

eDossier

March 2023

WHO VOTES FOR THE LEFT & WHY? IN SEARCH OF OUR IDENTITY

SELECTED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STRATEGY
SEMINAR OF TRANSFORM! EUROPE
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INTRODUCTION

TRANSFORM! EUROPE is a network of 39 European organisations from 23 countries, and also the recognised political foundation corresponding to the Party of the European Left (EL). The Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation, founded in 1990, is one of the six major political foundations in Germany, closely linked to DIE LINKE, the German Left Party, and the biggest structure of left-wing political education worldwide. The annual strategic seminar organised by transform! europe and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation has been a point of reference for the work and methodology of our think tanks. Organised for the first time in 2015, we brought together scholars, politicians, and activists from different social movements to debate strategic questions for the European Left and for the left in Europe. In the seminar we organised on 24 - 25 November 2022 in Paris, hosted by our member organisation Espaces Marx, we aimed to tackle questions related to the social basis of the left in Europe and the reasons behind our weakness to mobilise social strata with our political programme and influence European politics, both nationally and at EU level. We dugged into the sociology of the left vote today, to identify the socioeconomic profile of the people who preferentially vote for the left, and in parallel identify those who do not, despite the fact that we consider them to be strata that we could represent politically. Such a process led us to conclusions on where the left could potentially deploy in order to extend its social basis and, consequently, the electoral one.

Angelina Giannopoulou,
Editor and Coordinator of the Study
March 2023

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The radical left in Europe has been debating for years the reasons behind its decline, drawing conclusions from the results of national and European elections, the social basis that influences or not, its impact on the political mobilisations, and the extent to which it sets – or fails to set – the political agenda in our continent.

This debate results in the question of the radical left identity of today and the constraint in spotting the changes that the crisis of political representation – which obviously also affects the left – has brought.

The model of political representation of the left-wing parties has been radically transformed and this generates multiple changes both in the inner party and organisational matters and the relation of the parties to the social classes they address. In parallel, the continuous mutations of capitalism and the transformation of the labour market have not only produced a multiplication of the inner divisions of the working classes, but also a remodelling of what constitutes the modern social classes. Variables that decisively shape the self-identification of the people, their aspirations and their consequent political behaviour force us to comprehend in new ways the social structures of our modern societies, but also the ways through which people are politicised and how they want to participate, act and shape the relation between one's self and society.

The second pillar of the seminar was the examination of the variable of class in our contemporary era in combination with the various mutations of capitalism. Much of the left's soft

spot on identifying the social needs of the people is the weak analysis of the social structures and the modern composition of the classes. Often, we face the working classes in ways that historically belong to the past and we fail to acknowledge the interconnection of various variables along with class, such as gender and/or race – racial background, the sociology of the generations, etc.

Nicos Poulantzas, the intellectual, who, from the Marxist tradition, first presented a more open, complex and dialectic approach for the concept of "social class" describes it thus: social classes are groupings of social agents, defined principally but not exclusively by their place in the production process, i.e. in the economic sphere. The economic place of the social agents (so, their position in the relations of production) is not sufficient to determine social classes. Moreover, social classes do not exist per se. They are products of the class struggle; therefore social classes coincide with class practices. The set of social practices incorporates political and ideological relations. Precisely due to Poulantzas's distinction between class position and class determination, we have ways to interpret the fragmented mosaic of the social classes, and/or of the strata of classes.

I'm now bridging across to a topic that was part of our discussions over the days of the seminar by referring to Guy Standing's work ¹ on the precariat, firstly published 11 years ago. The precariat has neither a clear position in the relations of production, nor it can be found in some particular occupations and professions. The precariat has multiple positions, from the traditional proletariat ones to managerial and highly educated.

According to Standing, the precariat can be defined in three dimensions: 1. distinctive relations of production (patterns of labour and work), 2. distinctive relations of distribution (sources of social income – the clear deprivation by any rights-based state benefits, any welfare) and, 3. distinctive relations to the state (loss of citizenship rights, meaning the proletariat went from having few rights to having a rising number – cultural, civil, social, political and economic. By contrast, the precariat is losing such rights).

Consequently, as the precariat is still a ‘class-in-the-making’, it is internally divided by different senses of relative deprivation and consciousness. The precariat is on the other side of what we describe as a ‘class-for-itself’. Therefore, we witness all over the western world the fragmentation of its political behaviour, which Standing summarises as: 1. The Atavist precariats who tend to listen to the sirens of neo-fascist populism, 2. the Nostalgic precariats, mostly migrants and oppressed minorities, and 3. the progressives, mostly young, mostly highly educated, etc. The left knows the last contingent very well. We are familiar with them: they are left-wing voters, supporters (when they do not abstain).

However, as Standing highlights, “A challenge for aspiring politicians is to build a broad policy strategy for bringing all three factions together in a common cause. That is beginning to happen, so it is unnecessarily pessimistic to think a new progressive politics cannot be forged for the precariat as a whole.”

Ergo, one must think in terms of heterogeneous mobilisation that could be combined with voting for a party representing precisely this heterogeneity, as Didier Eribon described in an interview ² with the Nicos Poulantzas Institute in Athens some months ago.

In a year from now the EU will enter the electoral period, and much has changed since the last

European elections. Multiple crises have unfolded and Europe has been incapable so far of tackling its catastrophic consequences for the European peoples’ lives, as well as for the whole project of European integration and unity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine that brought war back onto European soil for the first time in many decades, the inflation crisis combined with a continuously escalating energy crisis, the retreat of the EU in the strategy against the climate crisis, together with the housing market crisis, are some of the most daunting challenges for the European states, but also for a big part of the world outside our continent. The European elections have always been an opportunity for the radical left parties in Europe, the political family of the European Left, to come together and reflect upon unsolved questions, programmatic principles, convergences and contra-positions, dead-ends and failures. The results of the 2019 elections were disappointing and damaging for the left forces in Europe, however every time offers the opportunity to reboot with a common political strategy and a concrete vision for Europe. The last time the left spoke about Europe was back in 2015. transform! will work systemically and hopefully decisively for a rejuvenation of the radical left parties in Europe and the common presence and fight in the European elections.

The ultimate goal of the seminar was for the left to be more capable of articulating a political programme, and a strategy to promote it, that, firstly, will remobilise our existing social basis, but also give us the leverage to advance beyond this social basis and make the European Left the political force that will work together with social majorities in order to guarantee a socioeconomic programme with transformative power for our national states, as well as for the EU as a common project that serves equality, justice, peace and solidarity.

In this e-Dossier we present you selected contributions from speakers who participated in the seminar giving their inputs on the above mentioned debates. A collection of seven articles which we consider critical to the analysis of the sociology of the left-wing vote, the new ways of class construction and its interrelation with various social variables from authors of different national perspectives and societal angles.

¹ Standing, Guy (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury Academic

² In Greek, <https://poulantzas.gr/yliko/ta-pollapla-emeis-i-taxiki-domi-kai-i-aristera-pros-mia-nea-antilipsi-syllogikotitas-syzitisi-me-ton-ntintie-eribon/>

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March 2023**

PRECARITY AND THE RADICAL LEFT.

*THE (NON-)VOTING PATTERNS OF PRECARIOUS
WORKERS IN EUROPE,*

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Walter Haeusl is a PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at Scuola Normale Superiore (Florence). His research lies in political sociology and political economy, with a regional focus on Southern Europe. His PhD dissertation focuses on the political alignment of precarious workers, delving into employment trajectories and status dynamics. During his PhD, he was also a visiting doctoral researcher at the University of Konstanz (Germany).

INTRODUCTION

SINCE THE 1980S, a series of reforms has liberalised – in particular – the margins of European labour markets, expanding the number of insecure and poorly paid jobs. The segmentation between secure and precarious workers has thus become a major principle of stratification in contemporary European societies. One may wonder what the political implications of such a development are, especially for the voting patterns (if any) of precarious workers. Do they inevitably contribute to weakening the radical left or do they also open up new possibilities for mobilisation? This short article summarises the existing knowledge and presents new empirical results on the (non-) voting patterns of precarious workers. The rest of the contribution is structured as follows. In the next section, I briefly discuss the concept of ‘precarity’ and show how the share of precarious workers varies across different European nations. Then, in the main section, I summarise and investigate the partisan preferences of precarious workers in Europe. In the subsequent section, the same is done for electoral non-participation, in the form of both abstention from voting and lack of eligibility to vote. Concluding remarks follow.

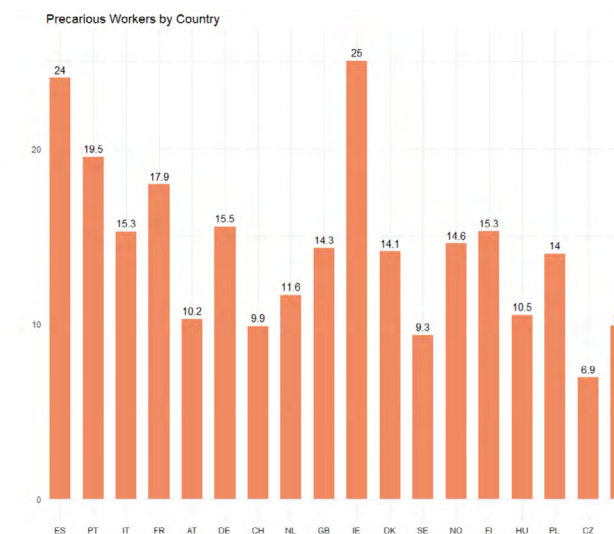
MAPPING PRECARIOUS LABOUR

In the labour market, ‘precarity’ generally refers to the condition of workers not in open-ended, full-time and decent jobs. Those attributes characterise the ideal-typical employment arrangements of Fordism, and the sense of security that comes with them. Precarity is thus primarily understood as ‘non-security’, that is, as the lack of those very employment attributes that used to be the standard and are not any more. More properly phrased, secure labour was the standard only in Europe in the aftermath of WWII and this wasn’t often the case for women and minorities.

However, even in Europe, precarious labour has become much more common since the 1980s. Following a wave of labour market liberalisation (Emmenegger et al. 2012), new contract types have been introduced that do not ‘respect the standard’, as they are fixed-term (vs open-ended), part time (vs full time) and generally poorly paid (vs well paid). Workers with such employment arrangements live in a state of uncertainty and deprivation and – more often than not – alternate between those jobs and spells of unemployment. The segmentation between secure and precarious workers has become a major source of stratification in European societies.

Precarious workers are thus defined by the combination of employment instability and economic insecurity (Kalleberg 2011, 2018; Olsthoorn 2014; Wright 2016), which sets them apart from ‘secure workers’. Here, I use the combination of atypical employment (or unemployment) and below-median income as empirical proxies of these two dimensions. Considerable variation exists, however, in the expansion of precarious labour across European countries. Figure 1 displays the share of precarious workers in the workforce, with data from the European Social Survey 2012-2018.¹

Figure 1 - Share of Precarious Workers on the Workforce by Country.



Abbreviations: ES: Spain; PT: Portugal; IT: Italy; FR: France; AT: Austria; DE: Germany; CH: Switzerland; NL: Netherlands; GB: Great Britain; IE: Ireland; DK: Denmark; SE: Sweden; NO: Norway; FI: Finland; HU: Hungary; PL: Poland; CZ: Czechia; SK: Slovakia.
Note on measure: individuals in atypical employment/unemployment and belonging to a household with below-median income are coded as precarious workers [1]; all individuals in standard employment are coded otherwise [0].
(Source: European Social Survey 2012-2018. Data is pooled across different waves)

The share of precarious workers oscillates between ~10% and ~25% of the workforce in most countries. Ireland has the highest share (~25%), closely followed by Spain and Portugal. This is coherent with the idea that Southern and Liberal regimes of welfare capitalism are more prone to generate precarious labour with scarce welfare safety nets. (Hopkin 2020; Manow, Palier, Schwander 2018). The lowest share is instead found to be in Czechia, Slovakia, Switzerland and Sweden (all below 10%). Other countries show an intermediate share of precarious work. Overall, Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, less so Italy) and Liberal countries (Ireland, less so Great Britain) show the highest proportion of precarious workers in the workforce.

