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## **Do subjective social classes vote based on national issue saliency?**

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**Do subjective social classes vote based on national issue saliency?**

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores the effects of national issue saliency of cultural and economic issues in the mind of voters within the social classes. The study uses the British Election Study 2019 (BES, 2019), a post-election random probability survey on political attitudes and voting behavior in the United Kingdom. The results show that the lower, but not middle/upper, social class still is a significant predictor of vote choice within the UK. The analysis, however, finds no significant increases or decreases in the interaction between social classes and vote choice when national issue salience is added as a moderator.

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## **Introduction**

Social classes have been essential predictors of vote choice (Lipset, 1960; Wright, 1997; Clark & Lipset, 2001). Belonging to a social class meant belonging to a group with a shared identity and experiences that predicted voting behavior. For example, the working class was strongly correlated to voting for the political left, and the middle and upper classes were strongly correlated to voting for the political right (Houtman et al., 2009; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2019). However, the overall effects of social classes on vote choice have declined in recent decades (Bornschieer & Häusermann, 2021), suggesting that social class is a less statistically significant variable in predicting vote choice.

The changing interplay between policy supply and demand of politics, economy, and culture can explain the decrease in the effects of social classes on vote choice. Our society has changed, resulting in changed values within all political classes. For example, economic values have become less important due to increasing prosperity and economic security, and cultural issues have become more relevant due to globalization and political policy congruence in the economic dimension (Achterberg, 2005). The change of values has caused disruptive shifts in electoral politics, which has intrigued political scientists and made them wonder how social classes currently navigate their vote choices (See, for example, Bornschieer and Häusermann, 2021).

A larger proportion of the population currently votes for parties not congruent with their ideological values (Houtman et al., 2009; Franko & Witko, 2022). Voters choose political right parties even though the vote is economically against their interests. Alternatively, people choose politically left parties even though this is against their cultural interests (Achterberg, 2005). One reason is that voters started to consider values about issues within the cultural dimension, such as political freedoms, immigration, multiculturalism, and globalization, more important than before (Houtman et al., 2009; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2019;

Kitschelt & Rehm, 2022), resulting in a complex system where people have to choose between cultural or economic issues when deciding whom to vote for since political parties have not moved their policy supply along with the changing demand or were just not interested in changing or were not able to change (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2019).

The effects of social class on vote choice can thus be complex and varied in the new political realm. This thesis explores the effects of national issue saliency of cultural and economic issues in the mind of voters within the social classes. Research has shown that individuals from different social classes may prioritize different issues when deciding which candidate or party to support (Steiner & Hillen, 2021; Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). For example, individuals from lower social classes may be more likely to prioritize economic issues such as job creation, income inequality, and the cost of living but also want more authoritarianism, anti-immigration policy, and a more important rule of law (See, for example, Carella and Ford, 2020; Roza & Vargas, 2021) while individuals from higher social classes may be more likely to prioritize social issues such as education, healthcare, and environmental protection but also want less state intervention, more free trade, lower taxes and more protection of private properties (Achterberg, 2005).

As the demand for and supply of political party policies has changed, and with it, the influence of social classes on vote choice, scholars are looking for different approaches or theories to test how social classes navigate and decide their vote choices. For example, Evans and Tilly (2011) argue that social class's effects on voting behavior have remained strongly correlated but it has become more multifaceted. Education, ideology, and responsive voting have become more critical when voting than before. This paper wants to analyze responsive voting of the social classes and therefore, it assumes that belonging to a social class still means that you share the same ideological traits and have had the same education. Reasoning that people in the same social class have had similar experiences in life, such as the same

education, which has created a shared identity containing a particular ideology that predicts vote choice (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). Holding this data equal, the analysis can measure the effects of responsive voting.

Responsive voting refers to the idea that voters' decisions are influenced by issues that they perceive as being important or relevant at the time of an election. The concept of responsive voting suggests that voters' decisions are not solely based on their overall political ideologies or the policies of political parties, but are also influenced by the specific issues that they perceive as being important at the time of an election. (Evans and Tilly, 2011). This concept will hereafter be referred to as issue salience since issue salience refers to the perceived importance or relevance of a particular issue when making behavioral choices at a given time (Steiner & Hillen, 2021).

Issue saliency/ownership theory argues that voters link an issue and which party this issue belongs to (Walgrave, Tresch & Lefevere, 2015, p.778). The voter chooses their ballot based on the saliency of an issue, which party they associate the issue with, and who is competent in it (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008; see also Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere, 2015). Specifically, the focus of this thesis will be on national issue salience. National issue salience refers to the perceived importance or relevance of a particular issue to the nation and research suggests that voters may be more likely to support candidates or parties that align with their views on issues that they consider to be highly salient at the national level (Dennison, 2019).

People have started to vote based on cultural issues since these issues have become more salient, which might have effect on the vote choice of the social classes. Therefore, this thesis wants to test if national issue salience, as a moderator between social class and vote choice, increases or decreases the interaction between them and if this is statistically significant. This has not been done yet and therefore, this thesis contributes to the literature of



social classes to give a better understanding how social classes now navigate their vote choice. The guiding research question of this thesis is "what are the effects of national issue salience within subjective social classes on their vote choice."

The paper argues that people in the lower class will be statistically correlated with left-wing political parties when they consider economic issues nationally salient. When the lower class finds cultural issues nationally salient they will be statistically correlated with right-wing political parties. Moreover, the thesis expects people in the upper and middle class to be statistically correlated with left-wing political when they consider cultural issues nationally salient. When people in the upper and middle class find economic issues nationally salient, they will be statistically correlated with right-wing political parties.

