

## ***Left–Right Position Matters, But Does Social Class? Causal Models of the 1992 British General Election***

JOHN BARTLE\*

Social class has long been assumed to be the predominant social or structural determinant of voting behaviour. This article assesses the effect of class on voting behaviour at the 1992 general election by adopting the causal modelling perspective developed by Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks. It explores two mechanisms (party identification and left–right ideological positions) which may mediate the effect of class on voting behaviour. However, it demonstrates that wherever class is assumed to be located in the causal order, it does not dominate analysis of voting behaviour and left–right positions.

As research into voting behaviour has progressed, it has gone beyond simply providing a list of possible causes, towards an examination of the causal processes by which explanatory variables affect voters' choices between the parties. Causal models of voting behaviour, such as those developed by Merrill Shanks and Warren Miller, have sought to bring order to apparent chaos by classifying explanatory variables into a series of blocks or themes. These blocks are arranged in a logical order from the highly remote demographic characteristics (like age, ethnicity and gender), through to the stable attitudes (like party identification and ideological positions), to variables highly proximate to the vote decision (like evaluations of the national economy or the party leaders). By recognizing the causal order that exists among explanatory variables, analysts are able to give variables credit for both direct and indirect effects (i.e., those which operate via other explanatory variables).

This article uses the basic framework developed by Shanks and Miller to examine the contention that social class is the pre-eminent 'long-term' or 'structural' determinant of vote choice in Britain. I demonstrate that the effects of social class are, to a very large extent, mediated by voters' left–right ideological positions. However, the evidence presented here suggests that social class, however defined, and wherever located in the causal order, does not

\* Department of Government, University of Essex. The 1992 British Election Studies data used in this article was provided by the ESRC Data Archive at the University of Essex. The research was supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. R00429434022). The author would like to thank the following for comments upon earlier versions of this article: Sarah Birch, Jonathon Burton, Ivor Crewe, Dylan Griffiths, Anthony Heath, Anthony Lyons, David Sanders, Elinor Scarborough and Hugh Ward, as well as his postgraduate student colleagues at the University of Essex. These individuals, however, are absolved from responsibility for any errors of interpretation.

'dominate' voters' left–right positions. Other 'long-term' structural variables such as ethnicity, religion and region have important effects on left–right positions. I therefore suggest that any structural explanation of voting behaviour and left–right position should be reformulated as the product of a wide variety of social characteristics.

Section I outlines the models developed by Miller and Shanks for the explanation of American presidential elections. It examines the basic assumptions that underpin recursive (one-way causation) models and their implications for the estimated effects of any given explanatory variable. Section II considers the measurement of voters' stable predispositions in models of British voting behaviour and reviews evidence which challenges the assumption that party identification represents a stable political orientation. I then consider alternative measures of stable predispositions, based on voters' attitudes towards matters of enduring controversy (in particular their left–right ideological positions) and argue that these measures shed light on the mechanisms by which social class is translated into voting behaviour. Section III examines the measurement of social class and the arguments of those scholars who suggest that it dominates structural accounts of both left–right position and voting behaviour. Section IV develops a series of models which demonstrate that, even given the most favourable assumptions about the causal priority accorded to social class, it does not 'dominate' models of left–right positions. Other variables, such as father's social class, region, housing tenure and religion all have striking effects. Class is important, but it does not 'dominate'.

#### I. MODELLING VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Despite protestations to the contrary,<sup>1</sup> political science has achieved a great deal in the study of voting behaviour. There is now a widely accepted list of possible causes of the vote, ranging from demographic characteristics (such as age, ethnicity and gender), through relatively stable social characteristics (for example, religion, social class, region and housing tenure), to stable orientations (for instance, party identification) and unstable evaluations of national or personal conditions. While producing a list of the 'usual suspects' is a useful exercise in itself, the theoretical and conceptual diversity which such a long list implies can cause one to despair of making any sense of voting behaviour.<sup>2</sup> There is a great temptation to use statistical procedures, like regression, to squeeze order out of apparent chaos. The usual strategy is to run a regression in which the vote is the dependent variable and to enter a long list of explanatory

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Dunleavy, 'Mass Political Behaviour: Is there More to Learn?' *Political Studies*, 28 (1990), 453–69.

<sup>2</sup> J. Merrill Shanks, 'Unresolved Issues in Electoral Decisions: Alternative Perspectives on the Explanation of Individual Choice', in M. Kent Jennings and Thomas E. Mann, eds, *Elections at Home and Abroad: Essays in Honor of Warren E. Miller* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 17–38.

variables. In the resulting statistical 'shoot-out', those variables which pass the significance tests are declared to be the only causes of voting behaviour.

The error at the heart of this approach is well illustrated by repeated findings to the effect that attitudes, rather than social characteristics, best predict the vote.<sup>3</sup> These models implicitly assume that all the explanatory variables in the list are spatially and temporally co-ordinate,<sup>4</sup> i.e., that none is the cause of the other. Thus, if it is found that religion has no significant effect on vote decisions when controlling for party identification and other variables, it is (falsely) concluded that religion has 'no effect' on voting behaviour. This ignores the possibility that religion may be a cause of variables that are themselves related to voting decisions, such as attitudes towards abortion and penal policy. What has actually been demonstrated, is that religion has no effect on vote which is not mediated by attitudinal variables.

If one is concerned with the prediction of voting behaviour, the above approach is acceptable. However, where the aim is to explain voting behaviour, and to offer characterizations of the causal processes underlying it,<sup>5</sup> then it is clearly insufficient to generate mind-numbingly repetitive regression models.<sup>6</sup> The challenge for political science is to shift away from simply describing the relationship between explanatory variables and vote, to examining the causal interrelationships that exist among the explanatory variables themselves.

The development of models of increasingly finer grain is not without its problems, of course.<sup>7</sup> Given the massive nature of the undertaking, it could hardly be otherwise. Some analysts have concluded that the task of organizing the vast array of possible causes into a comprehensive model is impossible, or at any rate that any such model would be highly speculative or misleading.<sup>8</sup> Others have made heroic assumptions about what can be safely ignored for the purposes of prediction and gone on to forecast election results.<sup>9</sup> There is a widespread reluctance to propose, specify and test comprehensive models of voting behaviour. In part, this stems from an acute awareness that such models

<sup>3</sup> Paul Whiteley, *The Labour Party in Crisis* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> J. Merrill Shanks and Warren E. Miller, 'Policy Direction and Performance Evaluations: Complementary Explanations of the Reagan Elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, 20 (1990), 143–235, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Douglas Rivers, 'Heterogeneity in Models of Electoral Choice', *American Journal of Political Science*, 35 (1991), 737–57; and Larry Bartels, 'Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections', *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (1996), 194–230.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher H. Achen, 'Social Psychology, Demographic Variables, and Linear Regression: Breaking the Iron Triangle in Voting Research', *Political Behaviour*, 14 (1992), 195–211.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'finer grain' of models is borrowed from Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> A notable exception is Mark Franklin, *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain: Changes in the Basis of Electoral Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); cf. Anthony Heath, John Curtice, Roger Jowell, Geoff Evans, Julia Field and Sharon Witherspoon, *Understanding Political Change: The British Voter 1964–1987* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991), p. 51, fn. 16.

<sup>9</sup> David Sanders, 'Economic Performance, Management Competence and the Next General Election', *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), 203–31.

would be built upon a whole host of debatable assumptions about measurement, cause and effect and the most appropriate statistical models. The unfortunate consequence however, is that the existing models have been partial and unsatisfactory accounts of voting behaviour.

### *The Shanks and Miller Models*

Two of the few scholars to have risen to the challenge are Merrill Shanks and Warren Miller. In a series of path-breaking studies they have specifically addressed issues of causation, causal order and model specification by constructing multi-stage models of voting behaviour.<sup>10</sup> These models apply the ‘funnel of causality’ heuristic, first deployed to great effect in *The American Voter*. In this ‘funnel’ variables are arranged into a series of blocks according to their degree of stability.<sup>11</sup> The basic assumption is that stable variables should precede (i.e., be regarded as causes of) those that are less stable.<sup>12</sup> Ethnicity is fixed at birth, while class (though relatively stable) is changeable through social mobility. Therefore ethnicity might ‘cause’ social class. For example, non-white voters are more likely to be working-class than white voters.<sup>13</sup>

Some steps in the causal model are relatively simple. Four variables (age, ethnicity, gender and father’s class) are entirely exogenous – their levels determined outside the system of equations that constitutes the voting model.<sup>14</sup> In other instances however, it is not possible to rule out reciprocal causation. Trade-union members may become more left-wing as a result of their membership and it is easy to speculate about the sorts of causal mechanisms involved (the propagandizing effects of union newsletters and experience of negotiations with management). However, where there is some element of choice about union membership, it is equally possible that left-wing people are simply more likely to join. The causal arrows run in both directions. Equally, social class (which is relatively stable) is assumed to ‘cause’ ideological

<sup>10</sup> Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, ‘Policy Directions and Presidential Leadership: Alternative Interpretations of the 1980 Presidential Election’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 12 (1982), 299–356; Shanks and Miller, ‘Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation’; J. Merrill Shanks and Warren E. Miller, ‘Partisanship, Policy and Performance: The Reagan Legacy in the 1988 Election’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1991), 129–97; and Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), pp. 24–7.

