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It's the Composition of Capital, Stupid!
Changing Class Structures and Political Divides in Denmark
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It’s the Composition of Capital, Stupid!

Changing Class Structures and Political Divides in Denmark

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*** DRAFT – PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE ***

Words:

Abstract

In studies of political attitudes and political conflicts there has been a tendency to downplay the role class as a structuring feature of contemporary political conflicts. New political issues are often regarded as a politics of identity or a politics of values, rather than as a politics of economic interests. The argument put forward here is that to fully understand the role of class in political conflicts and political divides we need to acknowledge that not only political issues, but also the structure of class and class interests is likely to have changed in later decades. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu we argue that class conflicts cannot be reduced to economic inequality, but is related to the distribution of a number of resources, including at the least economic and cultural forms. To explore the historical changes in the relationship between class and political conflict we make use of multiple correspondence analysis and draw on data collected in relation to the Danish National Elections Studies from 1990, 2001 and 2011. We apply a simple indicator of the multi-dimensional model of class developed by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984) and construct a multidimensional model of political attitudes to explore how homologies between these two structures develop over time. We expect political conflicts to be related as much (and increasingly) to the composition of the different forms of capital as to the volume of capital.
Throughout the first two-thirds of the 20th century, social class played an important role for party politics and elections, and class figured prominently in political science explanations of political behavior and party choice. However, during the last decades, class seems to have lost significance as an explanatory narrative in political science as well as political discourse, both in Denmark and in the rest of Europe (Elff 2007; Kitschelt 1993; Knutsen 2006; Lipset and Clark 1991; Lipset, Clark, and Rempel 1993; Nieuwbeerta 1995; Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf 1999). Some explanations of this development present sweeping claims about the epochal disappearance of class relations, class interest and economic political conflicts in modern society (Giddens 1990, 1994, Inglehart 1990, 1997; Pakulski and Waters 1996). Others, however, have pointed out that classes are still very much alive (Evans and Tilley 2017) and that class is still relevant for understanding current political conflicts (Flemmen 2014; Harrits et al. 2010; Jennings and Stoker 2017).

In this paper, we contribute to the latter argument, claiming that most contemporary contributions to the study of politics and elections conceptualize class relations in a rather traditional way, thereby not recognizing a changing social structuration of a multidimensional political space. Instead, most studies explain each dimension separately, sometimes pointing out how economic conflicts may be explained by class, whereas new, value-based conflicts are better explained by education (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Stubager 2009, 2013). Instead, we argue for the use of a flexible theoretical and methodological strategy exploring possible realignments of class and politics. More specifically, and drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of class, we suggest that class conflicts contain both economic and cultural dimensions, and that the multidimensional political space may be structured by both
volume and composition of the two forms of capital. To explore this claim, we present the results of a multiple correspondence analysis and draw on data collected in relation to the Danish National Elections Studies from 1990, 2001 and 2011.

**Traditional understandings of class as a political cleavage**

Most studies of class and politics draw more or less explicitly on a traditional conception of class and class conflict. In the Marxist tradition, classes are defined by their relationship to the means of production, and class relations are characterized by dominance and exploitation (Harrits 2013b; Wright 2005). The difference between classes, and the basis of antagonistic class interests and political conflict (Sørensen 2000), is thus participation in the production of societal surplus or the appropriation of surplus based on ownership rights. Political conflicts will therefore be focused on discussions of ownership, working conditions and the (re)distribution of economic resources, for example by establishing rights to social welfare (Andersen 1991; Korpi 1983; Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995; Wright 1997). In the Weberian tradition, classes are instead defined by the distribution of economic resources, market positions and life chances (Breen 2005; Harrits 2014), and the dynamics of political conflicts are similarly focused on distribution of resources, including possible re-distributions by welfare or labor market institutions (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Evans 1993; Goldthorpe 2000). Regardless of different conceptualizations of class relations, though, the Weberian and Marxist tradition are quite similar in their understandings of the content and dimensions of class interest and class politics, focusing mainly on the distribution of economic resources.
This understanding also dominates political science research, for example the seminal theory on political cleavages (Bartolini 2000; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Class conflicts is here seen as one – important – cleavage, developed and crystalized during the industrial and capitalist transformation of modern society, but supplemented by other cleavages founded in other social division (e.g. religious divisions, or the division between center and periphery), founded in other significant social transformations. As already mentioned, most political science research during the last decades of the 20th century concluded that the class cleavage, i.e. the tendency for social class as and economic interests to predict voting behavior, have now seriously declined (Bartolini 2000; Elff 2007; Kitschelt 1993; Knutsen 2006; Lipset and Clark 1991; Lipset et al. 1993; Nieuwbeerta 1995; Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf 1999).