The thesis finds no statistical evidence that either cultural or economic national issue saliency predicts vote choice of social classes based on data from the British Election Study (BES, 2019). The analysis, however, does find empirical evidence that the lower class still is a statistically significant predictor of vote choice. At the same time, there is no significance for the middle/upper class. The findings add on to previous literature that the lower social class increasingly votes for right-wing political parties, however, this is not due to national issue salience.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### *The changed supply and demand of party policy*

Class division and vote choice were strongly correlated with each other. However, this correlation is no longer self-evident (Clark & Lipset, 1991). Robison and Stubager (2018) argued that the decline of the effects of social class on vote choice is not due to the eroding of class consciousness (this does, however, depend on the country). Nor is it because social

classes' objective boundaries have changed (Evans & Tilly, 2012). The supply and demand of the policy of political parties have transformed (Evans & Tilly, 2012; Giebler et al., 2021).

Party policy supply refers to policies that a political party proposes or supports. Party policy supply includes all issues on which a party can offer policy (Giebler et al., 2021).

Political parties develop their policy platform to present a clear set of ideas and proposals to the public and differentiate themselves from other parties (Giebler et al., 2021). The demand for party policy refers to the desire or need for a particular party's policy among the public. The current political climate and parties can influence this and attempt to shape the demand through public relations, advertisements, and campaigning (Giebler et al., 2021).

Economic policy supply has shifted to the political center, and cultural policy supply has diverged. The economic shift to the center was most notably at the political left due to the declining proportion of people in the lower/working class (Evans & Tilly, 2012). The shift created an overlapping economic policy supply of the political left and the political right. The issues are perceived as similar among the voters and, therefore, less significant (Steiner & Hillen, 2021). Voters experience that their vote has less effect on policy output due to the lack of meaningful differences within the economic dimension (Evans & Tilly, 2011). The economic shift to the center has had three consequences: 1. Fewer left-wing people go to the polls (Heide, 2016); 2. voters base their vote choice on competence considerations, meaning that voters look at parties who are best at dealing with issues of their ideological interests, and then decide which party to vote for (Green & Hobolt, 2008) and; 3. voters base their vote choice on cultural considerations rather than economic considerations (Houtman et al., 2009). The thesis will focus on the latter two.

Unlike economic policy supply, cultural policy supply has diverged and changed due to different demands of cultural issues in society (Ares, 2021). Previously the cultural

dimension was primarily divided based on social justice and religion, with social class being the dividing factor between left and right, at least in Western Europe (Knapp & Wright, 2006). Nowadays, civil liberties, immigration, and issues such as Brexit (within the UK) increasingly get attention, with social classes no longer being the dividing factor. Within the social classes, people have become culturally ideologically divided between culturally left and right (Achterberg, 2005).

As the demand for cultural policies increased, more people started to vote based on cultural issues. For example, Rozo and Vargas (2020) show that when cultural issues such as immigration become salient, increases in voter turnout from the political left to the political right are measured. Moreover, Evans et al. (2022) argue that social classes have started to vote differently because internal priorities have shifted.

#### *How do social classes currently vote?*

According to this theory, people within social classes vote based on a shared social identity (Bornschieer et al., 2021). Social identity is a good predictor of what someone finds important due to shared experiences in life. Herein there are two broad emphases to analyze: resource-related and status-related. Resource related refers to class identity on economic experiences of social inequality. Sosnaud et al. (2013) also mention this, referring to voting behavior along the economic axis based on self-identification of the economic situation. They assume that people from lower class vote for economic parties on the left side of the axis because of economic considerations and experiences. Vice versa, people in the middle and upper class will vote for economic parties on the right side of the axis because of economic considerations and experiences.

As Sosnaud et al. (2013) call the cultural affinity perspective, status-related social class identity refers to social class status and is associated with voting behavior. In line with

status-related social class identity, Carella and Ford (2020) argue that lower social status is associated with support for anti-immigration and authoritarian attitudes associated with the cultural right. Moreover, Kitschelt and Rehm (2019; 2022) find that a higher social status due to the increase in education among the population can lead to culturally progressive attitudes that belong to the political left. They argue that people with higher levels of education tend to have more diverse social networks that expose them to a broader range of political viewpoints. Furthermore, higher education is also associated with critical thinking and openness to new ideas which are associated with culturally left-leaning vote choices.

According to the literature, this has created a dilemma for voters in Western democracies in which lower-class and middle/upper-class voters sometimes must vote against their own economic or cultural ideology. The reason for this is that political parties must deliver more versatile policies due to the emergence of the cultural dimension and the congruence of the economic dimension. However, in a two-party system, the political parties have not drastically changed their policy offers. Therefore, there is a supply gap on both sides. For the lower social classes, no political party offers economic left and cultural right policies. For the upper classes, no party offers economic right and cultural left policies (Evans et al., 2022).

### **Issue saliency**

How do social classes navigate this policy supply gap? According to a trend in the literature, people decide which party to vote for depending on issue saliency (See, for example, Miller et al., 2016; Dennison, 2019). Issue saliency is the weight a person puts on an issue to prioritize one issue over another (Krosnick, 1988). It refers to the perceived importance or relevance of a particular issue to a particular group, in this case, social class. Factors that can influence the saliency of an issue include: the level of media attention it

receives; the degree to which it affects the lives of a particular group; the level of public discussion or debate about it (Dennison, 2019) but; also how much political leaders/parties emphasizes specific issues (Rozo & Vargas, 2020).

If a particular issue is important to a particular social class, they may be more likely to vote for a political party that aligns with their views (Miller et al., 2016). For example, suppose a working-class voter places high importance on job security and wages. In that case, they may be more likely to vote for a political party that supports policies such as strong labor protections and higher minimum wages (Miller et al., 2016).

On the other hand, if a particular issue is not very important to a particular social class, they may be less likely to base their vote choice on that issue (Walgrave, Tresch & Lefevere, 2015). For example, suppose a wealthy voter does not place a high level of importance on issues related to income inequality. In that case, they may be less likely to base their vote choice on a political party's stance on those issues (Miller et al., 2016).