¹ Data is pooled across countries and waves.

PREARIOUS WORKERS AND THE RADICAL LEFT

Scholars have only recently started to investigate the partisan preferences of precarious workers. Despite often adopting alternative operationalisations of precarious workers, existing studies have so far tended to identify similar findings about their voting patterns.

First, precarious workers have a lower propensity to vote for mainstream right parties, i.e. Christian-democrats, conservatives and liberal parties (Schwander 2018). Those parties indeed do not provide any material advantage to them, thereby empirically rejecting the idea (Rueda 2005) that precarious workers may favour labour market liberalization. Second, precarious workers seem to be less willing to vote for the radical right (Mayer et al. 2015; Rovny and Rovny 2017), although results are somewhat mixed (Rovny and Rovny 2017; Schwander 2018). Secure workers, rather than precarious ones, seem to constitute the main constituency of this party family (Häusermann 2020).

Third, precarious workers tend to vote for the 'left alternative' to social democracy, be it the radical left (Marx and Picot 2013; Marx 2015; Rovny and Rovny 2017), or green parties (Marx and Picot 2013; Marx 2014, 2015). Two complementary explanations have been provided for this voting pattern. On the one hand, Marx (2015) argues that the radical left and the greens answer to the material interest of precarious workers. Both party families indeed generally promote redistribution and specifically favour universalist social and labour market policies targeted at the margins of the workforce. However, it is far from clear how (if) the radical left and the greens vary in their proposed policies, and which measures are the most favoured by precarious workers. On the other hand, Marx (2015) argues that both the radical left and the greens may channel political frustration against political elites. Both party families indeed variably articulate an anti-establishment discourse that should resonate to precarious workers, who

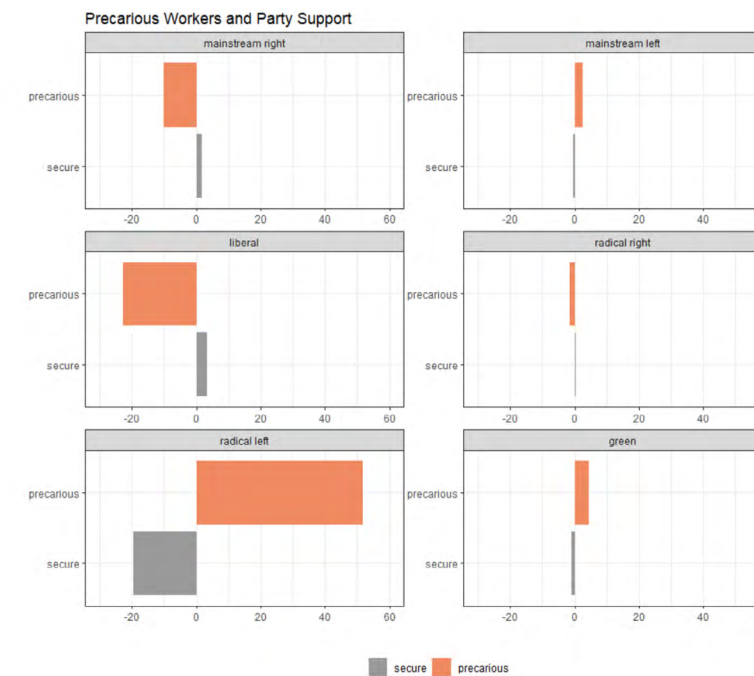
are the first to experience 'how rotten the system is' and may not feel represented by mainstream parties (Marx 2015).

Figure 2 shows relative patterns of party support of precarious and secure workers in Europe, with data from the European Social Survey 2012-2018. ² For precarious/secure workers, the standardized deviation from the score that the party family has obtained in the overall electorate is shown as a percentage. Relative support thus means relative to the electoral score of each party family. Standardization means that values for precarious/secure workers are comparable across party families, irrespective of their overall level of party support in the survey. ³ In simple terms, bars show whether precarious/secure workers support any given party more (or less) than the general electorate. For ease of interpretation, party scores in the general electorate are also displayed in Figure 3. ⁴

Precarious workers show the highest level of (relative) support for the radical left (+ 50%). As the radical left got 7.7% of the vote among the general electorate (Figure 3), this means that around 12% of precarious workers voted for the radical left in absolute terms. Conversely, precarious workers show the lowest level of support for the liberals (- 20%) and the mainstream right (- 10%). Minor voting patterns – very likely insignificant ones – emerge for the greens, the social democrats, as well as the radical right.

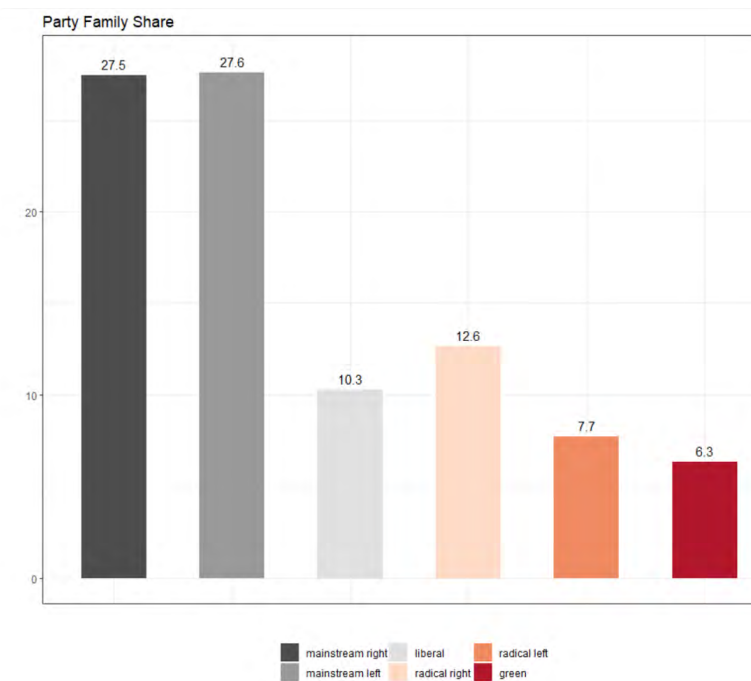
In relative terms, precarious workers display a strong voting pattern for the radical left. However, we should keep in mind that, in absolute terms, only a minority of them vote for the radical left, as this party family received a small share of the overall vote. Moreover, those percentages are calculated based on voters: they refer to people who declare they have voted in national elections only

Figure 2 - Relative Party Support for Precarious and Secure Workers in Europe.



Note on measure: individuals in atypical employment/unemployment and belonging to a household with below-median income are coded as precarious workers [1]; all individuals in standard employment are coded otherwise [0]. (Source: European Social Survey 2012-2018. Data is pooled across different waves and countries. Country included are: Spain; Portugal; Italy; France; Austria; Germany; Switzerland; Netherlands; Great Britain; Ireland; Denmark; Sweden; Norway; Finland; Hungary; Poland; Czechia; Slovakia.)

Figure 3 - Share of Main Party Families in Europe.



(Source: European Social Survey 2012-2018. Data is pooled across different waves and countries. Country included are: Spain; Portugal; Italy; France; Austria; Germany; Switzerland; Netherlands; Great Britain; Ireland; Denmark; Sweden; Norway; Finland; Hungary; Poland; Czechia; Slovakia.)

² Data is pooled across waves.

³ This is why the y-axis always cuts the x-axis at zero.

⁴ Data is pooled across countries and waves.

OUT OF THE POLITICAL GAME?

Indeed, many precarious workers do not vote at all. Existing studies find that precarious workers have a lower probability of participating in elections, i.e. they abstain far more often than the average voter (Schwander 2018, Häusermann 2019).. As such, labour market inequality – likely through political apathy and disillusion – fosters political inequality. Moreover, scholars have so far virtually neglected the fact that, since many

precarious workers are not citizens, they do not have the right to vote at all. Here, political inequality is direct and institutionalised.

Figure 4 shows patterns of abstention for precarious and secure workers (left panel), as well as the proportion of people with the right to vote (right panel) for both groups.

Figure 4 - Abstention and Eligibility to Vote for Precarious and Secure Workers.



*Note on measure: individuals in atypical employment/unemployment and belonging to a household with below-median income are coded as precarious workers [1]; all individuals in standard employment are coded otherwise [0].
(Source: European Social Survey 2012-2018. Data is pooled across different waves and countries. Country included are: Spain; Portugal; Italy; France; Austria; Germany; Switzerland; Netherlands; Great Britain; Ireland; Denmark; Sweden; Norway; Finland; Hungary; Poland; Czechia; Slovakia.)*

31.1% of precarious workers decide not to participate in elections, as compared to 20.2% of secure workers. Furthermore, while only 4.5% of secure workers do not have the right to vote,

this is the case for more than double of precarious workers, i.e. 9.4%. As such, precarious workers disproportionately opt out and are kept out of the political game.

CONCLUSION

Precarious workers who do vote clearly show greater support for the radical left (than is normally the case among the general electorate). The same cannot be said of all other party families – the radical right and the social democracy included – as well as the greens (contrary to previous findings in the literature). Or at least this is what emerges from the descriptives presented in this short article, based on the last waves of the European Social Survey. This is a bright and positive note for the radical left, which we shouldn't underestimate.

However, positivity should be taken with caution, as there are also relevant but less positive aspects to be aware of. In absolute terms, only a tiny minority of precarious workers actually vote for the radical left. This is due to a variety of reasons: the radical left gets a low share of the vote in the overall electorate; precarious voters are more likely to opt out of the 'electoral game'; and they are disproportionately made up of non-citizens, thus do not have the right to vote.

More research and more political thinking should be directed at understanding which socio-economic policies cater specifically to the interests of precarious workers in order to mobilise these workers more. Limits to temporary contracts, strong statutory minimum wages, and basic income schemes are probably the main suspects worth inquiring about. At the same time – and also for its own sake – an expansion of voting rights should be fought for.

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TRADE UNIONS AND VOTING FOR THE LEFT IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM.

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INTRODUCTION

THERE IS AN INCREASING AMOUNT OF RESEARCH

studying the influence of professional experience on electoral behaviour, with some very interesting results, especially when these studies go beyond a one-dimensional conception of professional activity (Delli Carpini, 1986) and take into account socio-professional position, the sector of activity, the status of activity, type of contract, working conditions such as autonomy at work, job satisfaction or recognition of work. One of these dimensions has, however, been less fully explored: the relationships that employees have with trade unions.

Some studies have highlighted, in Europe and in the United States, strong links between union membership and electoral turnout (D'Art & Turner 2007; Kerrissey & Schofer 2013). Following Carole Pateman (1970), these research studies consider that participation in the workplace, in whichever form, would encourage political participation outside of work, by increasing the interest in politics and the feeling of political competence of citizens. However, the effects of union membership for political participation, though still significant, are less salient for the 1980s generation than for older generations (Turner et al., 2020). At the same time, other studies looked at possible links between union membership and voting choice. Thus, in Europe, union members vote significantly more for the social democratic and radical left and significantly less for the greens, for the right and for the far right (Arndt & Rennwald, 2016).

In Australia, Andrew Leigh (2006) observes a significantly higher vote for Labour among union members. However, in the United States, the most recent study (Zullo, 2008) claims that unionisation no longer has an effect on voting orientation, whereas previous studies suggested that union members overvoted in favour of the Democrats (Sousa, 1993).

We contribute to this literature by taking account, beyond union membership, of the diversity of trade union organisations and by including in our analysis some of the different behaviours and attitudes related to labour unions (vote in union elections or attitudes towards unions' actions). However, to take account of the specific features of the industrial relations system and of the structure of the trade union landscape, it appears necessary to carry out analysis at national level.