In addition, much research has pointed out how a new cleavage based on “value differences” and the transformation towards a post-industrial society, have emerged. Some claim that the this “post-material” cleavage is replacing traditional class-based politics (Inglehart 1977, 1997), whereas others more moderately claim that the new post-materialist cleavage supplement the class-based cleavage (Borre 1995; Flanagan 1979; Flanagan and Lee 2003; Inglehart and Flanagan 1987; Inglehart and Norris 2016). Following this, a few scholars have argued for seeing education as the structural underpinning of the new value-cleavage (Houtman 2009; Houtman, Achterberg, and Derks 2012; Stubager 2009, 2013). Based on the overall theoretical framework of political cleavages, the dominating approach to studying the social structuration of political opinions and election behavior isthus to isolate class and economic political opinions, and education and value-based political opinions in two separate dimensions of political space. In this understanding, class is thus solely seen as related to one of
these two dimensions, underlining the conclusion that class has much less relevance for politics today compared to previous decades.

A few studies, however, have contributed with other interpretations of the development. British scholars have pointed out how the declining link between class and politics may have be created by political strategies of the social democratic parties themselves. Thus, whereas current class relations, and the link between class and political opinions seem quite stable, mobilization of the class cleavage has almost vanished (Evans and Tilley 2012, 2017; Rennwald and Evans 2014). In this narrative, a structural class cleavage is thus alive and well, although it does not seem to have any relevance for party politics or party choice.

Further, other scholars have argued for the continuing relevance of class for politics. Key to this argument is the claim that both dimensions of the multidimensional political space are structured by class, and that the restructuring of politics is accompanied by a restructuring of class relations (Faber et al. 2012; Flemmen 2014; Harrits et al. 2010; Jennings and Stoker 2017; Oesch 2006, 2008). To understand current political dynamics, it is therefore not enough to approach the economic and value-based cleavages separately (for similar arguments see Gest 2016; Hochschild 2016). In the remaining sections of this article, we follow this last line of reasoning, exploring the possible connections between political cleavages, and their social structuration.

**Class relations as volume and composition of capital**

Our conceptualization of social class is founded in the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984, 1985, 1987; Harrits 2013a; Savage, Warde, and Devine
Bourdieu defines class as positions in a social space, structured by multiple forms of capital, most importantly economic capital (such as money or property rights) and cultural capital (education, knowledge and technological and cultural "knowhow") (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). More precisely, social space is structured by volume and composition of capital, meaning that class relations are multidimensional and that differences between classes exist both with respect to the overall amount of capital one has access to, and with respect to the specific types of capital that constitutes these possessions.

No doubt, Bourdieu himself sees this theory of classes in social space as political, and he generally characterizes social relations as a constant struggle for acquisition of capital, legitimation of capital possession and valuation of capital itself (see also Harrits 2017). Yet, he mainly focuses broadly on class structuration of lifestyles as well as practices and struggles in key societal institutions, such as education, science, the economy or the state (Bourdieu 1984, 1988, 1996, 2005, 2014; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Thus, with the exception of a few analyses (Bourdieu 1984, 2001), Bourdieu does not explain in much detail, how classes are related to class conflict, class interest and class politics, and much less how the multidimensional structure of class relations is possibly related to the multidimensional political space. Still, based on the overall theory one would expect political space to be structured by the two forms of capital, and probably by the structure of social space, i.e. volume and composition of capital.

In this article, however, we take an explorative approach, trying to capture the social structurings of political attitudes, as well as the ways in which this structuring has possibly developed throughout the last two decades. Doing this, we avoid the assumption that economic and cultural dimensions of politics and social structure are
necessarily two separate dimensions, as is typically done in traditional analyses of voting behavior.