Overall, issue salience can influence vote choice by affecting voters' importance to specific issues. Different social classes place different levels of importance on different issues, which can influence their vote choice. The thesis expects that lower classes find economically left and culturally right policies important. In contrast, the middle/upper class generally finds economically right and culturally left policies important, as discussed in the last section. According to the theory, which issue, cultural or economic, a person finds salient at the time of the election will be a deciding factor in their vote choice. The thesis can therefore, formulate two hypotheses. One for the lower class and one for the middle/upper class:

*H1: people in the lower classes will have a higher likelihood to vote for left political parties when they find economic issues salient and right-wing political parties when they find cultural issues salient.*

*H2: People in the upper and middle classes will have a higher likelihood to vote for right-wing political parties when they find economic issues salient and left-wing political parties when they find cultural issues salient.*

### **Conceptualization and operationalization**

#### *Vote choice*

Vote choice refers to individuals' decisions about which candidate or political party to support in an election (Evans and Tilly, 2011). This decision is influenced by a variety of factors, including the individual's political ideology, their assessment of the candidate's policy positions, their perception of the candidate's personal characteristics, and their evaluation of the candidate's campaign performance (Mellon et al., 2018). Vote choice depends on several factors. However, this thesis will focus on individual-level factors such as ideology and socio-economic status influencing vote choice since ideology and socio-economic status are endogenous to social class.

Vote choice is the dependent variable and is measured using the question: which party did you vote for in the last election? The options are the Labour party, the Conservative party, the Liberal Democratic party, The Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru, UKIP, The Brexit party, Independent candidate, spoilt ballot paper, 'none,' and 'other.'

The main focus of the analysis is on the Labour party and the Conservative party since most people have voted for these two parties since descriptive analysis shows that 71,7 % of

all survey respondents have voted for either the Labour party or the Conservative party (See Appendix A, figure A1).

Labour is characterized as the political party that supports the traditional left and also takes issue positions corresponding to it. They represent left-wing ideological cultural and economic beliefs (Häuserman et al., 2022). The Conservative Party is seen as the political party that represents the middle and upper class and takes issue positions that reflect culturally and economically right-wing beliefs (Green & Hobolt, 2008).

Voters who ideologically want to vote for smaller parties often vote for one of the two main parties due to strategic voting (See, for example, Hale, 2020). The two main political parties have dominated elections since the end of World War II due to the first-past-the-post system (McKibbin, 2019). The first-past-the-post electoral system makes it difficult for smaller parties, such as the Liberal Democratic party, to win seats in parliament, leading to voters, voting for the larger parties to make their vote count. Nonetheless, some smaller parties have focused on specific issues, such as Scottish independence or Brexit, that have influenced policy and parliament. These parties, though, have not built a strong electorate over time or based on social class and, therefore, cannot predict their vote choice (Heath & Goodwin, 2017). For these reasons, the focus of this thesis will be on the Labour and Conservative parties, and it leaves out the other parties.

Vote choice is operationalized by recoding the data. For example, labor is coded as 0, the conservative party is coded as 1, and other parties, spoilt ballot paper, none, and others were recoded as missing values in SPSS.

### *Social class*

Social class refers to a group of people with similar social, economic, or educational statuses (Evans et al., 2012). People are grouped into different classes in many societies based on income, occupation, education, and wealth. These classes are often hierarchical, with some classes considered higher than others. For example, in some societies, there may be a wealthy upper class, a middle class of educated professionals, and a working-class of manual laborers. In other societies, the classes may be more fluid and less clearly defined (Evans et al., 2022). It is a group with the same cultural identity with objective means and their subjective rank against others (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). Often these concepts are measured and thus operationalized in an objective way by describing social class as a reflection of the social position measured by income, education, and employment (Evans & Tilly, 2012). Education and income, mainly, are predictors of belonging to a specific social class (Kitschelts & Rehm, 2019; Kitschelts & Rehm, 2022).

A debate has emerged about the best way to measure social class when studying voting behavior. Some researchers use objective indicators such as income and education (Evans & Tilly, 2012), while others use subjective indicators such as self-identification with a particular social class (D'hooge, 2016; D'Hooge et al., 2018). Using objective indicators can lead to measurement errors. It may not accurately predict voting behavior, as people may identify with a particular social class even if they do not objectively belong to it based on income, education, and other objective measures (D'Hooge, 2016). The measurement error is caused because identity plays a role in shaping behavior through shared experiences in life (Bornschier et al., 2021). Subjective social class, or self-identification with a particular class, may be a better predictor of voting behavior as it considers the role of identity. For example, research has found that subjective class identification is a better predictor of economic voting behavior than objective class identification in the Netherlands (D'Hooge, 2016).



As for the first predictor variable, the analysis uses the subjective social class. The subjective social class is measured by asking the respondents: “do you ever think of yourself belonging to any particular class”? By asking this question, class identification, and partly class consciousness, can also be measured. Descriptive analysis of the data shows that 71,4 % of the people think of themselves as belonging to a social class (See appendix, figure A7), meaning that over 2/3 of the population identifies with a social class. The respondent’s options were: do not know; yes, middle class; yes; working class; yes, other; no; in between classes; lower/working class; lower middle class and; no answer/not specified. To analyze the effects of social class, the data is recoded 0 if they identify with the lower/working class and 1 if they identify with the middle/upper class (See Appendix, figure A4).

### *Issue saliency*

The conceptualization of issue saliency has long been a subject of debate. Many studies do not touch the conceptualization or describe issue saliency inconsistently (Miller et al., 2017). For example, researchers use issue saliency as issue importance, which is different. An issue can be considered salient if it is receiving much attention in the media, if politicians and other public figures are widely discussing it, or if it is perceived as being particularly important or relevant to a large number of people at a given time (Moniz & Wlezien, 2020). Issue importance, on the other hand, refers to the perceived importance or value of a particular issue to an individual or group and is less susceptible to exogenous events (Dennison, 2019). An issue can be considered important to someone if it affects their personal well-being, aligns with their values and beliefs, or is related to a cause or issue they care deeply about. Both issue salience and issue importance can influence vote choice, as individuals may be more likely to support candidates or parties that take positions on issues that are important to them and that align with their values and beliefs (Dennison, 2019). The focus of the thesis is not on

issue importance since the values and beliefs that create the importance are already endogenous in the social classes due to the shared identity. Moreover, issue salience can easily change due to new exogenous events while importance remains stable over time. The focus is on responsive focus based on issue salience within the social classes and therefore, the focus is on issue salience rather than issue importance.