That's why we are focusing on France and Belgium, two European countries where some data are available and in which the political context and the industrial relations systems are very different. Belgian employees are more unionised than in France: in the 2010s, around 55% of employees were union members, compared with 11% in France. The role of trade unions is also very different. We use seven electoral surveys (five in France, two in Belgium) carried out between 2007 and 2022 that provide information on voting behaviour and several variables that describe the relationship to trade unions (trade union membership, participation in union or social elections, and attitudes towards trade unions and strikes). Nevertheless, not all indicators are available in all surveys and the numbers of employees surveyed are limited (see Tables 1 and 2).

A DECREASING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNION MEMBERSHIP AND THE LEFT-WING VOTE?

If we look at trade union membership, we can see a weakening of the left-wing overvote in France between 2007 and 2022. As shown in Table 1, in 2007 and 2012, union members voted more than non-union members for the left candidates in the first round of presidential elections. The difference is slight in 2017 and only concerns Jean-Luc Mélenchon. But, if we take into account the social and professional situation, the overvote of union members for the left still remains

significant. Nevertheless, in 2022, there was no longer any difference between union members and non-union members. In Belgium, in 2014, union members voted more for left parties than non-union members (see Table 2), especially for socialist or radical left parties. If the difference is slight in 2007, it remains significant if we take account of the social and professional situation of the respondents.

Table 1 - Left-wing vote and union membership (France, 2007-2022)

	2007	2012	2017	2022
Non-union members	35.2	38.4	25.1	24.8
Union members	57.9	60.5	34.8	25.5
Full sample	37.5	40.7	26.3	24.9

Sources: French Election Studies, CDSP, 2007-2012-2017; PEOPLE2022 survey, CERAPS / ESPOL / LEM, 2022
Fieldwork: employed respondents (n=894 in 2007, n=710 in 2012, n=695 in 2017, n=1001 in 2022)

Table 2 - Left-wing vote and union membership (Belgium, 2007-2014)

	2007	2014
Current union members	39	35.6
Previous union members	37.4	22.4
Non-union members	35	23.9
Full sample	36.8	30.3

Sources: Belgian National Election Studies, 2007-2014 (Swyngedouw et al. 2009; Abts et al. 2015)
Fieldwork: employed respondents (n=860 in 2014, n=957 in 2007)

The Belgian case is interesting because the high rate of unionisation allows us to differentiate voting choices according to the trade union organisation to which each union member belongs. It is mainly the members of the General Labour Federation of Belgium (FGTB/ABVV), close to the left parties, who voted massively for these parties (50.2% in 2007, 51% in 2014). On the contrary, members

of the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV) voted less for the left (20.1% in 2014, 30.1% in 2007). Thus, according to other analysis in Sweden (Arndt & Rennwald 2016) and France (Parsons 2015; Pernot 2022), the support of union members for the left concerns more the confederations historically close to this political family.

THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIONS, A MORE SIGNIFICANT VARIABLE.

Although in France the vote of union members does not seem to be more left-wing oriented, other surveys show that people who are union supporters vote even more for the left (Pernot 2022). It therefore seems appropriate to diversify the indicators of the relationship to trade unions by not limiting it to membership.

We can firstly look at participation in union or social elections. However, in Belgium, the difference between employees who voted in the 2012 social elections and those who abstained (respectively 36.1% and 31.3% vote for the left) are much smaller than those observed between union members and non-union members. Thus, if we have shown that, in France, it is not so much union membership or union presence that could increase electoral turnout but rather the participation in union elections (Haute 2022), workplace participation seems to have no significant impact on the voting choice.

Finally, we can look at employees' attitudes towards trade unions. This indicator is interesting as it does not have exactly the same social logics and dynamics: the decline in union membership in Europe has not been accompanied by a decline in pro-union attitudes; on the contrary (Frangi et al. 2017; Haute 2021).

In France, we find that employees with positive attitudes towards trade unions vote significantly more for the left. In 2012, employees confident in trade unions were much more likely to vote for left candidates (57.6%) than employees who lacked confidence in them (26.9%). Similarly, employees who approved of the use of strikes also voted much more for the left than those who disapproved (47.9% vs 21.7%).¹ Above all, this observation is repeated in 2022, even though union members are no longer distinguished by a more important left-wing vote. Thus, employees who strongly

agreed with the fact that trade unions provide services to employees are three times more likely than employees who strongly disagreed to have voted for left-wing candidates (38.6% vs 13.8%).

A very similar result is obtained in Belgium: employees who are confident in the unions, who are less numerous than union members, voted slightly more for left parties than employees who lacked confidence in the unions (46.7% vs 25.6% in 2007, 40.2% vs 16.9% in 2014). If trust in labour unions is not the better indicator of employees' attitudes towards unions, we obtain the same results when we use an aggregation of the nine opinion questions about unions available in the 2014 Belgian national election study (Swyngedouw et al. 2016). Moreover, if we compare, in regression models, the impact of union membership, workplace participation and attitudes towards unions on the left-wing vote, attitudes are always more significant than the other dimensions of the relationship to trade unions. Therefore, what should worry left parties in France, Belgium or elsewhere is not only the decline of union membership, but also the drop in the number of strikes and the number of employees taking part in them, the drop in turnout in union or social elections and, above all, the drop in positive attitudes towards unions in favour of

¹ Source : CEVIPOF post-electoral survey, CDSP, 2012; employed respondents (n=1161)

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THE ELECTORAL GENDER GAP(S) AND THE RADICAL LEFT IN WESTERN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

GENDER has a clear impact on the way in which we understand politics, but its influence on our political preferences and behaviour has changed significantly over time. In this piece, I explain how the relationship between gender and party choice has changed in most Western democracies over the past few decades. After that, I specifically address how gender affects the probability of voting for radical left parties.

THE TRADITIONAL GENDER GAP IN VOTING

In 1955, the French sociologist Maurice Duverger published a book entitled 'The Political Role of Women', where he analysed women's political behaviour in several liberal democracies. Besides finding that, at the time, women used to vote at lower rates than men, Duverger (1955) also found women to be consistently more likely than men to vote for conservative parties in the three countries that he had data on (France, West Germany and Norway). Similar patterns were found in other Western democracies during the post-war period, which, as Inglehart and Norris (2000) note, led to the widespread belief among scholars that women's conservatism was a well-established phenomenon.

There are many possible reasons why women were traditionally more likely than men to align themselves with right-wing parties. For example, we know that older generations of women were less likely to have a paid job (particularly after marriage), and even when women did work, as many working-class women did, they were less likely than men to do so in factories and other workplaces where there was a strong and thriving

labour movement. Moreover, women were more religious than men, and therefore also more likely to play an active role in religious movements and institutions. In fact, the religious factor seems to have been quite important in influencing women's social conservatism, because, as Shorrocks (2018) demonstrates using data from Europe and Canada, if older generations of men and women were equally religious, we would hardly see any differences in voting between the two groups.

Indeed, the belief that women were disproportionately more conservative than men, and that they were under the influence of religious organisations (and specifically that of the Catholic Church), is known to have created tensions within liberal and socialist parties during the first half of the 20th century, at a time when women's right to vote was being discussed (Przeworski, 2009: 316). Ironically, in countries such as Germany, women would then go on to play very active roles in right-wing parties that had fervently opposed women's enfranchisement (Scheck, 2004).

FROM THE 'TRADITIONAL' TO THE 'MODERN' GENDER GAP

Nevertheless, the role of women in society and politics shifted dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, bringing about changes in the political preferences of voters. A reversal of the traditional gender gap (i.e., women being more right-wing than men) was first seen in the USA during the 1970s, where younger generations of women were significantly more likely than men to vote for the Democrats (Inglehart, 1977: 228). This new phenomenon, which was coined as the 'modern gender gap', gradually spread across advanced capitalist countries, leading to a relatively consistent pattern of women being generally more likely than men to vote for left-wing parties across many of those countries, including most EU Member States, in recent decades (Abendschön and Steinmetz, 2014).

As ever in the social sciences, it is difficult to pinpoint the main defining factor that explains women's apparent shift towards the left. However, societal changes, including improvements in women's access to education and the job market, may well be one of the reasons. For instance, in 2021, women represented 46.4% of the total labour force within the EU, and 32.1% of these women in work had completed tertiary education, whereas only 26.9% of men had (Eurostat, 2023; The World Bank, 2023). This context of greater opportunities for women, however, contrasts with the existence of glass ceilings and gender pay gaps,

which are still very much present when women enter the labour market (European Commission, 2020). Furthermore, women are much more likely than men to face low-intensity careers, irregular working patterns and interruptions in their work histories as a result of unpaid care imbalances in society (Kelle 2018). Therefore, it would not be surprising if women's shift to the left was explained by a desire to support policies that guarantee higher levels of protection against labour market risks, difficult work-life balances, career breaks and other types of challenges that working women face on a systematic basis.

Alongside economic reasons, though, it is also important to bear in mind that the influence of organised religion has decreased dramatically across post-industrial democracies in the past few decades (Norris and Inglehart, 2004). So, if religion was one of the factors explaining women's greater levels of social conservatism, its decline may have increased support for gender equality among the former, as well as opposition to traditional family roles and lifestyles (Shorrocks, 2018). This may, in turn, have strengthened the appeal of left-wing parties among women, as many of them have (at least in the Western World) embraced feminist agendas, and also tend to offer a less conservative view on social and cultural issues than their right-wing counterparts.

GENDER AND SUPPORT FOR RADICAL LEFT PARTIES

When political sociologists refer to the 'modern gender gap', we usually measure it by looking at women's increased probability to vote for left-wing parties as a whole. However, the evidence seems to suggest that, at least in Europe, a very important part of the modern gender gap is driven by Green parties, which are overwhelmingly more successful among female voters, with gender differences in support being smaller for Social Democratic parties (Marks et al., 2021: 181). So, what about the radical left? Are radical left parties (RLPs) the (only) remaining male-dominated left-wing political actors in Europe?

The truth is, when thinking about how gender might affect support for RLPs, one necessarily needs to confront conflicting expectations. On the one hand, we know that many female-dominated jobs in Europe are part of the public sector (e.g., education and health industries), where the average RLP tends to be relatively successful (Gomez and Ramiro 2023). Similarly, although certainly not all radical left parties pay the same attention to women's issues, many of them have indeed incorporated feminist issues into their agendas. On the other hand, however, the labour movement, which the radical left has historically held (or aspired to hold) strong ties with, has traditionally been more powerful in manufacturing and other male-dominated sectors of the economy than in those sectors where most working women are nowadays present. If those links are still important for generating a left-wing identity, then we might find men to still be over-represented in the electorate of RLPs. Finally, there is also one last hypothesis that has been occasionally flouted in the literature, particularly (though not only) for the radical right. The idea is broadly based on findings from economics

and social psychology that, due to differences in socialisation, women tend to be much more risk averse than men, also when it comes to voting (Oshri et al., 2022). Following this line of thought, voting for radical parties can be considered to be a relatively risky activity for several reasons, which include the possibility of 'wasting' one's vote, and the risks associated with challenging the political establishment and supporting policies that are fundamentally aimed at shaking the social and political status quo. Whether that actually means that women are more likely than men to support the existing state of affairs rather than support any kind of change is actually debatable. But a broad interpretation of this theory would lead to the conclusion that the radical left would have a harder time persuading female voters than they would male voters.

In *Radical Left Voters in Western Europe*, Luis Ramiro and I looked at the relationship between gender and radical left support from an empirical perspective using data from 17 West European countries between 2002-2018 (Gomez and Ramiro, 2022). Interestingly, we found there was neither a modern nor a traditional gender gap in voting for the radical left. Rather, most RLPs are similarly successful among both men and women – and this was particularly the case when we compared female and male voters with similar characteristics (e.g., age, employment status, occupation, education, religiosity and so on).

There are, however, some exceptions to this rule. On one side of the spectrum are the Norwegian Socialist Left Party and Iceland's Red-Green Movement, both of which are much more successful among female voters.