**Data and methods**

To explore the historical changes in the relationship between class and political conflict we make use of multiple correspondence analysis and draw on data collected in relation to the Danish National Elections Studies\(^1\) from 1990 (N=1008), 2001 (N=2026) and 2011 (N=2078). By merging data on relevant questions repeated each year we end up with a total of 5112 respondents. The Danish National Elections studies is repeated after each national parliamentary election and includes questions related to both current political issues and more general political attitudes. Only few of these, however, are repeated in the same form across all of the three surveys. All the surveys includes questions on occupation, income and educational level along with indicators of gender and age. In 1990, however, the occupations are categorized in very general categories. There are to few indicators of economic and cultural capital to make a separate construction of a space of social positions along the lines of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Given this limitation in data we have made a simpler indicator of the principles governing the space of social positions found by Bourdieu in France (1984) and again by Rosenlund (2000) and Flemmen (2017) in Norway and by Prieur et al (2008) in Denmark, that is, by the volume and the composition of economic and cultural capital.

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\(^1\) See: [http://www.valgprojektet.dk/default.asp?l=eng](http://www.valgprojektet.dk/default.asp?l=eng)
# Table 1: Questions and number of categories used to construct the political space

## Economic issues

| Q1 | Social reforms have gone too far; people should manage without social support and contributions from society, or (b) Those social reforms that have been carried through should be maintained to at least the same extent as now? (c) Neither |
| Q2 | The differences in incomes and living standards are still too large in our country, so people with low income should have a faster improvement of their living standards than those with higher incomes, or (b) The levelling of incomes has gone sufficiently far; the income differences that still exist should largely be maintained? (c) Neither |
| Q3 | (a) Business people should to a larger extent be entitled to decide about their own business, or (b) The state should control and coordinate business life; at least, the state control should not be less than it is in Denmark today? (c) Neither |
| Q4 | High incomes should be taxed more than is the case today. Responses were scored: 5, agree partly = 4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, disagree partly = 2, and disagree completely = 1. |

## Non-economic issues:

| Q5 | "Please indicate whether you think the state uses too much money, a suitable amount, or too little money on aid to underdeveloped countries." |
| Q6 | "Crimes of violence should be punished much more severely than they are today." Responses were scored: agree completely = 5, agree partly = 4, neither agree nor disagree = 3, disagree partly = 2, and disagree completely = 1. |
| Q7 | "Economic growth should be secured by developing the industry even though this may be in

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2 Translation follows Borre 1995. Question 1-3 starts by the sentence: "Which of these two statements comes closest to your own point of view".
A total of eight questions are included as active variables in the construction of the political space. The questions are, with one exception, the same as the ones chosen by Ole Borre (1995), and have been used in a number of studies of political attitudes in a Danish and Scandinavian context (Ref). Question 1-4 are taken to represent the ‘Old Politics’ or ‘economic’ dimension. They tap into the traditional politics of the distribution and redistribution of material goods and the role of the state vis-à-vis the market. Question 5-8 are taken to represent the ‘New Politics’ or ‘non-economic’ dimension. They tap into different non-economic or non-material issues regarding foreign aid (5), crimes of violence (6) attitudes towards economic growth vs. the environment (7) and attitudes towards immigrants (8). For Q1-Q3 and Q5 the original coding was kept. For the rest of the questions the original 5 points scales were reduced to 3 categories by collapsing strongly agree with agree and strongly disagree with disagree.
Constructing the class scheme

The class scheme was constructed separately in all three years using a simple occupational scheme that was included in all surveys. Based on this respondents were categorized into unskilled workers, skilled workers, a service class [funtionærer/tjenestemænd] and a class of employers/self-employed. Students, co-working spouses and people outside the labour market were excluded from the analysis.

As an indicator of the composition of capital we divided respondents into five income categories each including about the same number of respondents. Also, we coded a five points scale based on educational level. By simply substracting the level of education from the level of income, we constructed a scale indicating very roughly whether respondents relative income level is above, about equal or below their educational level. We divided the scale into three categories of equal size and subsequently used these categories to group the service class into three fractions. One with a capital composition dominated by cultural capital (middle, cult), one with a balanced composition of capital (middle, intermediate), and one with a capital composition dominated by economic capital (middle, econ).

Table 2 shows selected occupational groups from the Danish version of the ISCO classifications scheme within the different classes and class fractions. The main objective is to examine how the different fractions of the middle classes are differentiated according to relevant types of occupation. Typical occupations within the cultural middle classes are professionals (37.6 %), Managers (9.3 %) and teaching (8.5
%). Typical occupations within the economic middle classes are Managers (23.8 %), Professionals (15.6 %) and finance, administration and policing (15.2 %).