In order to further understand issue salience, it is important to differentiate between personal and national saliency. National issue saliency refers to an issue's perceived importance or relevance to a nation or country at a given time, which can vary from person to person (Miller et al., 2017). Personal issue saliency also varies from person to person. However, it depends on an individual's values, beliefs, and circumstances (Kioussis, 2004). For example, someone struggling with a health issue may view healthcare as a highly salient issue, while someone financially secure may view it as less important. This paper relates personal issue salience with issue importance since belonging to a social class also means that the people within the same social class share personal circumstances that influence their voting behavior.

On the other hand, national issue saliency is determined by the perceived importance or relevance of an issue to the nation or country as a whole. National issue salience can be influenced by various factors, including the country's economic, social, and political context, as well as the views and concerns of the general population. For example, in the case of the UK, the debate surrounding Brexit was the country's most important national issue (See appendix figure A5). These issues are often the focus of policy debates and decision-making at the national level, as they have the potential to affect the well-being of the entire nation (Miller et al., 2017). Therefore, the analysis will focus on national issue saliency.

The literature suggests that people within specific social classes find particular issues important (Evans and Tilly, 2022). For example, the lower class evaluates issues such as redistribution and anti-immigration as important. In contrast, the middle/upper class evaluates issues such as lower taxes and climate policy as important. Finally, this thesis argues that based on their national saliency of the issue, the person in the social class will decide whom to vote for.

Issue saliency is measured by asking a respondent: "as far as you are concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at present time"? Respondents can only answer this question open-ended. Research on issue salience has focused chiefly on closed-ended questions since open-ended questions cannot account for long-term salience considerations (Geer, 1991). However, open-ended questions can help gather detailed and nuanced information about people's views and opinions. Moreover, the thesis aims to analyze national issue salience, at the moment of the election and, therefore, long-term salience considerations are not relevant to the research.

To measure the differences of social classes, the analysis recodes the data into a new variable containing economic and cultural issues. Following Achterberg (2005), economic and cultural issues can be categorized in the following way: economic issues can be indexed through three central themes, including all economic issues. If an issue in the survey corresponds with one of the themes, it is coded 0 as an economic issue. The first theme is social justice, which includes social economic equality, special protection for the less fortunate, redistribution of welfare, and breaking down class lines. The second theme is the welfare state, including topics such as social services, social security, and social investment. Lastly, the third theme is government control of the economy, which includes topics such as

free trade, state regulation of the economy, institution of minimum wage, protection of private property, price control, wages, and interest rates.

The index for cultural issues can also be differentiated between three central themes. First are norms and values about abortion, divorce, and euthanasia. Secondly, attention is given to minority groups which describe feelings of less privileged groups such as people with a handicap, immigrants, refugees, and civil liberties. Lastly, law and order include crime prevention, police support, stricter criminal courts, upholding the law, authoritarianism, nationalism, and globalism. These issues will be categorized as cultural issues and coded 1. All other issues are categorized as missing values. See appendix, figure A6, for the categorization of the issues in the data set into the cultural and economic dimensions.

## **Research design**

### *Case selection*

It is practical to apply a single case analysis to find out whether there is an interaction between social classes on vote choice, with issue salience moderating the interaction. A single case analysis provides a detailed picture of the interaction with a single case study seen here as an analysis within one country. Many variables influence vote choice, which means that outcomes will differ in different countries. Variables such as class consciousness, the party system, and political context all influence voting behavior and are different in all countries. The effects can be analyzed in greater detail through a case study analysis than in a multi-case analysis.

There are several conditions that a case must have in order for it to fit into this study. First, the country's voters must have strong class consciousness. Otherwise, people will not vote according to their class because they need to know what social classes are, do not know

the boundaries, and can no longer discern the differences. Voting based on class consciousness is linked with social identification and is a strong predictor of voting behavior, provided these conditions are present (Bornschieer et al., 2021).

Secondly, analyzing the supply gap of political parties in the research is essential. Otherwise, the study cannot comprehensively analyze the influence of issue saliency. According to the theory, voters must choose between cultural and economic subjects if there is a supply gap (Steiner & Hillen, 2021). What people within specific social classes think is the most important topic and what issue is nationally salient to them now determines the vote choice, argues this thesis. The effects of national issue salience are best tested in a party system where this supply gap is present and where it is clear how economic and cultural issues are divided. In a multi-party system, the interaction between issue saliency and social classes is too broad due to the versatility of such a party system. More variables will weaken the interaction between social classes, issue saliency, and vote choice. That is why a democratic system with two major political parties where the supply and demand of political policy do not match is the best choice. Third, the data must be available immediately after an election and before Covid-19 because personal salient issues can change over time due to exogenous events.

Based on these considerations, this paper analyzes Britain 2019 (BES, 2019). Several studies show that class consciousness is present in the United Kingdom (See, for example, Furnham et al., 2016; Westheuser & Della Porta, 2022). Moreover, there also is a supply gap in the United Kingdom due to the multidimensional structure of political issues that exists today due to the first-past-the-post electoral system of the UK (Hillen & Steiner, 2020). The supply gap can be noticed in the data by looking at the descriptive analysis of the question: do any of the parties in Britain represent your views reasonably well? If a significant group of people believes that the political parties are not ideologically congruent, we can assume that

there is a supply gap in the country. 54,2% of the respondents answered that the parties are not ideologically congruent with their own ideological beliefs or that they do not know if it is congruent (See Appendix figure A7)—half of the electorate votes against or partly against their ideological beliefs in the UK. Meaning the assumption is met. However, noteworthy for the analysis, Labour is no longer economically moving to the political center. Jeremy Corbyn moved the party back to the left after the general election in May 2015, resulting in more voters for the party, and as Whiteley et al. (2019) argue that the party has been soaring ever since.