A similar pattern was also found for Denmark's Socialist People's Party, although this party has been an official member of the European Green party for almost a decade. In another handful of cases, however, we found men to be significantly more likely than women to vote for the radical left. In particular, we found that to be the case for Syriza (at least up until 2015), the French and Portuguese Communist Parties, and the Spanish United Left (but only before 2016, when they joined forces with Podemos). We also found men to be more likely than women to support the Irish Sinn Féin, which is part of The Left (GUE/NGL) group in the European Parliament. All in all, most of these gender differences were relatively small. For the more 'male-dominated' parties, the differences between men and women amounted to up to 3 percentage points in the most extreme cases. However, the differences were much starker among the more 'female-dominated' parties. The Socialist Left Party, for example, gathers twice as

much support among female voters as it does among male voters (Gomez and Ramiro, 2022).

So, what can we conclude from this? The fact that most radical left parties are equally appealing to both men and women can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, obtaining balanced support among genders could be seen as a positive achievement by RLPs, or by any other party for that matter. On the other hand, if we think about the reasons why women are generally seen to be more likely to vote for other left-wing parties, most of those reasons have to do with women still being a particularly disadvantaged group in modern societies from an economic, social and political point of view. Following this logic, it would seem somewhat puzzling for some left-wing parties not to be able to obtain much more support from those groups whose interests they claim to have most at heart.

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WHY POLISH WOMEN ARE VEERING TOWARDS THE LEFT

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INTRODUCTION

IN AUTUMN 2020, mass protests by women shook Poland. According ¹ to the organisers' estimates, more than 400,000 women took part in street demonstrations. The marches, which were largely spontaneous, started after the Constitutional Court effectively banned abortion in Poland, by claiming that the right to terminate a pregnancy when the foetus is terminally ill is contradictory to what Polish Constitution stipulates about 'the need to protect life from conception to a natural death'. Following this decision, Polish women are only allowed to have an abortion in two distinct circumstances: when their life is directly in danger or when the pregnancy results from a crime (rape or incest).

¹ By young adults (men, women), I am referring to the 18-30 age group, as is conventional in most surveys in Poland.

LEGACY OF THE WOMEN'S PROTEST

Although the mass protest did not reach its essential political aims (i.e. the liberalization of the abortion law), it has significantly influenced the Polish political scene. Liberal and social-democratic parties started to speak openly about abortion as a human right – something which seemed unthinkable especially for the liberal parties, which were eager to support economic liberalism but stopped short of preaching more civil liberties in fear of the influential Catholic Church. The hegemony of the Church was also seriously questioned during the demonstrations, as the women-led protests did not take place only

in huge cities but also reached smaller towns and, in some cases, even villages – thus the areas where the Catholic thinking of family and women's rights was believed to be unchallenged.

In addition, the protests showed that Polish men and Polish women, especially the youngest adult generation, follow totally different political trajectories, with men leaning to the right (including the far right) and women looking to the centre and the left.

MEN: TEND TO BE INACTIVE AND NATIONALIST. WOMEN: TEND TO BE PROGRESSIVE

Here, one important remark is to be made: women in Poland have so far looked to the left and have described their political orientation as left-wing, but this does not mean an automatic left vote. I will elaborate later on why this is not the case.

Nevertheless, that women shift to broadly understood left positions ² is a fact and it has been noted in political surveys even before the large protests of 2020. Even before the 2019 parliamentary elections, the surveys showed a difference between young women and men – not only in terms of political views as such, but also in terms of more general thinking about political activism and social life.

Thus, a survey prepared for an influential liberal portal, OKO ³ press, showed that only 17% of young women declared no interest in politics and public activism, while 40% of young men claimed a lack of interest in this area. Those men who were interested in activism said they would most gladly join a nationalist organisation, while women preferred feminist or, more generally, progressive movements.

The majority of young women were ready to support registered same-sex couples (73%) and 'marriage for everyone' (59%) – these figures were only 49% and 36% respectively among young men. On the other hand, 25% of young men believed that a woman's role was to be a wife and mother – a social role that only 10% of young women deemed the proper one for themselves. Last but not least, women turned out to be almost entirely immune to anti-German, antisemitic and anti other xenophobic narratives promoted by Polish right-wing parties, while a significant percentage of men were eager at least to consider them as possibly valid.

² 'Left' is understood in Poland as the spectre of political views starting with moderate social-democratic positions and ending with revolutionary, socialist or anarchist positions.

³ OKO as an acronym stands for Ośrodek Kontroli Obywatelskiej (Centre for Citizen Control - a liberal NGO), but at the same time it means 'eye', which is to suggest that the medium watches the conservative government. <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,24700696,mlodzi-wypisali-sie-z-politycznej-wojny-starszych-maja.html>

THE VALUE GAP

This 'value gap' can be noticed, albeit to a lesser extent, when it comes to the society's attitudes towards the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border. In a 2021 survey, a slight majority (52%) of those asked expressed a disapproval for a pushback-based policy towards refugees and stated that they should at least be allowed to apply for international protection in Poland. The age and gender group which was most eager to welcome the refugees (i.e. allow them to stay) were young women (51%), while the young men opted for pushbacks (54%). In middle-aged and older age groups the readiness to see the refugees settling down in Poland was much smaller and the difference between men and women less marked, although it is worth noting that the only age and gender group that was categorically against refugees (74% for pushbacks) was older men.

Another survey prepared in 2019 for OKO.press aimed to show what the Polish parliament would look like, had it been elected by women

or by men only. Although right-wing parties of different flavours emerged victorious in both variations, the men's parliament was clearly more nationalist and populist oriented. Men supported two different far-right parties, a populist Kukiz' 15 and a nationalist-free market Konfederacja and gave them both 88 seats overall. In the women's parliament, the nationalists gained no seats and the populists had no more than 13 seats. On the other side of the political scene, women gave 68 seats to the social-liberal Spring party, ⁴ which would have had no more than 35 MPs in a parliament elected exclusively by men.

⁴ In 2021, Spring merged with the Democratic Left Alliance (social-democratic party) to form the social-democratic New Left.

AN UNPRECEDENTED SHIFT

Young women are shifting to the left in an unprecedented way. This is to be observed in yearly surveys prepared by CBOS (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, Social Opinion Research Center – one of the key sociological study centres in Poland) examining political self-identification of the 18-24 age group. In 2015, no more than 9% of young women and 10% of young men identified their worldview as left-wing. For women, the most suitable option was the centre (37%), while men chose right-wing (40%). Over the next four years, the percentage of left-wing women grew slowly to reach 19% and then made a leap forward in 2020 to 40%, which surprised even the researchers. At the same time, the percentage of young men supporting the right did not fall below a 30% threshold, but the centre option subsequently

lost its appeal. In 2020, young women appeared to be more progressive than ever and young men more divided – with 36% opting for the right and a record 22% for the left.

The shift to the left among young women is not uniquely an urban phenomenon. In 2015, only 13% of young women living in cities (>100,000 population) described their worldview as left-wing, and in towns and villages this percentage did not even reach 10%. In 2020, almost one third of all young women in the country (32%) and more than 1/3 in towns (39%) identified as left-wing. In the biggest urban centres, self-identified left-wing female sympathisers already form a 54 per cent majority.

WHY HAS ALL THIS HAPPENED?

It is logical to ask two questions: how can this remarkable shift be explained, and why is this mass left self-identification not bringing about a significant growth of support for Polish left-wing parties. After the abovementioned opinion polls were published, left-wing views stopped being a taboo or something that was rarely declared in public. However, neither the social-democratic New Left or Together (Razem) parties, represented in the parliament, nor any smaller radical left groups made significant steps forward in terms of popularity and membership.

The anti-abortion laws introduced under the Conservative government led by PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Law and Justice) seem to be the essential reason for the women's turn, especially since they were accompanied by strongly conservative discourse, referring to the Catholic vision of the woman's role as the mother and wife and was often simply offensive to female citizens. The first noticeable growth in left-wing identification was noticed in 2016, after the first government attempt to deprive Polish women of their abortion rights was recalled at the very last moment. At that time, the government took a step back, seeing a huge mobilisation of women in the streets. In 2020, they decided to wait till the protests lost their momentum. As a result, abortion has been banned, but young women turned resolutely away from the right, correctly

understanding that the conservative political parties and the Church do not care about their lives.

In addition, the radicalised youth come from a generation brought up in the spirit of pro-capitalist enthusiasm and now, as young adults, they realise they will not get any of the benefits promised. They struggle to afford living independently from their parents; they are unlikely to find well-paid and stable jobs; they realise how poorly funded public services (transport, healthcare) are after decades of cuts. In the case of women, this confrontation with capitalist reality is exacerbated by discrimination: even though the gender pay gap in Poland is not among the biggest in Europe, women still need to make a far greater effort than men to secure a stable job, not to mention a remarkable career. In Polish patriarchal society, it is still taken for granted that a working woman will also take care of the children, household chores and general wellbeing of the family. This way, women have all the reasons to look for pro-social alternatives that secure their human rights and offer public services. It would be groundless to look for these alternatives in right-wing party programmes, either liberal or conservative, even if they claim to be modern and progressive (the liberals) or to care about families (like the Polish conservatives constantly claim).

THE TACTICAL VOTE

On the other hand, women's feeling that these alternatives must be implemented here and now, even in some partial form, pushes them to vote tactically – to support this alternative to the conservatives that seems to have the biggest chance of winning here and now. This explains the remarkable support among women for the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) centre-right party, which positions itself as the strongest rival to Law and Justice.

In addition, Polish women tend to look for short-term solutions that improve specific aspects of life, and not for grand ideological narratives. Many women I had the opportunity to talk to as a journalist claimed even that they did not vote for right or left, but for honest and hard-working people. Women are often very disillusioned with politics, too, and will not wait for a party that would solve all of their problems in a complex manner. Instead, learning from previous bitter experiences

of Polish post-transformation politics, they are eager to vote for any party that declares to solve at least a part of what they consider key problems, and which they believe has a genuine chance of winning the elections. Therefore, younger women would vote tactically for Civic Platform, while older women voters might appreciate Law and Justice social policies and vote for them despite all the misogynistic remarks they might have heard from its leading politicians.

To secure women's votes, the left-wing organisations will need to do some work, too. First steps have been taken – women's rights are now inscribed in every left or liberal party programme, and the social-democratic Razem party has decided to elect male and female co-leaders from this year on. This is, however, just the first gesture. Women are there and expect real representation. It is up to the political forces to offer it.

THE POLITICISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LEFT:

LESSONS FROM THE GREEK CASE

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Professor Emerita **Maro Pantelidou Maloutas** was until recently Professor of Political Science at the Department of Political Science of the University of Athens, and Director of its Institute for Greek Politics. A researcher on politics and the young, as well as on gender, politics and democracy, she has directed many research programmes and published extensively on the above topics.

This paper deals with young people and the Left, based on lessons from Greece.¹ A country of the European periphery, where the Left gained power in 2015 as a result of the crisis and its Right management, and lost it in 2019, having disappointed part of its electorate. More than a case study, it stipulates that attitudes and perceptions/values, change first among the young because of their basic socialising experiences in a rapidly changing world, with the Left having to find new ways to address them, since they have different information and communication venues and perceptions of the social world, corresponding to the period and climate of their basic socialization. This is all the more the case when widespread precarious forms of employment, concerning mainly the young, have an important impact on the course of their lives, turning precarity into a notable factor of the young's political perception and worldview.

While the young do not form an homogenous category, since social class, gender, ethnic provenance, etc. diversify their experience, at the same time, being young today functions as a strong homogenizing factor, creating common attitudes and perceptions, even visions of the future, for very different groups of young people. Especially if they live through shattering experiences at a critical time in their life. An overview of the bibliography on the young as political actors, since the 1960/70s in Europe, shows that they have become more and more individualistic, they value autonomy and expressing themselves daily through new technologies, while perceiving injustices and political discontent as personal affronts, perhaps necessitating a personal response, but not necessarily as reason for collective reaction. A new type of citizenship seems to be progressively forming in conditions of neo-liberal hegemony: issue-based, participatory but also conditional, in contrast to the duty citizenship of the past.² Even young people leaning towards the Left share

these characteristics of today's youth and must be approached differently to older cohorts of radical voters. (Pantelidou Maloutas et al., 2020). They also need to be educated by the Left, so that their vote goes beyond a reaction to an intolerable situation, the Left considered as the lesser of two evils.