<sup>12</sup> Shanks and Miller, ‘Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation’.

<sup>13</sup> The effect of race could, in theory, increase as controls are added for class. If this was the case, it could be taken as suggesting that ‘perceptions of group interests or processes of group identification’ directly affect voting behaviour (Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change*, p. 113). However, the models of left–right position examined in Section IV suggest that this does not happen here.

<sup>14</sup> Ethnicity is not measured ‘objectively’ in the 1992 BES cross-section. It is a subjective sense of identity. The relevant item (Q. 915(a)) asks respondents ‘To which of these groups do you belong?’ and then shows them a card containing several ethnic groups.

positions (which are less stable). However, in the longer run, it is possible that those with right-wing values are more likely to seek and obtain advancement to the salariat or to become self-employed. These theoretical possibilities make it more difficult to come to firm conclusions about the causal order. It is necessary to arrive at some decision (backed by evidence or theory) that the causal arrows flow *predominantly* in one direction. In these circumstances, where there is any doubt about the correct causal sequence, it is instructive to examine what happens to estimates of the 'effect' of a given variable, if different assumptions are made about the causal order.

Arranging variables in this way produces a cumulative chain of causation, consisting of a series of blocks or 'themes'.<sup>15</sup> The total number of blocks depends upon the analyst's degree of confidence about the mechanisms involved (and therefore the quality of the data available). Figure 1 outlines a basic model which strips away some of the inessential detail from the Shanks and Miller models in order to illustrate how they work. The first block of variables ( $X_1$ ), represents voters' social characteristics. In later sections I subdivide this block into four separate components, in order to arrive at plausible estimates of the effect of specific social characteristics on voting behaviour and left-right positions. The second block of variables ( $X_2$ ) represents voters' stable predispositions. These are assumed to be the result of the enduring aspects of voters' lives – their class, religion and housing tenure. At this stage, the precise measurement of this block of variables is unspecified. It may be best characterized either as an enduring emotional attachment towards a political party (such as party identification) or as an enduring position on matters of general controversy (for example, left-right positions).<sup>16</sup> The third block of variables ( $X_3$ ) represents voters' preferences relating to policy direction and are therefore strongly affected by voters' values ( $X_2$ ). The final block of variables ( $X_4$ ) represents voters' evaluations of national and personal conditions, as well as their evaluations of qualities of the party leaders. Since these characteristics relate to the attainment of consensual outcomes (for example, low unemployment and 'caring' leaders), they are shaped by voters' ideological positions.<sup>17</sup>

Sketching out the causal relationships among the explanatory variables in this way helps to clarify some of the implications of the assumed causal order. For example, a social characteristic (like class) has two sorts of effect. 'Direct' effects are those that are not mediated by subsequent variables (represented by arrow 4). 'Indirect' effects are those that are mediated by subsequent variables. For example, social class is a cause of left-right positions and these are located

<sup>15</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> An alternative strategy would be to suggest that *both* predispositions have an effect and then attempt to model the interrelationship between them in non-recursive models. This strategy is rejected for reasons discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> Shanks and Miller, 'Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation', pp. 173–4.

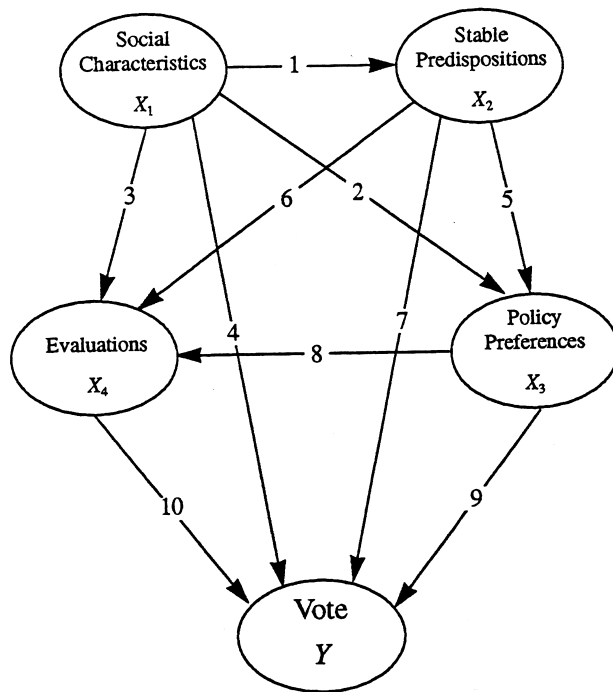


Fig. 1: A recursive causal model of voting behaviour

before vote in the causal order (in block  $X_2$ ). This indirect causal path is represented by arrows 1 and 7. A variable may exert important effects on voting behaviour, *even if it does not have statistically significant direct effects*. The further back in the causal order a variable is assumed to be, the greater its opportunity to exert indirect effects. Assumptions about the causal order may therefore have substantial implications for estimates of the total (i.e., direct plus indirect) effect of any given variable.<sup>18</sup>

If the analyst is prepared to endorse the assumption that the causal arrows run in one direction between the blocks, i.e., that variables located in subsequent blocks do not affect those located in prior blocks, then it is possible to estimate the direct and indirect effects using ordinary least squares models. 'Direct' effects are given by the regression coefficient for the variable in that equation that controls for all variables. The 'total effect' is given by the coefficient for the variable in that equation that controls for all prior blocks and those variables that are located in the same block. The models are therefore 'block recursive'

<sup>18</sup> A point continually emphasized in Shanks and Miller, 'Policy Direction and Performance Evaluation'.

in nature.<sup>19</sup> ‘Indirect’ effects are equal to the difference between total and direct effects. While these calculations are straightforward, analysts who doubt the assumptions about one-way causation are likely to prefer alternative assumptions.

The recursive models outlined above depend upon strong assumptions about the direction of causation and uncorrelated error terms.<sup>20</sup> Whether these conditions are in fact met may be doubted, given the often limited knowledge about the complexities of the causal mechanisms. In these circumstances, it is often suggested that non-recursive models are more appropriate.<sup>21</sup> This two-step method purports to provide estimates of the two-way causal flows by replacing the variables which are thought to be in a reciprocal relationship with each other, with ‘purged’ instruments. When these purged variables are included as explanatory variables in the normal system of equations, the size of the coefficients are said to estimate the relative size of the causal flows.

While superficially attractive, the problem with non-recursive models is that they require a whole host of additional assumptions of unknown validity in order to generate estimates of the hypothesized reciprocal effects.<sup>22</sup> Unless the instrumental variables used to construct the proxy variables are fully exogenous, the models will produce biased estimates, the properties of which are ill-understood.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, I would question *any* statistical technique that purports to provide a purely statistical solution to the problem of identifying cause and effect.<sup>24</sup> Causation is a theoretical rather than a statistical problem and one that must be addressed through knowledge of the apparent processes and real world events, such as that provided by panel data.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> James Davis, *The Logic of Causal Order*, Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences 007–055 (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1985). In general ‘block recursive models’ produce rather ‘conservative’ estimates of the apparent total effect of variables. See Miller and Shanks, *The New American Voter*, chap. 8.

<sup>20</sup> William D. Berry, *Non-Recursive Causal Models*, Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences 007–037 (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1984), pp. 11–15; John E. Jackson, ‘Issues, Party Choices and Presidential Votes’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 19 (1975), 161–85.

<sup>21</sup> Berry, *Non-Recursive Causal Models*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Larry M. Bartels, ‘Instrumental and Quasi-instrumental Variables’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 35 (1991), 777–800.

<sup>23</sup> Bartels, ‘Instrumental and Quasi-instrumental Variables’, p. 800.