### *Data selection*

This research uses the British Election Study 2019 (BES, 2019), a post-election random probability survey on political attitudes and voting behavior in the United Kingdom. The data has been created to be representative of the entire UK voting population. The data is extracted from All people aged 18 and older and people with a "right to remain" in the UK, which is a condition for being allowed to vote. Because this study aims to draw conclusions from vote choice, this does not threaten the study's external validity

People were selected based on several factors. First, people were selected based on stratified random samples of 400 parliamentary constituencies within the United Kingdom. Also, based on two lower super output areas per constituency with probability proportional to size. Moreover, on selecting addresses from the small user version of the postcode address file, and only one eligible individual is randomly selected per address by the interviewer. There were a total of  $N = 3946$  interviews conducted.

The data collection started immediately after the day of the election on the 12th of December, 2019. On the 18th of March, 2020, the research was temporarily stopped due to Covid-19. It included a cross-sectional election study based on face-to-face in-home interviews until that

date. After the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, the interviews were conducted online using computer-assisted web interviewing. They called this the push-to-web phase. The intervention of Covid-19 has caused a delay in completing the survey, which means that respondents may give a different answer than they would have if they had filled in the survey immediately. Covid-19 impacts issue saliency because exogenous events influence what people find salient over time.

Saliency is dependent on time since people change in what they find salient. It can threaten the research's validity. 2,095 (53.1%) respondents completed a face-to-face computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI). Of the remaining respondents, 1,350 (34.2%) completed a push-to-web, and 501 (12.7%) completed a mail-in survey. The intervention should be taken into account when discussing the analysis.

Another essential point is to consider satisficing. Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2003) argue that long questionnaires not conducted through face-to-face interview data are prone to satisficing. Meaning that respondents answer the first questions more carefully than questions that are asked later in the survey since an interviewee can find questionnaires less interesting the longer they are filling it in. Satisficing often happens when an individual has limited information and time to fill in an interview. An individual chooses an option that is 'good enough' for them rather than spending time searching for the 'correct' decision. When an interview is taken face-to-face, this problem is not considered since the interviewer is trained, according to the technical report of the election study, to give respondents enough time to answer 'correctly.' That is an answer that suits their values, norms, and opinions.

### *Model*

Three binary logistic regressions best fit the research since the dependent variable in all three models is vote choice, which is dichotomous. Vote choice is either the Labour or Conservative party.

The analysis also adds several control variables. First, the analysis includes sociodemographic variables. These variables are often added when testing the effects of issue saliency even though their effects have declined, according to the literature (Belanger & Meguid, 2008; Green & Hobolt, 2008). Therefore, the variables: gender, age, and ethnicity are added (Appendix, figure B1). Age is added because it is a substantial predictor variable of vote choice, especially in the UK, where older people tend to vote for the conservative party (Jeffery et al., 2022).

Ethnicity was added because research found that vote choice also depends on ethnicity (Evans & Norris, 1999). For example, non-native respondents are more likely to vote for Labour than white respondents. Vice-versa for the conservative party (Evans & Norris, 1999). Moreover, studies have shown that women in the UK are more likely to vote for left-wing parties such as Labour, while men are more likely to vote for right-wing parties such as the Conservatives. However, these patterns are inconsistent across all elections and may vary depending on the issues and candidates involved (Harteveld et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the thesis adds gender to the analysis.

Even though ideology, partisanship, education, and income are strong predictors of vote choice, the thesis does not include them in the analysis. Education and income are not included in the analysis because they are already part of the conceptualization of subjective social class. Someone with a higher income and higher education subjectively identifies him/herself with the middle/upper class and vice versa with the lower class. Meaning that it is endogenous to subjective social class, and by adding these variables to the relationship between social class and vote choice, the relationship would be less precise.

Moreover, the same arguments hold up for ideology and partisanship. However, ideology and partisanship are not concepts within the conceptualization of subjective social



class. People within the same social class do have a shared social identity that is correlated with sharing an ideology and partisanship (Bornschieer et al., (2021). Therefore, the paper assumes that the ideology and partisanship within the social classes are relatively similar and also endogenous to the social classes. Therefore, adding these variables to the analysis is not necessary and would control away the influence of social class on vote choice.

The binary logistic model is tested for statistical assumptions. No collinearity is found (see appendix, figure B2). All VIF values are just above 1 meaning that it indicates that there is no correlation between the predictor variables in the model.

In order to test the hypotheses that subjective social class influences vote choice based on national issue saliency, three models are created. The first two models use a filter to select all data of only one subjective social class. This way, the analysis can show the effects of issue salience within that particular social class on vote choice. The first model filters out the data of the middle/upper class, and the second model the data of the lower class.

The first model is created to test H1, thus if the lower class predicts vote choice with issue saliency and control variables added. Through a binary logistic regression, the analysis tests the effects of a change in issue saliency on the prediction to vote for the conservative party. If the odds ratio of issue saliency is above 1, it suggests a higher likelihood of voting for the conservative party when the lower class finds economic issues salient. When the odds ratio is below 1, it suggests a lower likelihood to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues salient. This odds ratio also means that when they find cultural issues salient, there is a higher likelihood to vote for the conservative party, which the hypothesis predicts. The odds ratio is, however, irrelevant if national issue salience is not statistically significant in the model.

The second model tests H2 and looks similar. However, it predicts vote choice based on the middle/upper class. If the odds ratio is above 1, it suggests a higher likelihood to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues salient, which is what the thesis aims to test. When the odds ratio of issue saliency is below 1, the middle class is less likely to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues salient. Again vice versa for cultural issues.

The third model uses no filter and tests the interaction between social classes on vote choice with issue salience and control variables. Also, a moderator (socialclass \* issuesalience) is created and added to the model to test the effects of issue saliency when the effects of social class are 0. When the moderator is statistically significant,  $p < 0.001$ , then issue saliency significantly enhances social class's effects on vote choice, which the thesis expects. The moderator outcome shows us the effects when the effects of the subjective social classes are 0. Finally, the odds ratio tells us how much the change is.