A macro-sociological view promotes the idea that the Greek youth has a long tradition of contentious politics and fighting inspired by values of the Left. From the inter-war period up to the late 1980s, the young were highly involved in politics and social battles. However, political disengagement and feelings of a representation crisis in a period of passivity and individuation, accompanied by identity politics and lifestyle, were undeniable characteristics of the Greek political culture, too, and, since the last decades of the previous century, have been prevalent among the young (Pantelidou Maloutas, 2012). While distrust was the main root of political disengagement, the crisis offered a new environment and new venues to express anger and distrust, mainly through direct action. The young 'returned' to politics through the massive mobilizations of the anti-austerity movement during the crisis (2010-2011), and then turned to institutional politics and elections, helping SYRIZA gain power, while creating a young electorate of more than 50% that supported the Left (Pantelidou Maloutas, 2015).

¹ This is a condensed version of the oral presentation deriving from prior research of its author. Only strictly necessary bibliographical references appear. Full documentation on quantitative data is omitted. For fuller referencing, see former work by the author noted in the bibliography.

² For bibliographical substantiation, see Pantelidou Maloutas, 2012, 2015.

Substantiating this 'return to politics' with data from 1988 to 2006 showing the steady decline in participation and Left identity (37.1% of 18-29-year-olds identified with the Left in 1988, and 9.8% in 2006³), with the situation reversed during the crisis, the paper shows that, in the case of Greece, the Left seemed to appeal in 2015 to 50% + of the young electorate, even more to young women than men as far as SYRIZA is concerned, with many middle-class young people among its electorate. (Pantelidou Maloutas, 2015). If this confronts the sociological question of who the young voters of the Left are, we must focus on deeper ideological and cultural characteristics of the young that brought SYRIZA to power (albeit with low party identification) and on their (dis) similarities with the former generation committed to the Left.

The paper confronts the hypothesis that the change in the ideological outlook and of the young 'return to politics' via the Left is marked by who they were/are as a political generation, in conditions of neoliberal hegemony. The main research question is whether this image of a Greek youth population that largely votes Left, ready for contentious politics, confirms the radicalization of the young hypothesis. Or, if young voters just express a thematic vote in exceptional conditions, such as austerity (in 2015, or today's precarity), conveying the idea that, if there is 'no alternative', it is preferable to vote for a party that does not believe in austerity/precariety, rather than for one that supports it.

Based on interviews concerning the ideological and social profiles of a sample of 234 17-29-year-olds, who either voted for a party of the Left or, if abstaining, self-identified with the Left, we investigated their self-image as political actors, their identity as leftists, their vision for the future and the way they perceive what being a radical means. Five important points emerge from the analysis defining the profile of the young Greek leftists of today. The first is that they have a very high participatory potential and are highly

interested in politics (87% declare themselves 'very interested'). But they are also characterised by a low diffusion of visions for a (radical) socio-political change, which is expected of the Left, and are lacking in hope for a better society based on social justice, while they express political cynicism and have a rather confused notion of what it means to be radical (Pantelidou Maloutas et al., 2020).

Their 'vision for a better world' is very pragmatic, mainly wishing for jobs, not having to emigrate, and for better living conditions. Less than ¼ of the sample (mainly voters of the Communist Party and ANTARSYA), express visions of a socialist future. Profound disappointment and lack of social hope are apparent when they respond if they accept the idea that 'another world is possible', the quintessence of a leftist credo, referring to a socially just society. Except for the few ANTARSYA voters, who embrace it enthusiastically, the rest are divided between cynical rejection and lukewarm acceptance. A socialist utopia is not even a background driving force in the Left vote of a majority of leftists in our sample. (It is, of course, legitimate to wonder whether this lack of hope is linked to what was perceived as SYRIZA's turn, after the 2015 referendum, creating disappointment/distrust about the possibility of major changes.)

As for their perception of radicalism, what prevails is the mainstream use of the term, equating radical with unconventional, considered necessary in policymaking but unreachable. Their self-qualification as radicals is usually denied, perceived however in positive terms. Only supporters of the Communist Party and ANTARSYA self-identify as radicals attributing political connotations to the term.

³ Based on research data from the National Center of Social Research (1988) and the University of Athens (2006) referring to representative samples substantiating this change. Pantelidou Maloutas, 2012.

On the other hand, the young share progressive liberal attitudes concerning highly controversial issues within Greek society, mainly referring to rights. Such as welcoming asylum seekers and immigrants demanding citizenship, marriage and adoption of children by same-sex couples, and support for the separation of state and Church. In all the above, the acceptance ranges from 83% to 98%.

How can we evaluate the meaning of all these for the Left and its social project? Can we not question whether these liberal-minded young people, ready to participate in dynamic ways, voters of Left parties, and/or self-positioned on the Left, who do not imagine a fairer social world as a possibility, are radicals? How could they be, lacking hope to mobilise them for social equality and substantive democracy? And what about the participatory attitudes and leftist stand of the young in relation to their prior political disengagement? Is this change the result of a modification in basic political values and attitudes, provoked by the crisis? Or just an expression of the same representations materialised in a different context, provoking changes on the level of behaviour? And not on deeper attitudinal/value levels?

It seems that the return to politics of the young is possibly circumstantial, as is their turn Left, facilitated more by liberal than socialist world views. The young seem open to an inclusive society, are highly interested in gender, ethnic and sexual discrimination, and are ready to intervene when issues concern these. They participate in politics on their terms when they feel that their voice will be heard. This is unlike the traditional image of the leftists – heavily involved in party politics and dedicated to the fight for social justice. Each period has, of course, the young leftists that correspond to it. The ones investigated here look more like liberals qualified as ‘progressive’, not believing in change beyond anti-discriminatory policies & a few welfare provisions. This is indeed a generation concerned mainly with personal autonomy, expressing oneself daily, ready for confrontational behaviour in the name of this self-expression. The main question is therefore whether their

wish for expression and autonomy will connect to visions of radical social change, viewing social justice as a precondition of autonomy for all. Or if the detachment of the two will persist, successfully promoted by neo-liberalism, where less discrimination can be combined with more inequality, as Harvey (2007) has shown. So, the issue today seems to be how the various distinct democratic demands of the young can be articulated into one cohesive socio-political front, to promote a unified fight. Conditions are conducive to an articulation in harmony with the values of the Left that could promote the radical vision lacking, showing that the relation of the young with the Left is highly dependent upon the Left itself, and on how it responds to their inclusive attitudes and democratic demands.

Tepid electoral support every four years with one conjunctural issue at stake is not enough for the Left. Left votes (must) presuppose a mobilising social vision for a different future and hope for equality. While the intersection of various points of inequality on the personal level, plus an open-minded perception of rights, make the young sensitive to leftist discourses, that does not mean that they will acquire a Left world-view and radical standpoint. So the Left, and particularly SYRIZA in Greece, must gain the young, not just the young vote, if, as mentioned in the programme, it wishes to promote ‘a socioeconomic programme with transformative power [...] that serves equality, justice, peace and solidarity’. This project presupposes hope. Where there is no hope, there are no radical visions, as Eagleton (2015) stipulates. So, the Left must inspire, educate and influence the deep beliefs of the young inclined to vote left, plus articulate cohesively their separate demands to give them hope for a better future for all.

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CLASS-ORIENTED POLICIES, PERFORMATIVE CLASS DISCOURSE AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR:

*INDICATORS FROM THE 2019
GREEK ELECTIONS*

DANAI KOLTSIDA

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INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL CLASS is traditionally regarded as one of the 'heavy' variables determining electoral behaviour (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). However, the generalised crisis of representation, the decline of party identification and the relative weakening of the electoral link between the parties of the Left and the popular classes pose legitimate questions: is class still a determinant of people's electoral behaviour and, if so, how? And, most importantly, what can the parties of the Left do in order to regain their popular electorate? The shift of the Left from the material needs and the priorities of the popular classes – either the social-democratic 'third way' or the turn of parts of the radical Left towards a post-materialist agenda, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall – is usually the decisive factor to which many analyses point.

The present analysis seeks to provide an additional insight into the electoral behaviour of the popular classes. More specifically, drawing from the 2019 Greek national election, it traces some indicators of the possible impact of the subjective class positioning on electoral behaviour and the performative role of the class discourse of the competing left- and right-wing parties. ¹

¹ The data provided here are provisional and are used as a starting point for the research project that will be conducted throughout 2023 by the Nicos Poulantzas Institute in collaboration with transform! europe.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the aftermath of the 2018 presidential election in Brazil and the then defeat of President Lula, Professor of Anthropology Benjamin Junge (2018) tried to explain the support for Bolsonaro among working-class voters, despite the fact that the Lula government had succeeded in taking millions of citizens out of poverty:

One of the hypotheses is that the Workers' Party prioritized social assistance programs but failed to link those incredible welfare benefits to any kind of political position or policy position among the beneficiaries; that the Workers' Party failed to bring into being a kind of new citizen consciousness – they just created this new middle class of consumers.

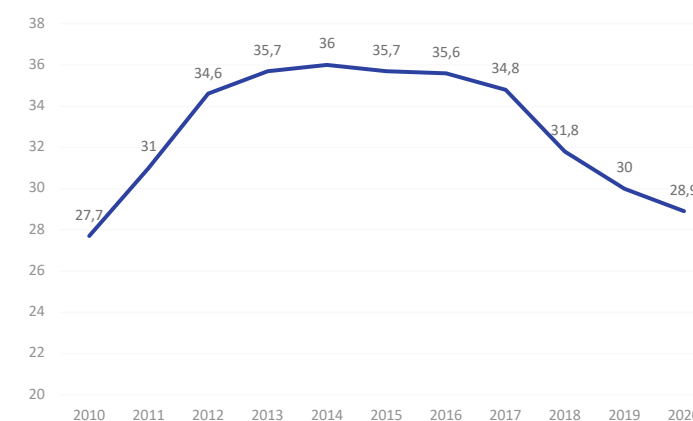
The case of the 2019 national election in Greece seems quite similar. After five years (2010-2015) of harsh austerity measures, the Syriza government of 2015-2019 – even despite the signing of a 3rd bailout programme – implemented a much more class-oriented economic and social policy intended to reverse the consequences of the previous period. The impact of these two respective periods can be traced in several indexes, such as the decline of inequalities and poverty (Figures 1-2).

Figure 1 - Gini coefficient (inequality index) | 2003-2019



Source: World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform

Figure 2 - Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio (% of total population) | 2010-2020



Source: World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform

However, the Syriza party was defeated in the 2019 national elections by the right-wing New Democracy party, which significantly based its campaign on the idea of ‘supporting’ and ‘relieving’ the middle-class – a notion most probably deliberately left undefined ² – from the ‘class-biased’ policies of Syriza.