<sup>24</sup> Davis, ‘The Logic of Causal Order’, puts it quite forcefully: ‘Although the methodological journals teem with crackpot proposals for determining causal order using only the numbers in the data set, most methodologists agree that causal order is a substantive or empirical problem to be solved by our knowledge about how the real world works, not by statistical gyrations’, p. 11. See the exchanges in the following articles: David A. Freedman, ‘Statistical Models and Shoe Leather Costs’, *Sociological Methodology*, 21 (1991), 291–313; Richard A. Berk, ‘Toward a Methodology for Mere Mortals’, *Sociological Methodology*, 21 (1991), 315–24; Hubert M. Blalock Jr, ‘Are There Really Any Constructive Alternatives to Causal Modelling?’ *Sociological Methodology*, 21 (1991), 325–35.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher J. Fleury and Michael S. Lewis-Beck, ‘Anchoring the French Voter: Ideology Versus Party’, *Journal of Politics*, 55 (1993), 1100–9; Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, ‘Comment on Fleury and Lewis-Beck, “Anchoring the French Voter: Ideology Versus Party”’, *Journal of Politics*, 55 (1993), 1110–17.



In these circumstances it is preferable to define variables clearly, remain within a recursive framework and explore the consequences of getting assumptions about the causal order 'wrong'. The search for some precise estimate of the effect of any given variable may, in the end, be illusory. It is more appropriate to compare the rough orders of magnitude and come to some conclusion about the relative effects of variables.<sup>26</sup>

### *Disaggregating Social Characteristics*

In Figure 1 social characteristics were represented by a single block of variables in order to convey some of the most important qualities of the system. Clearly, however, Figure 1 is not meant to be a finely grained model, and social characteristics vary in their stability and the causal mechanisms they produce. The most straightforward variables to locate are those like the fixed personal characteristics (age, ethnicity, gender and parental social class), that are established at some date in the past.<sup>27</sup> These are the first block of variables in Figure 2, which fills in the detail of block  $X_1$  in Figure 1.

Other social characteristics present greater problems of causal order. Does education cause social class or vice versa? Does social class cause housing tenure? What variables must be controlled for in order to estimate the effect of any given explanatory variable? The interrelationships among explanatory variables may be highly complex. Here the 'logic of elaboration' which lies behind the 'funnel of causality' is of only limited assistance.<sup>28</sup> The general rule, that stable variables should precede unstable variables begins to look less useful when either many variables change at the same time, or changes are so infrequent that it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the causal order. Evidence from the British Election Studies panel survey 1987–92 does suggest, however, that voters' religious affiliations (their sense of themselves as Church of England or Catholic etc.) and their housing tenure are among the most stable characteristics. Evidence from previous BES studies suggest that region is highly stable too.<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, there is a great deal of movement between the

<sup>26</sup> This article assumes that the effect of any given explanatory variable is both linear and additive. In practice, both assumptions may be violated. See Rivers, 'Heterogeneity in Models of Electoral Choice'.

<sup>27</sup> Respondents are asked to describe the sort of jobs that their fathers had when they were around 14 years of age and they were then assigned a 'Goldthorpe class'. This article does not explore the possibilities of measurement error that may result. Any error will weaken the strength of the relationship between father's social class and left–right position or voting.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, conceded that the funnel of causality 'like all physical analogies for complex and intangible processes ... becomes misleading if pressed too far' (p. 24).

<sup>29</sup> Of the people who reported being a 'member' of the Church of England in 1987, 91.2 per cent were still 'members' in 1992. The figure for Catholics was 83.4 per cent. Similarly, 96.4 per cent of homeowners in 1987 were still homeowners in 1992, while 70.75 per cent of council tenants in 1987 were still tenants in 1992. Evidence on regional mobility is contained in Dorren McMahon, Anthony Heath, Martin Harrop and John Curtice, 'The Electoral Consequences of North–South Migration', *British Journal of Political Science*, 22 (1993), 419–43.



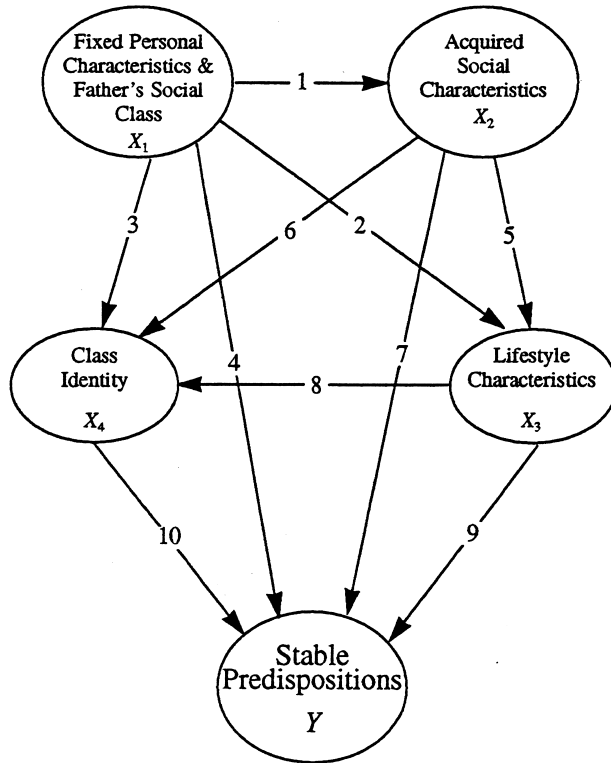


Fig. 2: Assumed interrelationships amongst social characteristics

classes. This is so whether class is measured using the five-class Goldthorpe schema or the more detailed eleven-class schema.<sup>30</sup> This fact alone might have led us to suggest that social class should be located later than religion and at the same stage in the causal order as tenure. Theoretically, however, it is possible for the level of social class to cause type of housing tenure, since the former is likely to reflect the voter's lifetime earning capacity and affect his or her credit

<sup>30</sup> The stability of social class depends on the schema used. When the five-fold Goldthorpe schema is used 1987–92 BES panel data suggests that 79.5 per cent of the 1987 salariat were still in that group in 1992. Equivalent figures for the petty bourgeoisie are 68.6 per cent, for foremen and technicians 41.8 per cent, for routine non-manual workers 62.2 per cent and for the working class 78 per cent. These figures may reflect some combination of social mobility and measurement error. The stability figures for the eleven-class schema are: high-grade salariat 60.1 per cent, low-grade salariat 53.0 per cent, routine office workers 55.3 per cent, sales personnel 45.0 per cent, small petty bourgeoisie with employees 59.1 per cent, small petty bourgeoisie without employees 43 per cent, farmers 57.2 per cent, foremen and technicians 41.8 per cent, skilled manual workers 47.8 per cent, semi-skilled manual workers 64.4 per cent and agricultural employees 46.0 per cent. Most of the movements in this eleven-class schema are between contiguous classes (such as high- and low-grade salariat).

rating (and therefore access to mortgage facilities).<sup>31</sup> I also suspect that there is a greater element of choice of tenure than social class.<sup>32</sup> For these, largely theoretical, reasons, I assume that the second block contains education, religious affiliations, social class and region.

The third block of variables are those which contain a greater element of choice. In Figure 2 they are referred to as ‘lifestyle characteristics’. They include housing tenure, car and share ownership, private health insurance and ownership of privatized shares,<sup>33</sup> employment in the public sector, dependency upon state benefits and membership of trade unions. The key assumption in Figure 2 and the models in Section IV, is that the causal arrows flow from social characteristics to left–right positions. Given that these ‘lifestyle’ variables reflect a choice, there is also likely to be more ‘feed-back’ between them and left–right positions than between acquired social characteristics and left–right positions.

The fourth block of variables in Figure 2 are voters’ identities as working or middle-class. In placing these variables immediately before the dependent variable, I assume that voters’ identities as working- or middle-class are a consequence of all those variables that precede it. This makes some sense. An individual’s sense of class may vary from region to region and may be increased by housing tenure and membership of a collective organization. This decision is also supported by 1987–92 panel survey data which suggests class identity is unstable over time.<sup>34</sup> The full model is set out in Figure 2.

Again it is important to be aware of the dangers of reciprocal causation between class identity and those variables that precede it. It may well be that those with a working-class identity are more likely to join a trade union and that those with a middle-class identity more likely to own their own house. Equally, there may be reciprocal causation between class identity and the dependent variable. Those voters with left-wing views are more likely to identify themselves as working-class, those with right-wing views more likely to identify themselves with the middle class, or to deny the relevance of class altogether.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> My thanks to Anthony Heath for this point. It could equally be argued that it is actually income which determines housing. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include income as an explanatory variable, because there was a great deal of missing data.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell and John Curtice, *How Britain Votes* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985): ‘we suspect that there is now a greater choice in housing market than in the labour market’ (p. 49: see also p. 54, fn. 4).

<sup>33</sup> The last variable (whether the respondent has privatized shares) raises particular problems about reciprocal relationships between social characteristics and values. However, in this model, ownership of privatized shares is interpreted as an indicator of wealth and therefore prior to left–right values.

<sup>34</sup> This statement must be qualified. Voters are quite stable in their identity as middle-class and working-class, but are less consistent about expressing such an identity without prompting. Given the apparent importance of this distinction in models of left–right choice (see Section IV below), the class identity variables are treated as highly proximate to voters’ left–right positions.