## **Analysis**

### *Results*

The theory has argued that social classes predict vote choice based on issue saliency and that the interaction between social class and issue salience will positively affect the party they vote for. The analysis is conducted at a time when Brexit plays an important role in British everyday life. Most people see the discussion surrounding Brexit as the most important problem at the moment of measuring (see appendix, figure A5). Public attention was primarily on the cultural domain due to this issue, and, therefore, the relationship between what social classes find salient and vote choice is tested under favorable conditions. Also, no outliers were found in the analysis.

Table 1 presents the three models. The first hypothesis expects a statistically significant p-value and an odds ratio  $< 1$  for issue saliency. Model 1 was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 35.921$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ , suggesting that the model could distinguish between those who did and those who did not vote for the conservative party. The model explained between 14,5% (Cox and Snell R square) and 19,4% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance of the dependent variable and correctly classified 69,9% of the cases. Furthermore, the odds ratio in model 1 was 0.683, suggesting that people in the lower class are 0.683 times (thus a negative coefficient causing a decline) more likely to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues nationally salient (See appendix, figure C4) (holding all else constant). However, as shown in table 1, age and ethnicity, but not issue saliency and gender, significantly contributed to the model. Thus the lower class significantly predicts vote choice but primarily based on age and not issue saliency, rejecting the notion that the subjective lower class makes voting decisions based on national issue saliency. Thus H1 can be rejected.

Model 2 is not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 8.226$ ,  $p = 0.084 > 0.001$ , suggesting that the model could not distinguish between those who did and those who did not vote for the conservative party. The model explained between 6.1% (Cox and Snell R square) and 8.3% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance of the dependent variable and correctly classified 63.8% of the cases. Table 1 shows that only age was statistically significant:  $p = 0.009 < 0.01$ . The odds ratio is 1.756, suggesting that people in the subjective upper class are 1.756 times more likely to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues nationally salient (See appendix, figure C4) (holding all else constant). Meaning that the salience coefficient is positive, as H2 expected. Nevertheless, since the effects of issue salience on vote choice are not statistically significant, and the model itself is not statistically significant, the second hypothesis can also be rejected.

Model 3 predicts vote choice based on subjective social classes combined with issue saliency plus the control variables and a moderator variable (social class \* issue salience). Model 3 is statistically significant,  $\chi^2(6) = 38.731$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ , suggesting that the model can distinguish between those who did and those who did not vote for the conservative party. The model explained between 10.2% (Cox and Snell R square) and 13.7% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance of the dependent variable and correctly classified 66.3% of the cases. Table 1 shows that only age was statistically significant:  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ . The same as models 1 and 2. The odds ratio for the created moderator variable is 2.299, suggesting that people in both subjective social classes are 2.299 times more likely to vote for the conservative party when they find economic issues nationally salient (holding all else constant). Meaning that the salience coefficient is positive, yet it is not significant. Rejecting the hypotheses that national issue salience influences the correlation between subjective social class and vote choice in the UK based upon the data in this research.

**Table 1. Logistic regression analysis of the probability of voting for the conservative party**

	<b>Model 1 (Lower)</b>	<b>Model 2 (Middle/upper)</b>	<b>Model 3 (both)</b>
(Constant)	0,000*** (0.728)	0.233 (0.782)	0,000*** (0.531)
Issue saliency (economic)	0,278 (0.352)	0.249 (0.381)	0,328 (0.341)
Social class * issue salience			0.161 (0.594)
Age	0.001** (0.009)	0.009** (0.011)	0.000*** (0.007)
Gender (Male)	0.068 (0.288)	0.869 (0.381)	0.221 (0.227)

Ethnicity (Native)	0.002** (0.581)	0.536 (0.637)	0.023 (0.380)
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-2LL	281.432	165.007	455.531
Cox and Snell's R <sup>2</sup>	0.145	0.061	0.102
Nagelkerke 's R <sup>2</sup>	0.194	0.083	0.137
N	229	130	359

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*Note: binary logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.*

\*\*\* p < 0.001, \*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05

### *Discussion*

The interaction terms of social class on vote choice were statistically significant in models 1 and 3. This data and research suggest that social class is a valid predictor for vote choice in the UK. However, this is mainly due to the effects of the lower class since model 2 is statistically insignificant. Nonetheless, issue salience was statistically insignificant in all three models. Therefore, the notion that subjective social classes base their vote choice on what national issues they find salient is rejected. In practice, the vote choice of social classes is thus not dependent on national issue salience. It is only predicted through age and the lower social class. The likelihood of voting for the Conservative party increases with age (Jeffery et al., 2022), and people who are not in the lower classes are less likely to subjectively place themselves in the middle/upper class. People in the middle/upper class might not have answered the question, which might have resulted in the insignificant outcomes in this analysis.

Existing studies find that issue salience predicts vote choice (for instance, Bélanger and Meguid, 2008), especially since specific cultural issues predict vote choice (See, for example, Carella and Ford, 2020). In this case, more people, as this study shows, find cultural issues nationally salient. However, it is not a statistically significant factor on which a

subjective social class decides whom to vote for. The findings suggest that the effects of the subjective lower class in British society on vote choice persist; however, they do not navigate the supply gap through national issue salience. Following this research, the decline of the effects of social class on vote choice might be due to the statistical insignificance of the social middle/upper class on vote choice and not due to ideologically divided classes.

### **Conclusion**

Social class has long been considered an essential predictor of vote choice, with people in different social classes typically aligning with certain political parties and ideologies. However, recent research has shown that the relationship between social class and vote choice has become more complex in recent decades due to a changing supply and demand of policy by political parties (Evans & Tilly, 2011; Evans & Tilly 2012; Evans & Tilly 2022). The new complexity is likely due to changes in society, including increased prosperity and economic security, as well as the increasing salience of cultural issues such as immigration, multiculturalism, and globalization. As a result, scholars argued that people within subjective social classes may prioritize different issues when deciding which party to vote for. This thesis has tested the effects of social class on vote choice with national issue salience as a moderating factor.