As Bithimitris et.al. (2022) put it:

*If in the interpretations given by the parties to the double electoral earthquake of 2012, the two basic organizing principles were **the crisis and the responsibilities that led the country to the memoranda**, in the case of the recent election, the place of the crisis and the memoranda seems to have been occupied by **the middle class and the return to normality**. In this sense, the two main poles of party competition have contributed to **a critical shift in the public debate: from the horizontal consequences of an economic crisis with primarily national characteristics to the socially and class-differentiated consequences of the policies of a post-economic condition**.*

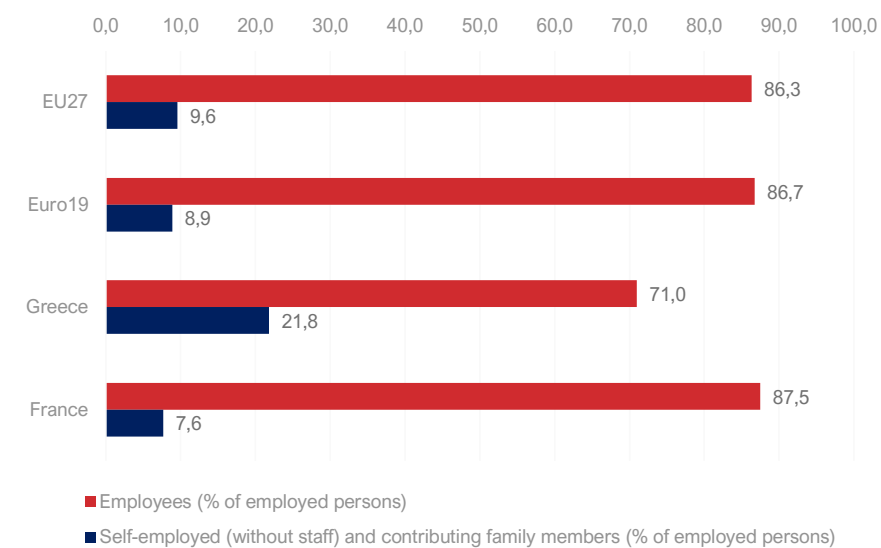
Of course, the Greek economic and social structure has several particularities that facilitated that kind of discourse on behalf of New Democracy and multiplied its impact on the subjective class self-determination and the electoral behaviour of the people, such as high numbers of economically inactive persons, relatively high unemployment & long-term unemployment, high levels of self-employment and opportunity entrepreneurship, a numerous traditional and new middle class and a vast number of very small (miniature) businesses and relatively low levels of salaried employees/workers (Figures 3-5). These characteristics, combined with the traditional *polysthenia* ³ of the lower and middle lower strata in Greece might have resulted in a looser and more flexible class conscience compared to highly industrialised countries.

However, since the Greek case is not unique in Europe, since the same approximate economic and social characteristics can be traced in the rest of the European South as well, it is worth examining it as an example of the impact of the parties’ performative class discourse and its relation to the actual class-oriented policies.

² After the elections, various definitions were given to the notion of the middle class by government officials. According to the ND Minister of Finance, Christos Staikouras, a single-person household with an annual income of between 6,294 and 16,783 euros belongs to the middle class. For the PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the middle class appears to be more of a cultural than a socio-economic category since he described as middle class “those who wear a tie” (December 2019).

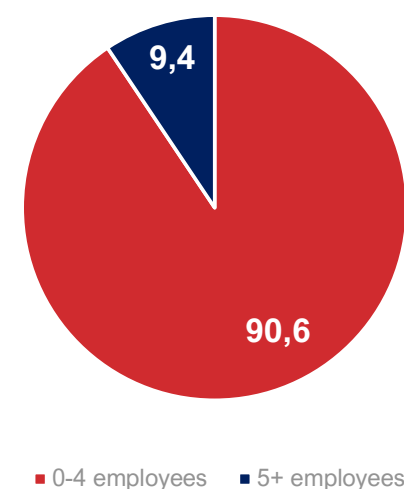
³ The term belongs to the sociologist Konstantinos Tsoukalas and was used to describe the diversification of the income sources of the lower and lower middle strata in Greece, combining income both from salaried/dependent employment and from wealth (especially land) ownership.

Figure 3 - Employees vs self-employed



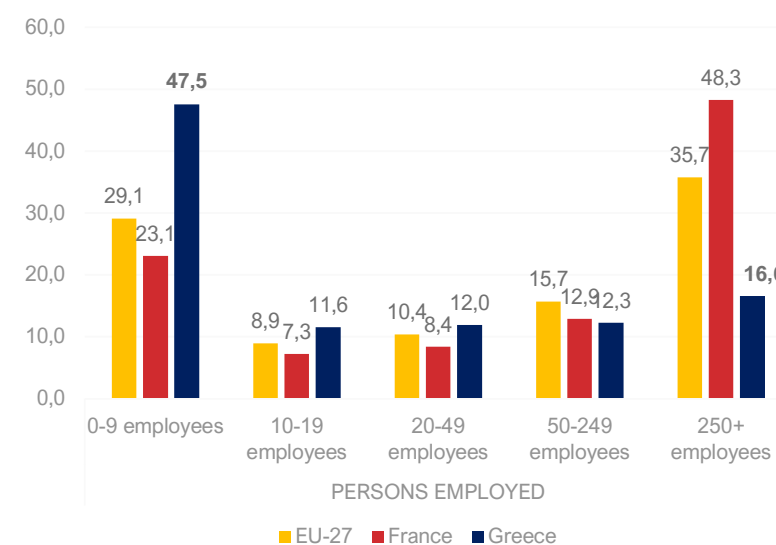
Source: Eurostat data, 2022-Q2, own processing

Figure 4 - : % of «miniature» enterprises (≤4 employees)



Source: Eurostat data, 2020, own processing

Figure 5 - Composition of employment (% of total salaried employment according to different business sizes)



Source: Eurostat data, 2020, own processing

CLASS STRUCTURE DURING THE CRISIS

As already suggested, the class structure in Greece was at least partially reshaped by the economic policies implemented during the decade of the crisis. As Sakellariopoulos (2016) describes, during the first half of this decade (2009-2014) one can observe a decrease of the share of the bourgeois class, as a result of the effects of the crisis that led many businesses to bankruptcy, but also to the decrease in high-ranking and high-

income officials in the public sector. Similarly, the crisis forced tens of thousands of small businesses to close, however the overall share of the traditional middle strata remained stable due to the downwards social mobility of parts of the bourgeois class. On the contrary, the share of the working class grew significantly, also due to downwards social mobility of those who were formerly members of the middle strata (Table 1).

Table 1 - Shift in class structure during the first 5 years of the crisis

Class	2009	2014	Shift
Bourgeois class	3,2	2,8	-0,4
Affluent agricultural strata	0,7	0,6	-0,1
Traditional petit-bourgeois class	7,3	7,0	-0,3
Middle agricultural strata	1,9	1,2	-0,7
New petit-bourgeois class	29,5	21,9	-7,6
Working class	49,1	59,2	10,1
Low agricultural strata	7,4	7,3	-0,1
Non classified	0,9	-	-0,9

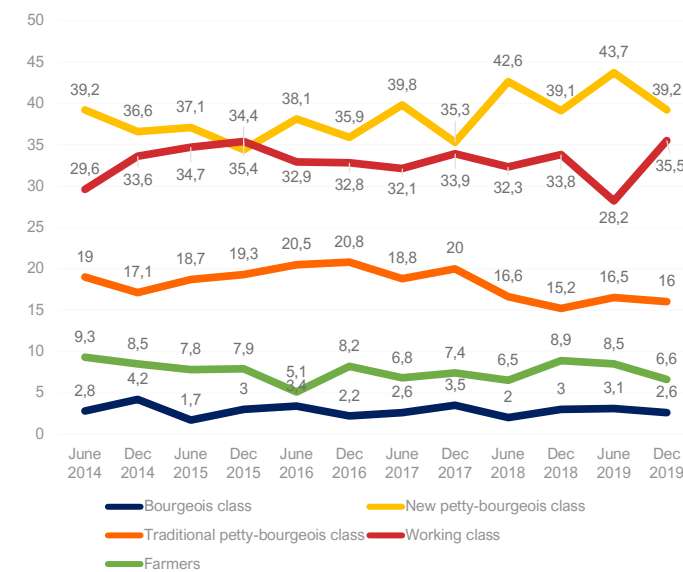
Source: Sakellariopoulos (2016)

This trend was, at least partially, reversed during the second half of the decade and the Syriza governance. As Bithimitris et al. (2022) point out, ⁴ from 2015 onwards the share of the new petit-

bourgeois class increased, while at the same time the share of the working class and of the traditional petit-bourgeois class dropped – a tendency that indicates an upward social mobility (Figure 6).

⁴ Following, however, a slightly different definition and typology of the respective social classes.

Figure 6 - Class structure 2014-2019



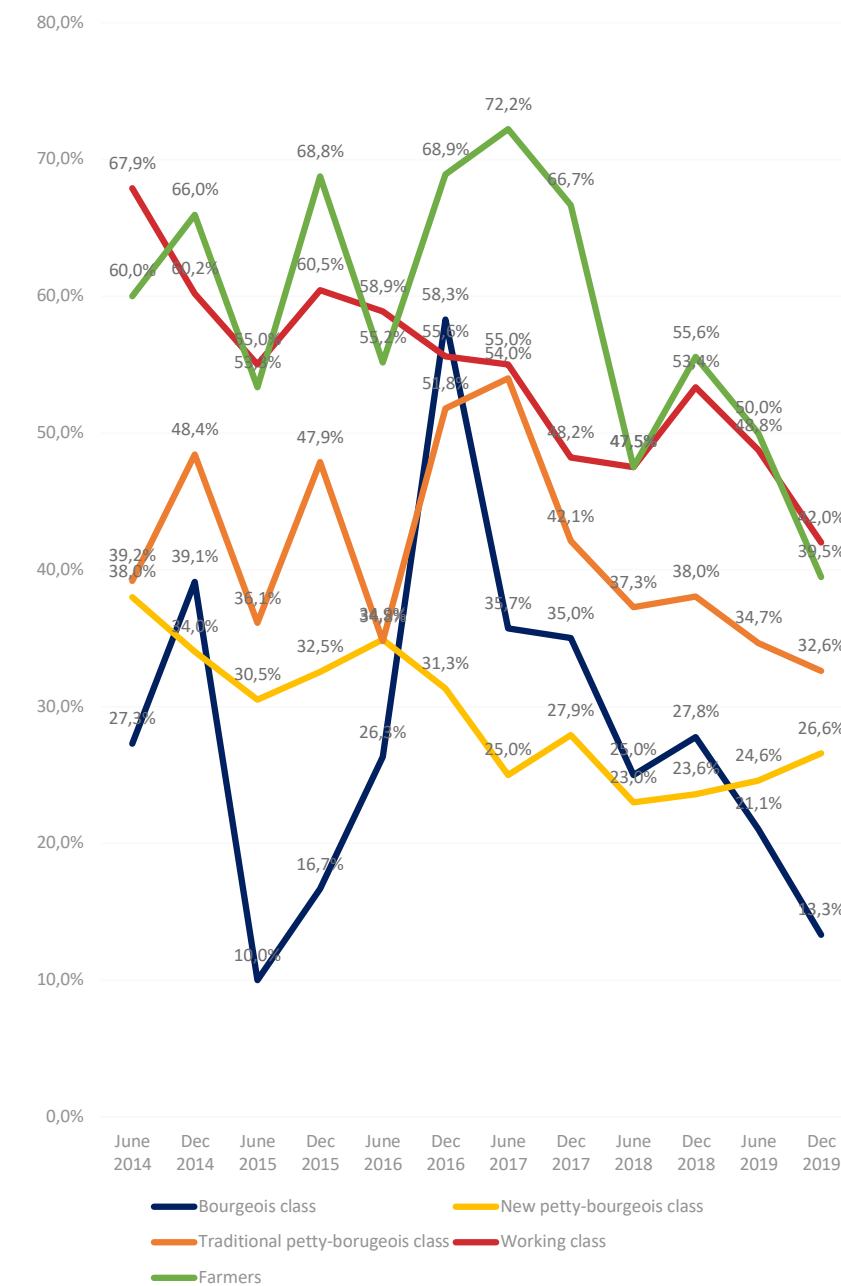
Source: Bithimitris et al. (2022) – Data from Eurobarometer

ACTUAL CLASS-ORIENTED POLICIES: ECONOMIC/SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF GREEK HOUSEHOLDS

Although this article is not the space for an in-depth presentation of the Syriza government record, we can briefly look into the results of the aforementioned policies, as depicted in the Eurobarometer question regarding economic hardships of Greek households. Following Bithimitris' et al. (ibid) classification, one can

observe that households in general, and more specifically households belonging not only to working-, but also to new and traditional petit-bourgeois classes, faced fewer difficulties in coping with their needs (Figure 7), an indicator of the positive social impact and the class-oriented economic policies implemented.