<sup>35</sup> David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Preference* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 93.

## II. THE EFFECTS OF 'STABLE PREDISPOSITIONS' ON VOTE

In Figure 1, the second block of variables was left somewhat ambiguous, though it was suggested that it could contain either variables representing a general emotional attachment to a political party or enduring values and beliefs. Before proceeding to examine the processes by which social class is translated into voting behaviour, it is necessary to establish how stable predispositions can be most appropriately measured with British data. It will be demonstrated that the choice between the Michigan measure of party identification and left-right ideological positions has implications for the pathways by which social class affects voting behaviour.

### *Party Identification*

The Michigan tradition assumes that most voters have an enduring emotional attachment towards one of the political parties, such that it becomes part of their identity as a person.<sup>36</sup> This identification is presumed to be acquired early in one's life from parental influences and membership of primary groups like social classes, religious denominations and neighbourhoods.<sup>37</sup> Party identification is said to have strong indirect effects, shaping voters' attitudes towards policy proposals and their evaluations of party performance.<sup>38</sup> It is also said to act as a perceptual screen, sifting out uncongenial information, so that it is self-reinforcing over time.<sup>39</sup> Once acquired, party identification is said to shift only in response to idiosyncratic changes in personal characteristics, as a result of social mobility, marriage and so on. By contrast, shifts in voters' political preferences and their evaluations of politics rarely cause them to shift their identifications.<sup>40</sup>

If these assumptions are correct, then party identification is the most stable political orientation. Butler and Stokes suggested that approximately two-thirds of the working class (defined as those in manual occupations) identified with Labour and three-quarters of the middle class (defined as those with non-manual occupations) identified with the Conservatives.<sup>41</sup> Social class was therefore

<sup>36</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, chap. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> Achen, 'Social Psychology, Demographic Variables and Linear Regression', p. 196; cf. Donald Philip Green and Bradley Palmquist, 'Of Artifacts and Partisan Instability', *American Journal of Political Science*, 34 (1990), 872–902, Donald Philip Green and Bradley Palmquist, 'How Stable is Party Identification?' *Political Behaviour*, 16 (1994), 437–66; and R. J. Johnston and C. J. Pattie, 'The Strength of Party Identification Among the British Electorate: An Exploration', *Electoral Studies*, 15 (1996), 295–309.

<sup>41</sup> Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, p. 69. The measurement of class in terms of the manual/non-manual dichotomy made sense because they found overwhelming evidence that most people thought of class in these terms.

TABLE 1 *The Effect of Party Identification and Left–Right Positions on Vote*

Controls	Party identification	Left–Right position
1. No controls	+ 0.95	+ 0.15
2. Fixed personal characteristics and father's social class	+ 0.94	+ 0.15
3. Acquired social characteristics	+ 0.92	+ 0.13
4. Lifestyle characteristics	+ 0.89	+ 0.12
5. Class identity†	+ 0.88	+ 0.11
6. Policy preferences	+ 0.81	+ 0.06
7. Evaluations	+ 0.66	+ 0.02

†Designated apparent total effect.

$p < 0.05$ .

See Appendix 1(b) for details of variables in rows 6 and 7.

important to the extent that it was the pre-eminent social basis of party identification.

The effect of party identification<sup>42</sup> on the choice between Conservative and Labour can be seen in Table 1. The dependent variable (vote) is scored + 1 if Conservative and – 1 if Labour. Party identification is scored + 1 for Conservative, – 1 for Labour and 0 otherwise. The coefficient in row 1, column 1, shows the bivariate coefficient for party identification and vote (+ 0.95). Once controls for all prior social characteristics (in row 5) are added, the effect of party identification falls to + 0.88. Given the assumptions about causal order set out in Figure 1, this coefficient represents the apparent total effect of party identification. When further controls for policy preferences, economic evaluations and assessments of the party leaders are added, the coefficient falls to + 0.66.<sup>43</sup> This represents the direct effect of party identification.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Party identification is measured by responses to the question ‘Generally speaking do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or what?’ Those voters who decline an identity, but who feel themselves ‘closer to’ a party are not classified as identifiers. This practice is in accordance with the observations made in Warren E. Miller, ‘Party Identification, Realignment and Party Voting: Back to Basics’, *American Political Science Review*, 85 (1991), 557–68. See Charles H. Franklin, ‘Measurement and the Dynamics of Party Identification’, *Political Behaviour*, 14 (1992), 297–309, for a critique of Miller’s work.

<sup>43</sup> The full list of variables appears in Appendix 1 (b) below.

<sup>44</sup> The general strategy being pursued in my research is to model voting behaviour as a series of dichotomous choices: Conservative or Labour, Conservative or Liberal and Labour or Liberal. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, it is preferable to use a logistic regression. However, the ordinary least square (OLS) results are more easily interpretable and are reported here. Logistic regressions confirm the patterns outline above, with few variables being found to be significant in the OLS and not the logit. On the question of model choice, see Guy D. Whitten and Harvey D.

TABLE 2 *The Effect of Social Class on Vote*

Controls	Petty bourgeoisie	Salariat	Foremen & technicians	Working class
1. No controls	+ 0.29	+ 0.16	- 0.36	- 0.58
2. Fixed personal characteristics and father's class	+ 0.23	+ 0.11	- 0.34	- 0.49
3. Acquired social characteristics <sup>†</sup>	+ 0.20	+ 0.15	- 0.37	- 0.44
4. Lifestyle characteristics	+ 0.15	+ 0.08*	- 0.20	- 0.23
5. Class identity	+ 0.11*	+ 0.03*	- 0.15*	- 0.20
6(a). Party identification (PID)	+ 0.02*	+ 0.06	- 0.00*	+ 0.00*
7(a). PID and policies	+ 0.01*	+ 0.05	+ 0.02*	+ 0.00*
8(a). PID and evaluations	+ 0.02*	+ 0.05*	+ 0.00*	+ 0.00*
6(b). Left-Right (L-R) <sup>‡</sup>	+ 0.05*	- 0.01*	- 0.08*	- 0.14
7(b). L-R and policies	+ 0.04*	+ 0.01*	- 0.02*	- 0.10
8(b). L-R and evaluations	+ 0.03*	+ 0.02*	- 0.01*	- 0.08

\*Not significant at the 0.05 level (one tailed test)

<sup>†</sup>Designated apparent total effect.

<sup>‡</sup>Includes controls for liberal-authoritarian and postmaterial values.

Table 2 sets out the effect of social class on vote. Class here is represented by the five-fold Goldthorpe schema: petty bourgeoisie, salariat, routine non-manual workers, foremen and technicians and the working class. In all the following models, routine non-manual workers are the base or reference category. Given the assumptions in Figure 2 about the causal order, the apparent total effects of social class on vote are given in row 3 (for example, for the petty bourgeoisie it is + 0.20). Members of the petty bourgeoisie are therefore more likely to vote Conservative than routine non-manual workers. As controls are added for subsequent variables, the effect of all the social class variables falls and (in some cases) becomes statistically insignificant, even before controls for party identification are added. When these controls are added however, in row 6(a), the effect of social class disappears – except for a very small effect (+ 0.06) for the salariat. This might be taken to indicate that the salariat is less likely than the other classes to base their vote on affective or emotional considerations of party identity. However, the effect is very small and may reflect chance significance.

(F'note continued)

Palmer, 'Heightening Comparativists' Concern for Model Choice: Voting Behaviour in Great Britain and the Netherlands', *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (1996), 231–60 and R. Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler, 'Economics, Issues and the Perot Candidacy: Voter Choice in the 1992 Presidential Elections', *American Journal of Political Science*, 39 (1995), 714–44.

It is instructive to note from Table 1 that party identification in this model has predominantly direct effects on the vote. The apparent total effect of party identification is + 0.88 and the direct effect is + 0.66, so that 0.66/0.88 or 75 per cent of the effect of party identification is direct. While the Michigan studies did suggest that these effects might characterize a relatively poorly informed electorate,<sup>45</sup> the sheer size of this effect is worrying. Recent research has added to these concerns. Harold Clarke and his colleagues have collected monthly data on party identification which suggests that party identification closely tracks vote intention in the opinion polls. To be sure, it never quite reaches the lows and highs achieved by vote intention, but the overall message is that, far from being stable, party identification – in the aggregate – fluctuates in response to assessments of the national economy, personal financial expectations and assessments of the party leaders.<sup>46</sup> Clarke *et al.*'s conclusion that party identification is only 'weakly exogenous' to vote intention suggests that one of the reasons for the apparent stability of party identification in Britain was the fact that it was measured so infrequently.<sup>47</sup>

The size of the direct effects implied by Table 1 and the evidence of Clarke *et al.*, tends to suggest that the traditional party identification variable is 'polluted' by policy preferences and evaluations, so that it does not represent a 'long-term' component of the vote decision.<sup>48</sup> Research has increasingly focused upon alternative measures of stable predispositions.<sup>49</sup> These do not rely upon a single measure of the 'long-term' component and the relevant survey items do not make direct reference to the parties themselves.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Party identification also reduces the apparent effects of policy preferences and evaluations by factors between 2 and 8, compared with models which control for left–right position. Those analysts who believe that much voting is of the habitual or expressive variety will not be overly concerned about these effects. Those who believe that voting represents a conscious choice between the parties would suggest that this indicates that party identification is quasi-tautological. Such analysts could also point out that the effect of party identification in Britain (controlling for a similar set of social characteristics) is considerably larger in Britain than the United States (0.88 compared with 0.70). (See Miller and Shanks, *The New American Voter*, Table 11.1, p. 286.) This again adds to the suspicion of tautology.