The findings of this paper suggest that the lower, but not middle/upper, social class is still a significant predictor of vote choice within the United Kingdom. However, based on this research, social classes do not regard national issue salience as an important factor when making voting choices. The analysis finds no significant increases or decreases in the interaction between social classes and vote choice.

There are some limitations to this research. Issue salience, for example, can be easily affected by exogenous events over time and the data collection had to be postponed due to the

intervention of Covid-19. Therefore, the answers that respondents gave might not be the same as the answers that they would have given if the data was collected closer to the time of voting. Moreover, people in the objective middle/upper class might be less likely to subjectively place themselves in the middle/upper when they are asked if they belong in it. Resulting in data with more people in the lower class than the middle/upper class.

Nonetheless, the thesis contributes to the literature on social classes. It found that national issue salience is not moderating the effects between social class and vote choice, at least in the UK. Future research should analyse the effects of personal issue salience as a moderator. This could provide some useful insights.

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**Appendix A**

**Descriptive statistics of raw and recoded dependent and independent variables**

Figure A1. Vote choice in the general election of 2019.

		<b>2019 General Election vote</b>			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Prefer not to say/Refuse	164	4,2	5,2	5,2
	Don't know	27	,7	,9	6,1
	Labour Party	895	22,7	28,6	34,7
	Conservative Party	1348	34,2	43,1	77,8
	Liberal Democrats	384	9,7	12,3	90,0
	Scottish National Party	125	3,2	4,0	94,0
	Plaid Cymru	16	,4	,5	94,5
	Green Party	98	2,5	3,1	97,7
	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	2	,1	,1	97,7
	Brexit Party	43	1,1	1,4	99,1
	Other	10	,3	,3	99,4
	An independent candidate	4	,1	,1	99,6
	Specified name- no party mentioned	7	,2	,2	99,8
	Spoilt ballot paper	7	,2	,2	100,0
	Total	3130	79,3	100,0	
Missing	System	816	20,7		
Total		3946	100,0		

Figure A2. Recoded vote choice in the general election of 2019.

		<b>Recorded vote choice at general election</b>			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	labour party	895	22,7	30,6	30,6
	conservative party	1348	34,2	46,1	76,7
	other party	682	17,3	23,3	100,0
	Total	2925	74,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1021	25,9		
Total		3946	100,0		

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Party	Recorded into
Prefer not to say/refuse, don't know, specified name but no party, spoilt ballot paper, all other parties = missing values.	Missing values
Labour party	0 = Labour party
Conservative party	1 = Conservative party

Figure A3. Subjective social class

**Subjective class**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not stated	1	,0	,0	,0
	Don't know	105	2,7	2,7	2,7
	Yes, middle class	1043	26,4	26,4	29,1
	Yes, working class	1720	43,6	43,6	72,7
	Yes, other	10	,3	,3	73,0
	No	1012	25,6	25,6	98,6
	In between / between working and middle class	13	,3	,3	98,9
	Lower / under class	16	,4	,4	99,3
	Lower middle class	12	,3	,3	99,6
	No answer / class not specified	14	,4	,4	100,0
	Total	3946	100,0	100,0	

Figure A4: Recoded subjective social class.

**Subjective social class**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lower class	1736	44,0	62,2	62,2
	Middle/upper class	1055	26,7	37,8	100,0
	Total	2791	70,7	100,0	

Missing	System	1155	29,3	
Total		3946	100,0	

Subjective social class:	Recorded into:
Not stated, yess other, no answer	Missing values
Lower class, working class	0 lower class
Middle class, lower middle class	1 middle class
No class identification, don't know	3 no class identification

Figure A5. Most important issue.

		Most important issue (coded)			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pensions/ageing	19	,5	,9	,9
	Brexit / leaving the EU / what happens after Brexit	639	16,2	31,1	32,0
	Climate change / global warming / environment	152	3,9	7,4	39,4
	Living costs	9	,2	,4	39,8
	Covid-19 / coronavirus	95	2,4	4,6	44,4
	Crime / law and order / violence / vandalism / anti-social behaviour	97	2,5	4,7	49,1
	Defence	3	,1	,1	49,3
	Societal Divides	35	,9	1,7	51,0
	Education	25	,6	1,2	52,2
	Finances	11	,3	,5	52,7
	Flooding / sea defences	3	,1	,1	52,9
	Funding / underfunding	15	,4	,7	53,6
	Future of young people	6	,2	,3	53,9
	Housing / homelessness	50	1,3	2,4	56,3
	Economic consequences of Brexit	60	1,5	2,9	59,3
	Immigration	100	2,5	4,9	64,1
	Inequality	37	,9	1,8	65,9
	Instability / uncertainty	14	,4	,7	66,6

	Foreign affairs	11	,3	,5	67,1
	Unemployment	33	,8	1,6	68,7
	Transport / infrastructure	11	,3	,5	69,3
	Money going to foreign countries / foreign aid	4	,1	,2	69,5
	Morals	14	,4	,7	70,2
	Health	210	5,3	10,2	80,4
	Overpopulation	20	,5	1,0	81,3
	Social security / benefits	13	,3	,6	82,0
	Policing	11	,3	,5	82,5
	Politics / the government / lack of trust in the government	105	2,7	5,1	87,6
	Pollution / waste / litter	3	,1	,1	87,7
	Poverty	48	1,2	2,3	90,1
	Racism / discrimination	6	,2	,3	90,4
	Scottish independence	9	,2	,4	90,8
	Security	5	,1	,2	91,1
	Social care	11	,3	,5	91,6
	Taxation	3	,1	,1	91,7
	Technology / the Internet	3	,1	,1	91,9
	Terrorism	11	,3	,5	92,4
	Economy - general	53	1,3	2,6	95,0
	The Royal Family	5	,1	,2	95,2
	Other	70	1,8	3,4	98,6
	None / no issue	11	,3	,5	99,2
	Don't know	5	,1	,2	99,4
	No answer	4	,1	,2	99,6
	War	4	,1	,2	99,8
	Welfare	2	,1	,1	99,9
	Austerity	2	,1	,1	100,0
	Total	2057	52,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1889	47,9		
Total		3946	100,0		