Table 2: Selected occupational groups within the different classes and class fractions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Legislators</th>
<th>2 Professionals</th>
<th>3 1 Engineering</th>
<th>32 LifeSci and health ass</th>
<th>33 Teaching</th>
<th>341-345 finance, adm, policing</th>
<th>346-348 social, artistic and religious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unskilled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle class, cult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle class, intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class, econ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The structure of political cleavages 1990-2011

As a first step, we construct a composite space of political attitudes, including respondents from all three years.

Figure 1: Cloud of 5112 individuals distributed along the first and second axis of the political space

In figure 1 we find the cloud of 5112 respondents distributed in plane 1_2 of the political space. Since the number of respondents in 1990 is about half the size of the later surveys it will have a less dominant role in the political space.
Figure 2: Categories contributing above average to the first or second axis of political space.

Figure 2 shows the categories contributing above average to the variance of the first (horizontal) and the second (vertical) axis of the political space. The first axis explains as much as 79.81 % of the total variance of the model. The second axis explains an additional 13.19 % of the total variance. The third axis explains 4.9 %. Judged by the decrease of eigenvalues and the accumulated modified rates (Le roux & Rouanet + note on modified rates), it would be relevant to interpret one or two axes. In the following
we interpret the first two axes of the political space accounting for 93 % of the total variance of the model.

15 categories contribute above average to the variance of the first axis. In addition we include the category punish crime harder on the left hand side of figure 1. We find about equal contributions from economic issues (43,5 %) and non-economic issues (56,6 %) to the variance of the axis.

On the left hand side of figure 1 we find right wing or liberal/conservative attitudes with regards to all economic issues: we find agreement that social reforms has gone too far; that there should be no more levelling of incomes, that business people should decide more about their own business, and disagreement with raising taxes on the highest incomes. Further, we find right wing or conservative/authoritarian attitudes in non-economic issues: agreements with cuts in foreign aid, agreement that economic growth should be secured even if it conflicts with environmental interests, agreement that immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national culture, and agreement that crimes of violence should be punished much more severely. On the right hand side of figure 1 we find left wing/socialist and post-materieal or culturally liberal attitudes regarding the same issues. To sum up, axis 1 opposes right wing attitudes in economic as well as non-economic issues to left wing attitudes regarding the same issues. We thus interpretive this axis as a composite left-right axis.

8 categories contribute above average to the variance of the second axis. In addition we include the categories punish crime harder at the lower end and foreign aid_fair at the higher end of figure 1. We find about equal contributions from economic issues (55 %) and non-economic issues (45 %) to the variance of the axis. The questions contributing
the most to the variance of the axis are: Q4 on taxation of high incomes; Q5 on attitudes towards immigrants and Q2 on income levelling.

At the lower end of figure 1 we find left wing or socialist attitudes with regards to specific economic issues: we find agreement that the levelling of incomes should be maintained and agreement with raising taxes on the highest incomes. Further, we find right wing or conservative/authoritarian attitudes in non-economic issues: we find agreement that immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national culture; agreements with cuts in foreign aid, and that crimes of violence should be punished much more severely. At the higher end of figure 2 we find the opposite combination of attitudes (or neutral attitudes) regarding the same issues, with right wing or liberal/conservative attitudes in economic matters together with left wing or culturally liberal attitudes in non-economic matters.

To sum up, axis 2 combines left wing attitudes in economic matters with right wing attitudes in non-economic matters in opposition to the opposite combination of the same attitudes. We thus interpret this axis as a liberal vs. non-liberal axis,

**Political attitudes and voting**

To examine the relationship between the two main dimensions of political space we introduce the major political parties with parliamentary representation in 1990, 2001 and 2011 as supplementary points in the political space. As supplementary categories they do not define distance between individuals (i.e. do not affect the axes of the space examined above) (See: Le Roux & Rouanet 2010: 42). Each indicator of political parties represents the mean point of its electorates in the cloud of categories. Examining the distribution of political parties along axis 1 we find all the right wing parties on the left
hand side (i.e. at the right-wing position on the left-right-axis). These are the Liberal Party, the Conservative People’s Party and the Danish People’s Party. These parties are clearly separated from all the left wing parties situated at the left-wing position (which in the figure are positioned to the right). These are The Red-Green Alliance, the Socialist Peoples Party, the Social-Liberal Party and the Social Democrats. Along the second axis we find the popular right (Danish People’s Party) in the bottom of the figure (i.e. the non-liberal position) along with most of the left wing parties The Red-Green Alliance; the Socialist Peoples Party, and the Social Democrats. At the top side (in the liberal position) we find the The Centre-left party (Social-Liberal Party) along with the traditional right wing parties: the Liberal Party and the Conservative People’s Party.