<sup>46</sup> Harold D. Clarke, Marianne Stewart and Paul Whiteley, 'Can the Tories Win Again?' (paper presented at the Specialist Group Conference on Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, September 1995, London).

<sup>47</sup> Clarke *et al.*, 'Can the Tories Win Again?' p. 9. Similar points are made in Herbert F. Weisberg and Charles E. Smith Jr, 'The Influence of the Economy on Party Identification in the Reagan Years', *Journal of Politics*, 53 (1991), 1077–92.

<sup>48</sup> See Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> But see Anthony Heath and Roy Pierce, 'It Was Party Identification All Along: Question Order Effects on Party Identification in Britain', *Electoral Studies*, 11 (1992), 93–105.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Feldman, 'Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values', *American Journal of Political Science*, 32 (1988), 410–40; Anthony Heath, Geoffrey Evans and Jean Martin, 'The Measurement of Core Beliefs and Values: The Development of Socialist/Laissez Faire and Libertarian/Authoritarian Scales', *British Journal of Political Science*,

*Left–Right Ideological Positions*

Anthony Downs was among the first scholars to suggest that voters might use an ideology – defined as ‘a verbal image of the good society, and the chief means of achieving such a society’<sup>51</sup> – to evaluate political parties. Doing so would reduce the cost of informing themselves about the minutiae of the party manifesto and monitoring performance.<sup>52</sup> However, initial research into ideology and voting behaviour was overwhelmingly hostile to this view. Voters were held to be poorly informed about politics and were incapable of ideological thinking because (1) their attitudes did not ‘hang together’ into coherent ‘belief systems’, (2) they did not recognize even the most basic ideological terms of ‘left’ and ‘right’, and (3) such attitudes as they did have appeared to be highly unstable and to vary almost randomly.<sup>53</sup> This reinforced the assumption that it was party identification rather than ideology which mediated the effect of social characteristics on voting behaviour in Britain.

The Michigan approach, which is based upon twin assumptions about the importance of party identification and the virtual irrelevance of ideology, has come under intense scrutiny. Not only has the concept and measurement of party identification been criticized, but many of the assumptions about ideology have been questioned. Foremost among its critics, Elinor Scarbrough has argued that what the Michigan studies took as measures of ‘ideological thinking’ – inter-correlated attitudes on questions of public moment and/or the recognition of abstract concepts – are peculiarly limited notions of ‘ideology’.<sup>54</sup> Ideologies are not simply logical deductions from abstract propositions. In reality many, apparently initially contradictory attitudes, can be made to ‘hang together’ by greater elaboration. Equally, the recognition of abstract terms is a poor test of ideological thinking. Someone who believes in greater economic equality, strong trade unions and increased spending on the National Health Service has an ideology or set of values, even if they mistakenly identify themselves as

(Footnote continued)

24 (1994), 115–32; Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Mansur Lalljee, ‘Measuring Left–Right and Libertarian–Authoritarian Values in the British Electorate’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 47 (1996), 93–112; Harvey D. Palmer, ‘Effects of Authoritarian and Libertarian Values on Conservative and Labour Party Support in Great Britain’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 27 (1995), 273–92; Jan W. van Deth and Elinor Scarbrough, eds, *The Impact of Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 96.

<sup>52</sup> Ian Budge, ‘A New Spatial Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1994), 443–67.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Converse, ‘The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics’, in D. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

<sup>54</sup> Elinor Scarbrough, *Ideology and Voting Behaviour: An Exploratory Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).



'right-wing'. They are likely to respond to politicians who appeal to them in such terms.<sup>55</sup>

While the theoretical basis for the Michigan assumptions have been challenged, improvements in question wording and survey design have demonstrated that many voters' attitudes are quite stable after all.<sup>56</sup> This is particularly the case once allowance is made for measurement error.<sup>57</sup> While surveys such as the British Election Studies do not collect enough data on values to test for 'ideological voting', enough information is collected to permit the measurement of voters' attitudes on enduring matters of controversy, such as change in the direction of greater social, political and economic equality; i.e., their 'left-right' positions.<sup>58</sup> Voters' scores on such scales can then replace party identification in Figure 1 as a measure of stable predispositions.

In essence this strategy involves accepting the logic behind the 'funnel of causality', while rejecting the proposition that party identification distinguishes between 'long'-term and 'short'-term components of the electoral decision in Britain. The second column of Table 1 sets out the effect of voters' left-right positions on vote decisions. (The effects of party identification and left-right position are not comparable because they are on different metrics.) The positive coefficient suggests that the more right-wing the voter, the more likely s/he was to vote Conservative. Given the assumptions about the causal order, the coefficient in row 5 is the estimate of the apparent total effect of left-right position on voting behaviour (+0.11). When controls are added for policy preferences, assessments of the economy and party leaders, the direct effect is +0.02. Thus, 0.02/0.11 or 18 per cent of the effect of voters' left-right positions is direct (compared with 75 per cent for party identification). The greater part (82 per cent) of the effect of left-right positions is indirect, shaping policy preferences and evaluations of the economy and party leaders. To some extent, the remaining direct effects may be an artefact, caused by the omission of variables which might mediate the effects of left-right position.<sup>59</sup> However, it is also possible that these effects are real and reflect the impact of left-right

<sup>55</sup> The importance of ideology or ideological position will depend upon the voter's ability to relate their general beliefs to specific choices or preferences. For an important statement of this principle, see John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Heath and Sarah MacDonald, 'The Demise of Party Identification Theory?' In David Denver and Gordon Hands, eds, *Issues and Controversies in Voting Behaviour* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 230–8.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher H. Achen, 'Mass Political Attitudes and Survey Response', *American Political Science Review*, 12 (1975), 195–211.

<sup>58</sup> This definition is Lipset's. It is quoted in D. Fuchs and H. D. Klingemann, 'The Left-Right Schema', in M. K. Jennings *et al.*, eds, *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 203–34, at p. 224.

<sup>59</sup> Shanks and Miller, 'Partisanship, Policy and Performance', p. 154.

position on voters who are otherwise balanced in their preferences between the parties. Ideological positions may thus be a sort of 'tie-breaker' for voters.

Returning to Table 2, it is now possible to examine the effects of social class on vote if left-right position replaces party identification as the measure of voters' stable predispositions. By the time controls are added for class identities (in row 5) only the working-class variable has significant direct effects on vote decisions (−0.20). Controlling for left-right positions reduces the effect to −0.14 in row 6 (b). As further controls are added for policy preferences and evaluations of national conditions, the effect of being 'Working class' falls. Even when all variables are controlled for there remains a small (−0.08) but statistically significant direct effect. This could be taken as an indication that there is some form of social determinism at work, in the form of social pressures, group norms and so on.<sup>60</sup> However, it appears more likely that this effect simply reflects the omission and/or inadequate measurement of variables that are located between left-right positions and the vote decision.<sup>61</sup>

### III. SOCIAL CLASS AND LEFT-RIGHT POSITIONS

Previous analyses of left-right positions have suggested that social class 'dominates analysis of left-right positions'.<sup>62</sup> Anthony Heath and his colleagues suggest that this is because 'different positions in the division of labour will be fertile soil for distinct social and political values'.<sup>63</sup> Their basic model suggests that voters' material interests are, largely speaking, determined by their social class. This leads Heath *et al.* to adopt the Goldthorpe schema as their measure of class because it 'reveals the social roots of dissensus'.<sup>64</sup>

The basic division in the Goldthorpe schema is between employers and employees.<sup>65</sup> However, since the former constitute a tiny minority of the electorate, there are further distinctions based upon voters' competitive positions in the labour market. While the original Goldthorpe schema contains around eleven groups, as employed by Heath *et al.*, the electorate is divided into five groups: the petty bourgeoisie (self-employed), the salariat (managers and administrators), routine non-manual workers (routine office and sales

<sup>60</sup> David Weakliem and Anthony Heath, 'Rational Choice and Class Voting', *Rationality and Society*, 6 (1994), 243–70. These authors use 1987 cross-sectional data to suggest that, since some of the effects of class persist after controlling for attitudes, there is some form of 'social determinism' at work (p. 266). The evidence presented here suggests that the direct effects of class might disappear once enough controls are added for political attitudes.