Figure A6: most important problem recoded into issue saliency

**Issue saliency**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economic saliency	352	8,9	22,1	22,1
	Cultural saliency	1241	31,4	77,9	100,0
	Total	1593	40,4	100,0	
Missing	System	2353	59,6		
Total		3946	100,0		

Most important problem	Recorded into:
Don't know, no answer, covid-19, defense, flooding/sea defense, foreign affairs, transport/infrastructure, health, overpopulation, Pollution / waste / litter, Scottish independence, Technology/ the internet, War, Austerity, other.	Missing values
Pensions/aging, living costs, education, finances, funding/underfunding, housing/homelessness, economic consequences of Brexit, inequality, unemployment, social security / benefits, Poverty, Social care, Taxation, Economy in general, Welfare.	Economic saliency = 0
Brexit/leaving the EU, crime / law and order / violence/ vandalism/ anti-social behavior, societal divides, future of young people, immigration, instability / uncertainty, money going to foreign countries, morals, policing, politics/lack of trust, Racism / discrimination, Security, Terrorism, The royal family, Global warming/climate change.	Cultural saliency = 1

Figure A7. Do any of the parties represent your views reasonably well?

**Do any of the parties in Britain represent your views reasonably well?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not stated	13	,3	,5	,5
	Don't know	491	12,4	19,4	19,9
	Yes	1150	29,1	45,3	65,2
	No	883	22,4	34,8	100,0



Total	2537	64,3	100,0
Missing System	1409	35,7	
Total	3946	100,0	

### Appendix B

#### Coding and measurements details of control variables + logistic regression assumption check

Table B1. Control variables

Control variable	Values	description
<b>Age</b>	Scale variable	This variable is not recoded.
<b>Sex</b>	0 = "Male" 1 = "Female"	This variable was recoded from 1 = "Male", 2 = "Female".
<b>Ethnicity</b>	0 = native 1 = non-native	Natives are people with English, Welsh, Scottish, and northern Irish background. Any other is considered as having a different ethnicity. "Prefer not to say" and "not stated" are missing values.

Figure B2. Multicollinearity check: no multicollinearity

		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Issue saliency	,990	1,010
	Subjective social class	,995	1,005
	Gender	,996	1,004
	Ethnicity	,990	1,010

a. Dependent Variable: Vote choice

**Appendix C**

Figure C1. Crosstabulation with filter for only voting behavior of the lower class by saliency

**Subjective social class \* Vote choice \* Issue saliency Crosstabulation**

Count

Issue saliency			Vote choice		Total
			Labour party	Conservative party	
Economic saliency	Subjective social class	Lower class	59	41	100
	Total		59	41	100
cultural saliency	Subjective social class	Lower class	129	158	287
	Total		129	158	287
Total	Subjective social class	Lower class	188	199	387
	Total		188	199	387

Figure C2. Crosstabulation with filter for only voting behavior of the middle/upper class by saliency.

**Subjective social class \* Vote choice \* Issue saliency Crosstabulation**

Issue saliency			Vote choice		Total
			Labour party	Conservative party	
Economic saliency	Subjective social class	Middle class	17	36	53
	Total		17	36	53
cultural saliency	Subjective social class	Middle class	65	103	168
	Total		65	103	168
Total	Subjective social class	Middle class	82	139	221
	Total		82	139	221

Figure C3. Chi-square and significance of models 1, 2 and 3

**Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients for model 1**

	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1 Step	35,921	4	,000
Block	35,921	4	,000
Model	35,921	4	,000

**Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients for model 2**

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	8,226	4	,084
	Block	8,226	4	,084
	Model	8,226	4	,084

**Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients of model 3**

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	38,731	6	,000
	Block	38,731	6	,000
	Model	38,731	6	,000

Figure C4. Odds ratio as Exp (B) for models 1, 2 and 3

**Variables in the Equation of model 1**

		B	SE.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for B	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Issue saliency(1)	-,382	,352	1,175	1	,278	,683	,343	
	Gender(1)	,525	,288	3,321	1	,068	1,691	,961	
	Ethnicity(1)	1,792	,581	9,498	1	,002	6,001	1,920	
	Age	,029	,009	10,628	1	,001	1,029	1,012	
	Constant	-3,331	,728	20,923	1	,000	,036		

a. variable (s) entered on step 1: Issue saliency, Gender, Ethnicity, Age.

**Variables in the Equation of model 2**

		B	SE.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for B	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Issue saliency(1)	,563	,489	1,328	1	,249	1,756	,674	
	Gender(1)	-,063	,381	,027	1	,869	,939	,445	
	Ethnicity(1)	-,394	,637	,382	1	,536	,674	,194	
	Age	,029	,011	6,918	1	,009	1,029	1,007	
	Constant	-,932	,782	1,420	1	,233	,394		

a. variable (s) entered on step 1: Issue saliency, Gender, Ethnicity, Age.

**Variables in the Equation of model 3**

		B	SE.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for B	
								Lower	Upper

Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Subjective social class(1)	-,975	,534	3,331	1	,068	,377
	Issue saliency(1)	-,334	,341	,958	1	,328	,716
	Moderator social class*issuesalience(1)	,833	,594	1,967	1	,161	2,299
	Age	,028	,007	17,252	1	,000	1,029
	Gender(1)	,278	,227	1,500	1	,221	1,320
	Ethnicity(1)	,864	,380	5,153	1	,023	2,372
	Constant	-2,178	,531	16,850	1	,000	,113

a. variable (s) entered on step 1: Subjective social class, Issue saliency, Moderator social class\*issuesalience, Age, Gender, Ethnicity