The distribution of the electorates of the different political parties along the first axis clearly support the interpretation of this axis as being related to conflicts between the left and the right wings in parliament – with a clear separation between the two. In plane 1_2 the second axis may be read as a specification of the distribution of electorates along the first axis. The electorates of the Danish People’s party are much more likely to combine left wing attitudes in economic matters with authoritarian / non-liberal attitudes in non-economic matters, separating them from their partners in parliament (the Liberal Party and the Conservative People’s Party). In the same vein we find the electorates of the social liberal party to be separated from their parliamentary alliance by their propensity to combine right-wing attitudes in economic affairs with culturally liberal attitudes in non-economic affairs.
Figure 3: Votes for the major political parties in parliament in political space plane1_2.
In figure 4 we see the changes in political attitudes over time according to axis 1 and 2 in the political space. The separation along the first axis is negligible, and despite the fact that government has changed hands from centre-left in 1990 to liberal-conservative in 2001, and back to centre-left in 2011, there is no indication of a general turn in the attitudes on the composite left-right dimension. Along the second axis there is a notable deviation (about 0.49) between the average point of the respondents interviewed in 1990 and those interviewed in 2001 and 2011. This indicates a greater propensity to combine right wing attitudes in economic matters with culturally liberal attitudes in non-economic matters in the last two rounds of the survey.

**Class structuring of politics 1990-2011**

Turning to the analysis of the social structuring of this political space, we insert as supplementary variables categories from the class scheme constructed above into the 1_2 plane of the space of political attitudes.
Figure 5: Social class and class fractions in political space plane 1_2.

What we see, first of all, is that classes and class fractions are positioned in a very similar manner and with about the same distance between classes and class fractions across the timespan. Skilled and unskilled workers are clearly separated from the middle classes along the second axis, with the former being much more likely to combine socialist attitudes in economic matters with conservatism in non-economic matters compared to the middle classes who are more likely to make the opposite combination of attitudes.
Further, within the middle class there is a clear separation along the first axis between the cultural fractions holding left wing attitudes in all matters and the economic fractions holding right wing attitudes.

**Figure 6: Respondents educational level in political space plane 1_2.**

**Figure 7: Respondents income levels in political space plane 1_2.**
Other structuring factors

Respondents' level of education (figure 6) is clearly related to the second axis. Highly educated groups are more likely to express right wing attitudes in economic matters and left wing attitudes in matters not related to the economy compared to those with lower levels of education. Income is not as strongly related to the second axis as level of education. But there is a clear separation between the highest income groups and other income groups, with the former holding similar views as the highly educated. Deviations between age groups as well as between the sexes are negligible.

Class Voting?

Table 3: Right-wing votes\(^3\) according to classes and class fractions 1990, 2001 and 2011 (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, cult</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, intermediate</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, Econ</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all classes</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So far we have dealt focused on exploring the class structuring of political attitudes as revealed through the relationship between class and the political space, or between the

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\(^3\) Right wing parties are: the Liberal Party; the Conservative People's Party and the Danish People's Party. The progress party was included as right wing party in 1990 and Liberal alliance in 2011. Left wing parties are: The Red-Green Alliance; the Socialist Peoples Party, the Social-Liberal Party and the Social Democrats. Other parties, non-vote and other votes were excluded from the analysis.
political space and voting. Table 3 is constructed to reveal class mobilization in political alignments. It gives the percentages of each of the classes and class fractions votes for right wing parties. Between 1990 and 2001 there is a marked shift in the propensity for the skilled and the unskilled workers to vote for the right wing parties. In 1990 right wing votes within these classes were a minority. In 2001 and 2011 right wing votes are as common within the working class as are left wing votes, and they are as common as within the privileged middle classes. Within the middle classes there is a clear and stable divide between the fractions of the middle classes privileged by cultural resources and the fractions privileged by economic resources. In 2001 and 2011 this division seems to be stronger than the one between the skilled and unskilled manual workers on the one hand and the more privileged middle class occupations on the other.

**Concluding discussion**

[To be written]
References (Incomplete)


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