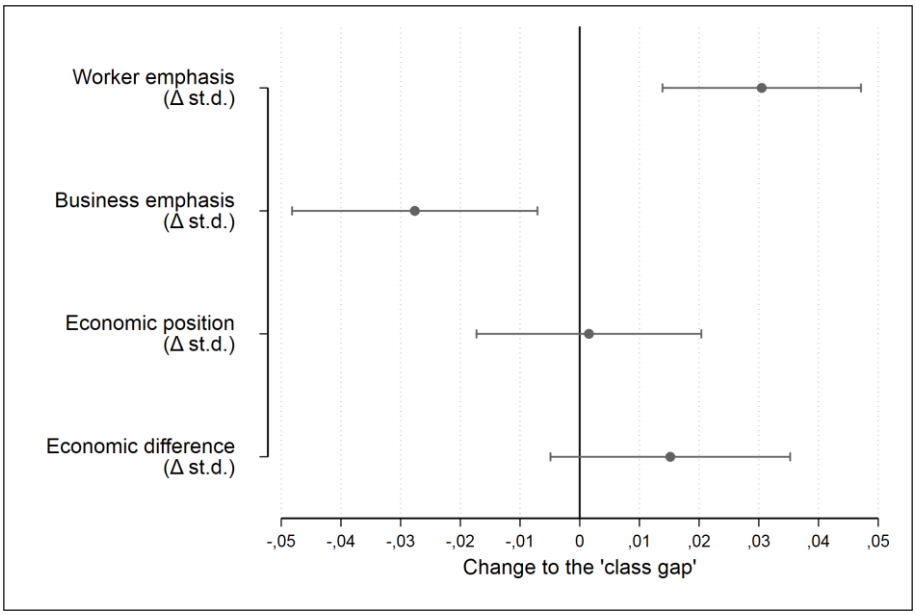
Figures in the Main Article

Figure 1. Marginal Difference between Workers and Self-Employed in Labour Support across Worker and Business Emphasis, Controlling for Policy Effects



Note: This figure shows the marginal effect of class on Labour support (relative to the Conservatives) across the observed range of Labour's worker and business emphasis. Estimates and confidence intervals are based on random effects logit models reported as Model 3 and 4 in Table 1.

Figure 2. Comparing the Moderating Effect of Group-Based and Policy-Based Class Appeals



Note: This figure shows the how the marginal difference in Labour support between workers and self-employed changes for a one standard deviation change in either Labour's worker emphasis, Labour's business emphasis, Labour's economic policy position, or the Labour–Conservative difference in economic policy position. Dots are estimates from random effects linear probability models and bands are the 95% confidence intervals. The models estimating the worker and business emphasis effects, respectively, control for both policy indicators (like models 3 and 4 in Table 1); the models estimating the economic position and difference effects, respectively, control for both group indicators (unlike previous models, which included both policy indicators at once).