Figure 7 - Difficulty to pay the bills at the end of the month during the last year – Most of the times



Source: Bithimitris et al. (ibid) – Data from Eurobarometer

THE SHIFT IN SUBJECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION

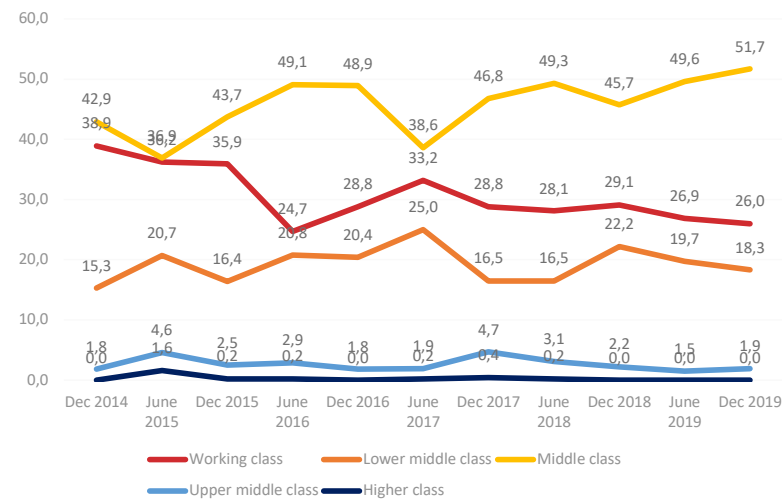
The upward social mobility suggested by the data presented above was understandably prone to also influence the class self-determination of the citizens, especially given the fluidity and flexibility of the class conscience in Greece to which we already referred. This tendency was, however, successfully and impressively reinforced by the class discourse of New Democracy after the election of Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the party leadership in 2016. As the data from the

Eurobarometer suggest (Bithimitris et al., *ibid*), the share of the Greeks who self-identified as middle class augmented impressively by 13.1 percentage points in the two years before the 2019 elections (Figure 8). Even more impressive is the fact that a growing share of people belonging – according to the researchers’ objective criteria and typology – to the working class self-identified as middle class during the examined period (Figure 9).

The distance between the subjective self-identification and the objective living conditions of the citizens seems to be clearer in the case of the lower social strata, whereas the more affluent parts of society seemingly have a clearer class self-understanding. More concretely, according to the findings of the Eurobarometer that followed the 2019 European elections (only a few weeks before the Greek national election of July 2019), only half of those who answered that, over the past

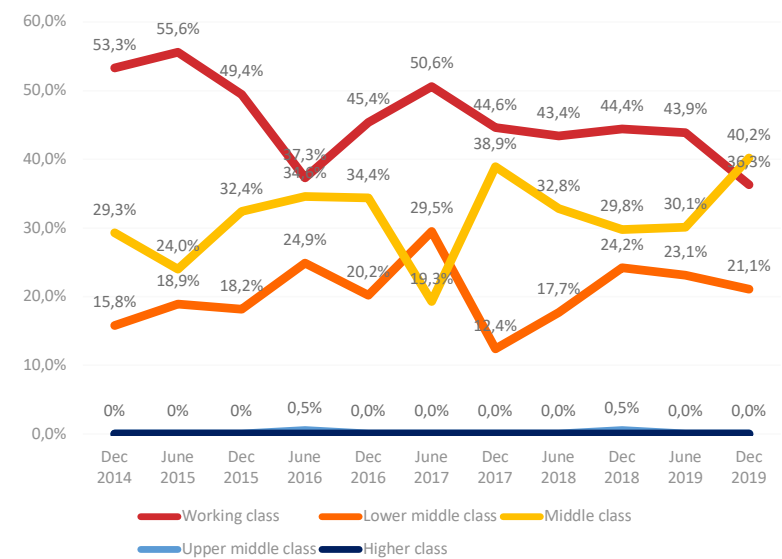
year, they faced difficulties paying their bills most of the time identified as working class, whereas one out of four of these identified as middle class. On the contrary, people who faced no economic hardships identified to a larger extent comparatively as middle and upper class (Figure 10). This could be interpreted, at least partially, as a result of the absence of a clear and decisive class discourse on behalf of Syriza.

Figure 8 - Subjective Class Identification (general sample) | You believe that you and your household belong to the...



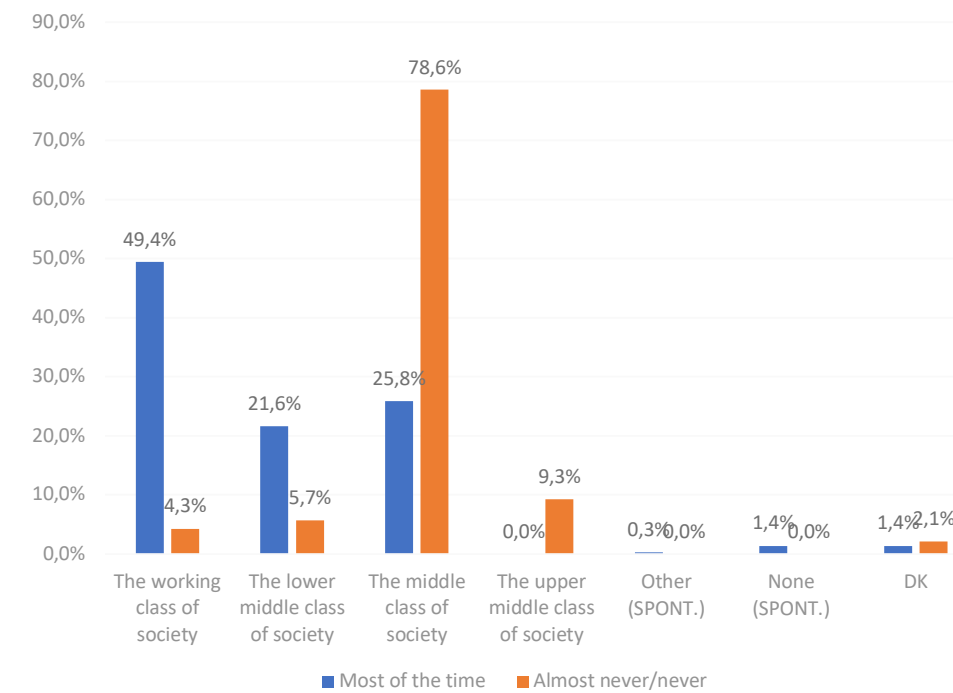
Source: Bithimitris et al. (*ibid*) – Data from Eurobarometer

Figure 9 - Subjective Class Identification of the Working Class | You believe that you and your household belong to the...



Source: Bithimitris et al. (*ibid*) – Data from Eurobarometer

Figure 10 - : % of people facing economic hardships identifying as working-, lower middle, and middle-class



Source: Eurobarometer 91.5 (June/July 2019), own processing

CLASS AND VOTE

Data regarding recent national and European elections in Greece are inconsistent and insufficient regarding the relation to class (both objective class belonging and subjective class self-identification).

More concretely, according to data from the June/ July 2019 Eurobarometer concerning the vote in the 2019 European Elections, the electoral performance of Syriza is much better among those

struggling with financial problems and among those who identify as members of the working class. As one might expect, the opposite is true for those who face no economic hardships and those who consider themselves members of the middle or the upper class. What is perhaps the most interesting finding is the overwhelming support for the right-wing New Democracy by those who self-identify as lower middle class (Table 2).

Table 2 - Vote according to economic hardship and subjective class self-identification (European elections 2019)

Difficulty paying bills the past year	ND	Syriza	Syriza-ND	Class self-identification	ND	Syriza	Syriza-ND
Most of the time	31,3%	30,0%	-1,4%	Working class	29,3%	31,5%	2,2%
From time to time	39,5%	27,3%	-12,2%	Lower middle class	44,7%	21,1%	-23,6%
Almost never/never	44,4%	28,9%	-15,6%	Middle class	39,3%	29,5%	-9,7%
				Upper class	40,0%	33,3%	-6,7%

Source: Eurobarometer 91.5 (June/July 2019), own processing

On the other hand, a wider look into the diachronic electoral results of each party in the different employment status categories ⁵ reveals that the social bases of the respective parties generally remain stable throughout the decade of the crisis (Table 3). After 2012 one can trace a clear socio-professional cleavage between the electorates of the two major parties (ND/Syriza). More specifically, the core of the right-wing electorate (ND) mainly consists of the economically inactive population (pensioners/non-employed housewives) and farmers, whereas the core of the left-wing electorate (Syriza) mainly consists of public sector employees and unemployed people.

The contested field consists of the self-employed and, to a lesser extent, the private sector employees.

It is especially within this part of the electorate that other class determinants different than the type of employment (e.g., managerial position, possession of wealth, income, educational level, etc.) alongside subjective class self-identification might play an important role in forming the citizens' electoral choice.

⁵ We use employment status as an important determinant of class classification.

Table 3 - Share of the vote of the respective parties among different professional categories

	ND							SYRIZA							PASOK						
	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019
Farmers	29,5	34,3	29,3	30,3	33,0	34,0	42,0	5,7	21,2	18,8	28,8	33,7	18,0	26,0	19,5	18,8	9,8	8,1	4,4	13,0	10,0
Self-employed	13,6	26,5	19,8	28,5	29,5	37,0	44,0	18,2	29,9	29,4	33,5	28,7	20,0	27,0	9,4	9,6	8,7	4,4	6,3	9,0	7,0
Public Sector employees	16,3	25,0	18,7	23,9	28,2	31,0	33,0	22,4	30,0	30,7	38,1	37,1	26,0	37,0	13,3	10,7	8,0	4,6	4,3	7,0	8,0
Private Sector employees	10,8	23,5	18,4	22,9	21,6	30,0	38,0	19,3	32,3	28,6	39,5	37,4	21,0	30,0	8,9	8,2	5,0	3,1	4,3	6,0	7,0
Unemployed	12,3	19,4	17,5	20,4	17,0	19,0	29,0	22,2	35,6	30,0	43,5	43,3	29,0	42,0	6,6	6,8	5,9	3,3	2,9	6,0	4,0
Students	9,5	20,3	16,5	26,1	15,9	28,0	35,0	19,7	30,2	29,3	32,8	37,6	22,0	39,0	8,9	6,0	3,6	1,7	1,4	4,0	4,0
Non-employed housewives	24,6	37,0	32,5	36,9	34,0	38,0	49,0	14,6	24,3	26,0	32,5	39,2	27,0	32,0	16,8	14,4	8,9	4,1	7,5	6,0	7,0
Retired	32,6	43,1	35,0	36,3	37,9	40,0	45,0	10,7	15,8	23,3	32,7	34,0	27,0	28,0	21,4	20,2	14,0	7,7	10,5	10,0	12,0
Total	18,8	29,7	22,7	27,8	28,1	33,1	39,8	16,8	26,9	26,6	36,3	35,5	23,7	31,5	13,2	12,3	8,0	4,7	6,3	7,7	8,1
	KKE							GD							ANEL						
	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019	2012A	2012B	2014 (EU)	2015A	2015B	2019 (EU)	2019
Farmers	9,7	4,4	7,5	7,1	7,5	6,0	5,0	9,3	8,6	14,2	10,1	12,6	11,0	8,3	4,6	1,6	5,1	3,3			
Self-employed	7,4	3,5	6,0	4,1	4,7	4,0	5,0	8,9	8,8	12,3	8,0	6,6	4,0	13,2	8,9	3,7	5,2	2,7			
Public Sector employees	6,9	3,3	3,8	4,6	6,3	5,0	5,0	6,3	8,1	9,1	5,7	3,8	5,0	9,6	7,3	3,7	6,6	4,5			
Private Sector employees	8,7	4,7	6,4	5,9	7,1	6,0	6,0	8,4	7,3	10,5	6,7	7,6	6,0	14,0	10,2	4,2	4,4	3,3			
Unemployed	10,9	5,9	6,0	5,6	8,8	7,0	5,0	9,1	10,1	12,2	9,1	8,8	9,0	11,9	10,2	5,6	5,0	2,7			
Students	9,9	4,0	7,9	7,4	8,7	4,0	4,0	9,5	9,4	8,2	5,4	7,3	9,0	12,2	10,3	4,4	5,6	3,4			
Non-employed housewives	7,5	4,2	4,6	5,2	1,7	5,0	4,0	4,0	4,0	4,4	4,3	4,3	2,0	9,2	5,0	4,8	6,8	3,2			
Retired	8,3	5,3	6,1	5,7	6,1	6,0	5,0	3,2	2,7	6,6	3,7	3,6	2,0	6,1	4,0	2,7	2,9	2,2			
Total	8,5	4,5	6,1	5,5	5,5	5,3	5,3	7,0	6,9	9,4	6,3	7,0	4,9	10,6	7,5	3,5	4,7	3,7			

Source: Joint national exit polls, own processing

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This analysis aimed solely to offer some initial insights and indicators on the performative role of the class discourse of the parties as an additional factor explaining the link (or the lack thereof) between the left parties and the popular electorates, apart from the obvious necessity of class-oriented policies.