<sup>61</sup> If the models failed to control for any stable predisposition (party identification or left-right position), a statistically significant direct effect for the working-class variable would also remain.

<sup>62</sup> Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change*, 'social class (and class related variables) dominates analysis of the left-right dimension', p. 174.

<sup>63</sup> Heath *et al.*, *How Britain Votes*, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Heath *et al.*, *How Britain Votes*, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> See David Rose, *A Report on Phase One of the ESRC Review of OPCS Social Classifications* (Swindon: Economic and Social Research Council, 1995).

	Routine Non-manual		
Left	?		Right
Working class	Foremen & technicians	Salariat	Petty Bourgeoisie

Fig. 3: Predicted order of the five Goldthorpe classes on the Left–Right scale

personnel), foremen and technicians (the supervisors of manual labour) and the working class (rank-and-file workers in industry and agriculture). Heath *et al.* suggest that the varying material interests will cause predictable differences in left–right positions between the classes.<sup>66</sup>

The petty bourgeoisie are predicted to be the most right-wing group, since they are more exposed to the rigours of the market economy. They are likely to favour less regulation, greater incentives, lower taxation and weaker trade unions. The salariat are assumed to be right-wing because they occupy a privileged position among employees, having authority, autonomy and access to many ‘fringe’ benefits. They are assumed to be anxious to maintain the status quo and resist any change in the direction of greater equality. The working class, by contrast, have little autonomy at work and are subject to managerial control. They are said to be reliant upon collective action to secure higher pay and rights in the workplace. The two remaining classes by contrast are in somewhat ambiguous positions.<sup>67</sup> Routine non-manual workers share some of the benefits afforded to the salariat, but are also subject to managerial control. Similarly, though foremen and technicians exercise some control over their colleagues, they are in turn subject to control by managers. The result is that one cannot make a prediction about the likely order of these two classes on the left–right scale. Heath *et al.*’s predicted order appears to be that set out in Figure 3.

While Heath *et al.* place great importance upon social class when constructing models of voting behaviour and left–right position, the model set out in Figure 2 recognizes that other characteristics also affect voters’ material interests. These other characteristics may offset the effects of class.<sup>68</sup> For example, a working-class voter might indeed have an interest in promoting equality, but as a home owner s/he may resist property taxation in order to fund the public expenditure programmes that seek to achieve this. Moreover, the importance of ideological position raises moral concerns, so that religious identities may also

<sup>66</sup> Heath *et al.*, *How Britain Votes*, chap. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Heath *et al.*, *How Britain Votes*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> See Giovanni Sartori, ‘The Sociology of Parties: A Critical Review’, in Peter Mair, ed., *The West European Party System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 150–82.

affect left-right positions. Material interests, however defined, are only part of the left-right story.

Whatever the many possible causes of left-right position, the real test is an empirical one: what in fact is the effect of any given variable on left-right positions? In the following section I will provide estimates of the effect of a whole series of variables, using the model set out in Figure 2.

#### IV. MODELS OF LEFT-RIGHT POSITION

This section examines the results of a series of regressions in which the dependent variable is voters' left-right positions. Close attention is paid to the way in which the effects of voters' social class are confounded by prior variables and mediated by subsequent variables. Comparisons are then made between the effects of social class and other variables in order to assess the contention that social class 'dominates' analysis of the left-right scale.

Table 3 below sets out the average left-right scores for each of the classes in the five-fold Goldthorpe schema. (Appendix 1(a) below contains details of how this scale is constructed.) These scores can vary between 0 (for those giving the most left-wing response to all items) and 24 (for those giving the most right-wing response to all items). The average across the whole sample is 10.48, but the most interesting feature of Table 3 is that the classes are in the anticipated order. The petty bourgeoisie is the most right-wing class, followed by the salariat. The working class is the most left-wing group, and it appears that routine non-manual workers are to the right of the foremen and technicians.

TABLE 3 *Average Left-Right Scores by Goldthorpe Class*

Class	Mean
Petty bourgeoisie	11.86 ( <i>N</i> = 175)
Salariat	11.77 ( <i>N</i> = 719)
Routine non-manual	10.80 ( <i>N</i> = 591)
Foremen & technicians	9.47 ( <i>N</i> = 121)
Working class	9.17 ( <i>N</i> = 861)

*Source: British Election Study 1992, cross-sectional sample, weighted data.*

Note, however, that there is very little difference between the petty bourgeoisie and the salariat. From this evidence, it does not appear that the only basic political division is between employers and employees.<sup>69</sup> Although the petty bourgeoisie are the most right-wing group, one might bear in mind that, by definition, they do not work in the public sector and are not members of trade

<sup>69</sup> Where class is measured by the eleven-fold schema and entered in the models as a series of ten dummy variables, the models suggest that there are statistically significant differences between the groups that make up the five classes (for example, between the high and low grade salariat). Details of such analyses are available from the author upon request.

TABLE 4 *The Effect of Social Class on Left–Right Position*

Controls	Petty bourgeoisie	Salariat	Foremen & technicians	Working class
1. No controls	+ 1.06	+ 0.97	– 1.33	– 1.63
2. Fixed personal characteristics and father's class	+ 0.68	+ 0.68	– 1.58	– 1.58
3. Acquired social characteristics†	+ 0.61	+ 0.76	– 1.57	– 1.41
4. Lifestyle characteristics	+ 0.45	+ 0.55	– 1.03	– 0.76
5. Class identity	+ 0.38*	+ 0.38	– 0.87	– 0.60

\*Not significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed test).

†Designated apparent total effect.

unions: two variables which are likely to have the effect of shifting voters to the left.<sup>70</sup> Viewed in this light the right-wingedness of the petty bourgeoisie is less impressive. Moreover, although it is relatively unsurprising that routine non-manual workers are to the right of foremen and technicians, there was no theoretical expectation that this would be the case, given their similar position in the labour market.

Table 4 sets out the effect of social class on left–right positions. Routine non-manual workers are again the base (or reference) category. Row 1 shows the bivariate regression coefficient (controlling for no other variables) for the four classes.<sup>71</sup> The information contained in this first row simply repeats the effect noticed in Table 3. The positive coefficient for the petty bourgeoisie and the salariat indicates that they have higher scores (i.e., are more right-wing) than routine non-manual workers, while the negative coefficients for foremen and technicians and working class suggest that these two are to the left of the base category.

As controls for prior variables (father's social class and fixed personal characteristics) are added, the effect falls for the petty bourgeoisie (from + 1.06 to + 0.68), the salariat (from + 0.97 to + 0.68) and the working class (from – 1.63 to – 1.58). This suggests that some of the effect of the respondent's social class is attributable to father's prior characteristics. By contrast, the effect of foremen and technicians rises as controls are added. Clearly any analysis of social class must be broadened to examine the effects of social origins. Some of the apparent effect of social class is properly allocated to a factor much further back in the funnel of causality than *current* social position.

When further controls are added for the other acquired social characteristics

<sup>70</sup> The notable exception are farmers, who do belong to a powerful trade union.

<sup>71</sup> The average scores for each of the classes can be calculated by simply adding the coefficient (which may be negative) to the constant from the first regression. Thus, the average score for the petty bourgeoisie is  $10.80 + 1.06 = 11.86$ .

(religion, education and region) the effect coefficients in row 3 generally fall. Given the assumptions about causal order contained in Figure 2, the effect coefficients in the third row represent the apparent total effect of each class on left–right positions. Interestingly, the results suggest that – all other things being equal – foremen are slightly to the left of the working class (a finding that is replicated using a different measure of left–right positions in Appendix 2 below). As further controls are added for lifestyle characteristics (housing tenure, trade-union membership etc.) the effect coefficients fall again. The largest reductions occur among foremen (down from  $-1.57$  to  $-1.03$ ) and working class (down from  $-1.41$  to  $-0.76$ ). It appears that the effects of social class are, to a large extent, mediated by lifestyle characteristics. The reduction among the petty bourgeoisie (from  $+0.61$  to  $+0.45$ ), by contrast, is fairly small. The coefficient in row 5 shows the direct effect of class on left–right positions after controls are added for class identity. By this stage, the effects of class are greatly reduced; for example, the effect for the working class has fallen from  $-1.57$  in row 3 to  $-0.87$  in this final row and the direct effect of the petty bourgeoisie is statistically insignificant.