For the Left to build a potentially majoritarian social/electoral coalition, there is a need for a twofold strategy: on the one hand, to safeguard its traditional/stable electorate; and, on the other hand, to expand its impact over the contested field.

The current inflation crisis unifies the experiences of private/public sector employees and self-employed persons and that of lower and middle social strata, as larger and larger parts of society face a substantial lowering of their standard of living, thus making a social and electoral coalition more feasible.

For this coalition to become a reality and for the Left to be able to reclaim the popular social strata that self-identify as 'middle class', there are several prerequisites: a performative (working) class discourse; the priority of collective consumption over private consumption; and highlighting the importance of the welfare state are a few examples. Also important is the question of representation of these social categories, both in terms of agenda/interests and in terms of personal representation, and the integration within the left-wing parties' discourse of the question of prosperity and development alongside the traditional question of social justice and wealth redistribution. In other words, the Left is right to focus on actual living conditions and to prioritise the support of the more vulnerable, however, it should not neglect the power of symbolic representation and of peoples' hopes, dreams and aspirations. Under, of course, the condition that it channels those towards a collective rather than an individualistic approach.

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STOP ANSWERING CENTRIST QUESTIONS:

*THE LEFT CAN ONLY WIN WHEN IT ANSWERS
THE QUESTIONS IT WAS FOUNDED TO POSE.*

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INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT THE 20TH CENTURY, there were myriad examples of profoundly impactful left-wing movements transforming the lives of working-class people. Whether via nationalisation of industry or creation of welfare systems, once radical political projects became mainstream by virtue of the left delivering pragmatic responses to the needs of the vast majority. These were policies that were unthinkable both shortly before their implementation and after their dissolution during the neoliberal reforms from the 1980s onwards. We now find ourselves in a position in which contemporary versions of those policies are the only possible means of dealing with the critical, existential challenges created by neoliberalism. Indeed, there is evidence that people globally are keenly aware of and receptive to this. In this article, we summarise findings from a recent programme of research (Johnson, Johnson & Nettle 2022; Johnson M et al. 2022a; 2022b; Johnson E et al., Reed et al. 2022; 2023). We outline a cluster of related errors made by policymakers and propose that Universal Basic Income (UBI) – a system of largely unconditional payments to support citizens' satisfaction of basic needs – is a transformative policy capable of attracting support from the electorate. We use this to emphasise that the left's relevance depends upon presenting a programme of material change.

THE STRATEGIC ERROR

All too often, the organised left find themselves constrained by parameters set by those who have an interest in stifling change. Asking 'who votes for the left', in terms of their assumed 'inherent' values and identities – at a time in which it is failing to govern or to use power in government to transform lives in ways that previous iterations had done successfully – is counter-intuitive and misdirecting. In the past, there was a basic assumption that, regardless of people's self-identification, the shared material needs of workers provide the basis for the relevance of left-wing politics. The reason the left has won in the past is that it has assumed it has the capacity to appeal to the vast bulk of society.

Today, the left has internalised a series of neoliberal tenets that undermine its capacity to uphold its role in advancing history. Weberian classification of social groupings has long underpinned political and psephological analysis (see Breen 2006, 36). It has broken up workers into a range of distinct social organisations, each bound by forms of status attendant to skills and education. Likewise, adoption of liberal concern for what Isaiah Berlin (1969) described as empirical, rather than rational, selves, means that the left has been concerned with appealing to people's expressed identities, rather than their fundamental needs.

Asking who is voting for the left is wrong-headed: nowhere near enough people are voting for the left for this to offer any meaningful indication of a pathway to government. When groups are identified, the conclusions drawn are unhelpful. If women in some countries are currently voting in larger numbers for some left-wing political parties, is the strategic conclusion that the left ought exclusively to appeal to women or seek to suppress or prohibit male voting? If women in other countries, such as the US, or the UK during Margaret Thatcher's leadership, vote in pluralities for right-wing candidates, do we need to appeal to men?

The second question attached to this identitarian analysis is 'what values do voters hold'? Being committed to empirical selves leads logically to tailoring policy to the express values of those selves. As such, the left often focuses not on material policy, but on cultural conflict and cultural struggle. These are often struggles that affect small numbers of people and can only be addressed effectively by progressive government. The biggest error the left has made has been to assume that movements of small groups bound by totally distinct and often contradictory cultural grievances can be more cohesive than movements bound by shared human need. The right will always win in identity politics because it has the capacity to appeal to much larger cultural units. Often, these units overlap with the very groups (e.g., low to middle-earning men) who would benefit most from left policies, if they were presented in a meaningful way that appealed to their material interests. Importantly, due to intersectionalities, those who have often been at the sharp end of narratives developed by the right as a result of their characteristics, for example disabled people or minority ethnic groups, would benefit very significantly from the very same policies.

These are questions that lead to strategic dead-ends. They are the consequence of the left's acculturating itself to neoliberal understandings of preferences. The notion that individuals have fully formed, inflexible preferences, that ought to be respected, necessarily inhibits the capacity of progressive policymakers to do what the right, increasingly, has done: persuade people that policies advance their interests. If people are serious about transforming society, we need to return to antecedent questions raised by much more successful historical predecessors.

THE RIGHT QUESTION

The strategic dead-end has been realised in PASOKification across Europe. In the UK, the demise of Labour's historical support among workers is correlated with its inability to present coherent policies by which to secure workers material needs. The loss of traditional, 'red wall' Labour seats in the North of England in 2019 has been presented by commentators such as Paul Mason as evidence of voters in those seats being fundamentally socially conservative and opposed to progressive values. We have argued that viewing electoral preferences in this way presents an 'insurmountable conservative values' hypothesis that reads as fact people's present political preferences, and that has reduced some progressive politicians to a strategy either of appealing to believers (university educated, younger, urban-dwelling liberals who support membership of the EU and other multilateral organisations) or mimicking the putative values of socially conservative working voters. The problem is that this wholly misrepresents the fundamental reasons for the temporary rise of Conservative support in the North of England. Just as in the rise of the Scottish National Party and the rise of Welsh Labour in Wales, that phenomenon related to the party's support for policies that were viewed as increasing material security. Brexit was viewed by many as a means of reducing zero-sum competition for resources and for internal

redistribution (see MacKinnon 2020). Levelling Up and the Furlough Scheme (HM Revenue & Customs 2021) both produced significant levels of support within these constituencies. Likewise, the Scottish National Party's and Welsh Labour's use of devolved powers to present themselves as resistance against neoliberal reform has ensured and increased their relevance to voters. In each of these cases, in very different political parties with very different express values, the theme is the same: providing material means of preserving security.

The question the left needs to answer is the same question the left was organised to answer: how can we secure for workers the material goods to satisfy our need for security? Some of the means are age-old: only the nationalisation of natural monopolies, utilities, public transport and industry essential to energy independence can mitigate the climate crisis; only socialised public health systems can deliver provision and control spiralling profiteering. Others, coming at a time of ultra-insecurity and ecological crisis, are new. While some have called for job guarantees as a response to financial insecurity, we have examined the prospective role of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Income Standard, which is the amount of money identified by the public, with the support of experts, needed to satisfy people's basic needs. While the policy has mixed reception on the left, it is slowly gaining traction among policymakers as a viable response to insecurity. Over the past few years, we have examined its implications for health specifically. Those implications are significant and provide opportunities for genuine transformation

of public health. We have also examined its political feasibility in light of claims that 'red wall' voters are fundamentally opposed to redistributive policy.

The research conducted, over a series of survey waves, all presents a picture of an electorate keenly aware of the need for change and highly receptive toward UBI as a redistributive policy. Importantly, wherever we looked, we found overall levels of support of between 68-80%. In 'red wall' constituencies, that support was at the higher end. Voters consistently highlighted as a key attraction the ability of UBI to secure their needs efficiently and urgently at a time in which they were faced by ultra-insecurity. By securing the needs of all, UBI transforms welfare policy from an outgroup issue that benefits only 'scroungers' (as the UK media often refers to people out of work) to an ingroup issue that benefits workers. Concern for welfare fraud reduces accordingly. Importantly, we found that narratives that express the health impact of UBI were more persuasive for older people and that those focused on addressing financial security were more persuasive to young people. These are material concerns that cannot be explained clearly by values or identities.

We (Johnson, Johnson & Nettle 2022) then used a series of narratives co-produced with the small 7-12% of respondents who expressed strong opposition to see if those who opposed UBI could be persuaded of the benefits of UBI. The narratives produced were highly impactful, increasing levels of support from a mean of 13% to 50%. The most impactful narrative was one that presented UBI as a 'living pension' – precisely the sort of conceptualisation consistent with the shift from ability to need:

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a living pension for all adult citizens, providing state support for your basic needs. It would be a safety net during short periods of unemployment, giving you some time

to support yourself and your family while looking for employment. This helps to stop you slipping into poverty and ensures that you do not face homelessness. As many infamous cases have shown, this is vital for us, as the current system does not keep us secure. There was the case of the diabetic British War Veteran whose Universal Credit payment lapsed, leaving him with no money to top up his electricity meter. This meant that he could not keep his medicine refrigerated, meaning that he went into a diabetic coma and died. In our country, you should not have the stress of worrying about meeting your basic needs. You should not have to worry that taking on short-term work will leave you unable to support yourself. UBI secures you from the many unpredictable events in modern society.

Even those who oppose redistributive policies can be persuaded of the value of UBI because it shares features with previous programmes of the left: it addresses a fundamental human need; it is universal; it is efficient and, unlike conditional welfare schemes, it supports workers in particular.

These are features that underpinned the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) and other successful interventions. Unlike less effective interventions, such as increases in conditional welfare payments, UBI, like the NHS, is resistant to neoliberal reform because it benefits such a large proportion of the population. It is precisely the sort of policy that is likely to transform society and create opportunities for further transformation once enacted.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

UBI has often been dismissed by virtue of its being unambitious or being a libertarian means of reducing working conditions and pay. However, it is a transformative means of shifting allocation of resources from arbitrary recognition of ability to recognition of universal human need. If set at a sufficient level, it enables workers to satisfy their needs independently of fulfilment of abusive, demeaning labour. That level is the Minimum

CONCLUSION

THE HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY

This research indicates two facts that are obscured by the adoption of liberal understandings of preferences as being grounded in values and of taking people's empirical selves at face value. Firstly, there is an historic opportunity for the left to transform societies by returning to its founding *raison d'être* of securing material goods for workers. Secondly, the left needs to stop thinking that voters' preferences are fixed – they simply are not. As such, policymakers should reject any notion of an Overton Window placing transformative policy beyond the pale, or at least only accessible through incremental, conservative change. Such a policy has never been more needed, and people have seldom been so receptive. This ought to provide encouragement.

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