How large are the effects of social class compared with other variables in the models? Table 5 below sets out the total effect estimates for all variables. To begin, the effects of father's social class is important. These variables should be included in vote models – particularly if the aim is to explore the evolution of values – because they are clearly exogenous.<sup>72</sup> Religious affiliation is assumed to be located at the same stage as social class in Figure 2. The apparent total effect of being Roman Catholic is  $-0.56$ , so that Roman Catholics are to the left of the base category (basically, the non-religious). The effect of being a member of the Church of England is  $+0.40$  so that members of the established church are to the right. The total effect of religious affiliation is quite high in comparison with that of the petty bourgeoisie ( $+0.61$ ) or salariat ( $+0.76$ ). To be sure, it is not as large as the apparent effects for the working class ( $-1.41$ ) and foremen ( $-1.57$ ), but they are a useful reminder – if one were needed – that left–right position is not simply a matter of material interests.<sup>73</sup>

Still, the effect of religion is indeed smaller than that of class. What of region? The apparent total effect of living in the North is  $+0.31$ , so that respondents in the North are to the right of those in Scotland and Wales. The effect is greater in the South ( $+1.15$ ), however, and in the Midlands it is  $+1.39$ . These effects are impressive and equal (or exceed) those of social class.<sup>74</sup> Even when controls

<sup>72</sup> There is a great deal of missing data on father's class. Such cases are omitted from the statistical analyses.

<sup>73</sup> The effect of being a Roman Catholic is not diminished if controls are added for Irish origins.

<sup>74</sup> There are reasons to be suspicious about the effect of the Midlands regional variable in the models. This variable includes the East and West Midlands and East Anglia. Some 62 per cent of the BES sample in the West Midlands reported having voted Conservative, compared with the 46.6 per cent actually recorded. See David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1992* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 268.

are added for all other variables, the direct effects of region, shown in Table 6 below, rival those of class. For example, the effect of the South (+ 0.53) and the Midlands (+ 0.80), exceed that of the petty bourgeoisie (+ 0.38) and salariat (+ 0.38).

Table 5 suggests that housing tenure also has important effects on left–right positions. The larger effect for those who own ‘outright’ might presumably reflect the greater wealth of such respondents. To be sure, as attention shifts to variables located closer to the dependent variable, there is greater risk that the dependent variable is at least a partial cause of the explanatory variable – like the decision to buy a house.<sup>75</sup> However, the effects of tenure are impressive, particularly when one bears in mind that these estimates control for all other lifestyle characteristics, such as car and share ownership, unemployment and membership of a trade union. Moreover, it is not possible to rule out a reciprocal relationship between class and political values. Right-wing people may be more likely to set up on their own account (i.e., become petty bourgeoisie) and are more willing to join management (i.e., become a member of the salariat). The fundamental assumption is that voters exercise greater freedom in their choice of tenure than in their choice of social class.<sup>76</sup> This is plausible, but it is always necessary to state such assumptions clearly when assessing the relative importance of variables.

The effect of trade-union membership on left–right position in Table 5 (– 1.89) is particularly impressive. Again the caveats about reciprocal causation apply. It may be that left-wing people are more likely to join trade unions. However, the fact that even former members of trade unions are more left-wing, adds some confidence to the suggestion that the effect is genuinely causal.<sup>77</sup>

The summary displayed in Table 5 contains further interesting information, suggesting – among other things – that older voters are more right-wing, as are men and the wealthy (those with cars, shares, private health insurance and privatized shares), while non-white voters, those dependent upon benefits and the unemployed are more left-wing, compared with the base categories.

Table 6 sets out the results of the final regression containing all the explanatory variables. Given the assumptions about causal order set out in Figure 2, the coefficients indicate the direct effect of the variables. For example, the estimates of the direct effect for the classes correspond to those from row 5 of Table 4. If no account had been taken of causal order, then the effect estimates contained in Table 6 would have led me to conclude (mistakenly) that the effects of social class were small. This reinforces the importance of assumptions about causal order.

<sup>75</sup> Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, were alert to this problem: ‘Measurement close to the behaviour runs the risk of including values that are determined by any event we are trying to predict, that is, the vote decision’ (p. 35).

<sup>76</sup> Heath *et al.*, *How Britain Votes*, p. 49; cf. Dunleavy, ‘Mass Political Behaviour’, p. 460.

<sup>77</sup> Of course, it might be that those who had previously joined and subsequently left a trade union originally joined because of their (then existing) ‘left-wing’ views.



TABLE 5 Total Effects of Social Characteristics on Left-Right Positions

Variable	Total effect
<i>Father's Social Class &amp; Fixed Personal Characteristics</i>	
Father petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.96
Father salariat	+ 0.78
Father foremen/technicians	- 0.76
Father working-class	- 0.94
Age	+ 0.02
Black	- 0.66*
Male	+ 0.16
<i>Acquired Social Characteristics</i>	
Petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.61
Salariat	+ 0.76
Foremen/technicians	- 1.57
Working-class	- 1.41
Roman Catholic	- 0.56
Church of England	+ 0.40
Degree qualification	- 0.21*
Further education qualification	+ 0.79*
A level qualification	+ 0.25*
O level qualification	+ 0.42
CSE qualification	+ 0.30*
Midlands	+ 1.39
Northern	+ 0.31*
Southern	+ 1.15
<i>Lifestyle Characteristics</i>	
Homeowner (outright)	+ 0.93
Homeowner (mortgage)	+ 0.51
Public sector employment	- 0.23*
Car ownership	+ 0.47
Share ownership	+ 0.57
Privatized shares	+ 0.77
Private health insurance	+ 1.22
Benefits main income source	- 0.41*
Unemployed	- 0.65
Trade-union member	- 1.89
Former union member	- 1.12
<i>Self-Assigned Class</i>	
Middle-class identity (1)	- 0.12*
Middle-class identity (2)	+ 0.43*
Working-class identity (1)	- 1.95
Working-class identity (2)	- 0.57

No summary statistics reported, because total effect estimates are derived from a series of models.

\*Not significant at 0.05 (one-tailed test).

TABLE 6 *The Direct Effects of Social Characteristics on Left-Right Positions*

Variable	Direct effect
<i>Father's Social Class &amp; Fixed Personal Characteristics</i>	
Father petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.90
Father salariat	+ 0.46*
Father foremen/technician	- 0.13*
Father working-class	+ 0.13*
Age	+ 0.02
Black	- 0.62*
Male	+ 0.43
<i>Acquired Social Characteristics</i>	
Petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.38*
Salariat	+ 0.38
Foremen/technician	- 0.87
Working-class	- 0.60
Roman Catholic	- 0.36*
Church of England	+ 0.30
Degree qualification	- 0.73
Further education qualification	+ 0.63*
A level qualification	- 0.19*
O level qualification	+ 0.08*
CSE qualification	+ 0.20*
Midlands	+ 0.80
Northern	+ 0.29*
Southern	+ 0.53
<i>Lifestyle Characteristics</i>	
Homeowner (outright)	+ 0.70
Homeowner (mortgage)	+ 0.33*
Public sector employment	- 0.17*
Car ownership	+ 0.42
Share ownership	+ 0.49
Privatized shares	+ 0.63
Private health insurance	+ 1.07
Benefits main income source	- 0.50
Unemployed	- 0.57
Trade-union member	- 1.62
Former union member	- 0.99
<i>Self-Assigned Class</i>	
Middle-class identity (1)	- 0.12*
Middle-class identity (2)	+ 0.43*
Working-class identity (1)	- 1.95
Working-class identity (2)	- 0.57
Constant	9.07
Adj. $R^2$	0.25

$P > 0.05$

\*Not significant at 0.05 (one-tailed test).

The final variable that is examined is self-assigned social class. Because of its assumed location, immediately prior to the dependent variable, the direct effects in Table 6 equal the total effects in Table 5. Those with a middle-class identity are not significantly more right-wing than those without any class identity, controlling for all variables. Those with a working-class identity, however, are significantly more left-wing. The effect is apparently four times as great among those who spontaneously volunteer a working-class identity, compared with those who accept such an identity after prompting.<sup>78</sup>

It might be thought that the results presented above are an artefact of the particular measure of left–right position used in this analysis. To check whether this is the case, the analysis was repeated using a left–right scale based upon respondents' positions on 'proximity scales' on the issues of nationalization/privatization, increased spending and tax-cuts, the redistribution of income and unemployment/inflation priorities. The results presented in Appendix 2 suggest that the general pattern of results reported above holds for this additional measure of left–right positions. It therefore appears that these findings are quite robust and that social class does not dominate analysis of the left–right scale, however that scale is constructed.

#### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Any attempt to build a causal model of voting behaviour encounters a formidable series of obstacles, including: theoretical assumptions about causal order, the best way to characterize the decision-making processes (as a statement of identity or as a deliberate/rational choice) and statistical specification. Clearly, models can be challenged on *any* of these grounds, so it is essential to state one's assumptions plainly and assess the costs of getting those assumptions wrong. In this light, the search for a precise estimate of the effect of any given variable is probably chimerical, but careful comparison of the effects of variables under different plausible assumptions will mean that research should not go too far wrong when discussing the relative importance of variables.

The more specific conclusions arrived at here are that (1) left–right positions are an important determinant of voting behaviour, (2) social class is indeed an important cause of left–right positions, but (3) that it does not 'dominate'.<sup>79</sup> Religion, region, housing tenure and trade-union membership have effects

<sup>78</sup> The BES asks respondents, 'Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class? (If yes) Which class is that?'; those who report anything other than middle or working class or don't know are then prompted, 'Most people say they belong to the middle class or the working class. If you had to make a choice, would you call yourself ... middle class or working class?' (Questions 55(a) and 55(b), 1992 cross-sectional study).

<sup>79</sup> Although Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change*, p. 174, argue that 'class (and class related variables)' dominate analysis of left–right positions, it is unclear what the authors mean by both 'dominate' and 'class related variables'.

which are uniquely attributable to those variables that cannot be overlooked. Even simple material interest theories of voting behaviour must recognize that the sources of 'interests' are diverse. To be sure, it may be that some of the regional effects could be attributed to differences in class composition or economic experience. However, regional effects might also reflect genuine cultural and political differences, while variables (like religious affiliation) are unlikely to be associated with *material* interests. Equally, the apparent effect of class, region, race and other variables may result from a sense of identity, as much as a material interest.<sup>80</sup> The interpretation which analysts select is inevitably coloured by their fundamental assumptions about the extent to which voting behaviour can be conceived as a deliberate choice based upon an examination of the alternatives, or as an identity-defining act of affirmation.<sup>81</sup>

The 1997 BES contains the six items used to construct the left–right scale. It will therefore be possible to check if the relationships reported here are stable over time. It will also be possible to use panel data to establish what causes voters to shift their left–right positions. If these positions are found to be stable, or to shift only in response to changes in social characteristics, then this will support the assumptions behind the recursive models outlined above. If, however, left–right positions shift in response to short-term factors, like policy preferences and evaluations of current conditions, then it may be necessary to formulate more complicated models based on non-recursive methods. However, before that is done, additional research into the properties of non-recursive models is clearly required.

The causal models presented above differ in one important respect from those produced by Merrill Shanks and Warren Miller: they focus more upon the complex relationships that exist among the social characteristics and rather less on psychological (or political) variables nearer to the vote decision. This difference, at least in part, is due to the data available in the British Election Studies datasets. The most recent BES cross-sectional survey made notable advances in the measurement of ideological positions by the creation of the two ideological dimension scales, but collected relatively little data on voters' evaluations of the parties' relative abilities to achieve consensual outcomes (such as their skills as economic managers) and assessments of the party leaders. It appears that in our desire to do justice to the complexity of the social sources of voting behaviour, analysis has shifted back down the funnel of causality, so that analysis must make a 'leap' from left–right positions to policy preferences and evaluations.<sup>82</sup> To be sure, the analysis of psychological variables raises problems of theoretical causal order and statistical multi-collinearity. However,

<sup>80</sup> Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, were similarly unclear as to the nature of the class–party relationship, saying that 'too little attention has been paid to the beliefs that link class to party in the voters mind', p. 67.

<sup>81</sup> Shanks, 'Unresolved Issues', p. 19, makes the point forcefully.

<sup>82</sup> Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change*, p. 96.

it also reflects a conscious decision on the part of many BES analysts to assume some form of sociological determinism. The point is that 'values and perceptions explain much more of the variance in the vote than does social class'.<sup>83</sup> A fully specified causal model would integrate both types of variable, but researchers could focus more attention on these explicitly political variables, without necessarily assuming that they must make some 'sociological sense'. Social characteristics do indeed matter, but so do politics and political preference.

APPENDIX 1(A): THE LEFT-RIGHT SCALE

The left-right scale is made up of responses to the following statements:

- (1) Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth.
- (2) There is one law for the rich and one for the poor.
- (3) There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages.
- (4) It is the government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one.
- (5) Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems.
- (6) Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership.

Responses were coded so that 4 represented the most right-wing response and 0 the most left-wing response. The scores were then simply summed to create a scale which could range between 0 (for those giving the most left-wing response to all statements) and 24 (for those giving the most right-wing response to all statements). The mean score was 10.48; Cronbach's alpha for the six items was 0.70, which is acceptable for a six-item scale. Confirmatory factor analysis suggests that there is only one dimension underlying the scale. For further details on the scale construction, see Heath *et al.*, 'The Measurement of Core Beliefs'.

APPENDIX 1(B): VARIABLES IN THE VOTING MODELS FOR TABLES 1 AND 2

Numbers in brackets refer to BES data codes.

*Policy Preferences*

(1) Trade-union power (v51a), (2) Business power (v51b), (3) Defence spending (v31b), (4) Nuclear weapons (v32), (5) Troops in Northern Ireland (v31a), (6) Poll-tax (v49a), (7) Proportional representation (v59), (8) Sterling (v29b), (9) Privatization and nationalization (v45a/b), (10) Competition in schools (v222b).

*Evaluations*

(1) Prices (v26a), (2) Unemployment (v26b), (3) Taxes (v26c), (4) Quality of National Health Service (v26d), (5) Quality of education (v26f), (6) Strikes v26h, (7) Respondent's standard of living (v26i), (8) Regional prosperity (v54a), (9) Leadership traits v22-v24.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Heath, 'Comment on Dennis Kavanagh's "How We Vote Now"', *Electoral Studies*, 5 (1986), 29-30.

## APPENDIX 2: ALTERNATIVE LEFT–RIGHT SCALE

Respondents to the BES survey were asked to place themselves on a scale (numbers in brackets refer to BES codes). The poles of these dimensions present two options:

- (1) reducing unemployment or inflation (v35a),
- (2) increasing tax and spending or reducing both (v36a),
- (3) further nationalization or privatization (v37a) and;
- (4) moving towards greater equality or not (v38a).

Responses to the resulting scale made up of these items correlate quite highly (Spearman's correlation = 0.59) with the left–right scale used in the main text. Confirmatory factor analysis again suggests that there is one dimension underlying the scale. This suggests that the two scales are measuring the same underlying left–right dimension.

Table A sets out the apparent total effect of social characteristics on left–right position. Scores on this scale can range from  $-1$  (for the most left-wing responses) to  $+1$  (for the most right-wing responses), and therefore the effects are not comparable with those in the main text. Moreover, since the proximity items were asked of only half the BES sample, the standard errors of the coefficients are larger, and fewer variables achieve statistical significance.

Table A again suggests that father's social class is an important predictor of left–right positions. The apparent effects of social class are statistically significant (except in the case of the petty bourgeoisie, as a result of the small size of that group), but by no means do they 'dominate' the analysis. Again region, housing tenure and trade-union membership all have effects which are as large as social class.

TABLE A *The Total Effects of Social Characteristics on Left-Right Positions*

Variable	Total effect
<i>Father's Social Class &amp; Fixed Personal Characteristics</i>	
Father petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.14
Father salariat	+ 0.12
Father foremen/technician	- 0.02*
Father working-class	- 0.04*
Age	+ 0.00*
Black	- 0.05*
Male	+ 0.09
<i>Acquired Social Characteristics</i>	
Petty bourgeoisie	+ 0.08*
Salariat	+ 0.09
Foremen/technicians	- 0.14
Working-class	- 0.13
Roman Catholic	- 0.07
Church of England	+ 0.01*
Degree qualification	+ 0.02*
Further education qualification	+ 0.12*
A level qualification	+ 0.00*
O level qualification	+ 0.05*
CSE qualification	- 0.02*
Midlands	+ 0.15
Northern	+ 0.02*
Southern	+ 0.11
<i>Lifestyle Characteristics</i>	
Homeowner (outright)	+ 0.10
Homeowner (mortgage)	+ 0.08
Public sector employment	- 0.04
Car ownership	+ 0.05*
Share ownership	+ 0.10
Privatized shares	+ 0.04*
Private health insurance	+ 0.04*
Benefits main income source	- 0.02*
Unemployed	- 0.05*
Trade-union member	- 0.09
Former union member	- 0.11
<i>Self-Assigned Class</i>	
Middle-class identity (1)	- 0.02*
Middle-class identity (2)	+ 0.01*
Working-class identity (1)	+ 0.12
Working-class identity (2)	- 0.07*

$P < 0.05$

\*Not significant at 0.05 (one-tailed test).