The Missing Link: Network Influences on Class Divides in Political Attitudes

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Abstract

Previous research provides a detailed picture of class differences in political attitudes. Less is however known about the social structures that enforce this political divide across social classes. This article contributes towards filling this gap by considering how the class profile of personal social networks influences political attitudes. We propose a general framework for incorporating an individual’s social network into class analysis of political preferences. Using Sweden as a case, we empirically evaluate our approach using a population survey with information about the respondents’ own employment situation, egocentric networks, and political attitudes in terms of redistribution and welfare chauvinism. We find that there is considerable class segregation in social networks as individuals tend to have more ties within their own and neighbouring class positions. Concerning political preferences, results show that: (i) a substantive part of the class–attitude relationship is shaped by a person’s social network; (ii) the class profile of networks influences attitudes over and above one’s own class position; (iii) class segregation in networks fortifies class divides in political attitudes. We thus conclude that social networks constitute a (hitherto) ‘missing link’ in class analysis of political preferences that merits careful consideration in theoretical models of contemporary politics.

Introduction

As substantial class divides in political attitudes persist, social class is of continuing political relevance among the general population (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Manza and Crowley, 2018; Lindh and McCall, 2020). Traditionally, sociological class analysis has discussed how class relations in the labour market and the workplace are reflected in personal social ties and contribute to social community and segregation beyond employment, and what the implications might be for class-based political mobilization (e.g. Goldthorpe et al., 1968; Wright, 1997). However, most research considers the micro-foundations of class politics only through the lens of an individual’s own employment situation. While this research provides indispensable insights, a sizable share of the relationship between class position and political outcomes remains ‘unexplained’ after accounting for the immediate employment situation. Consequently, some studies conclude by speculating that social networks might be the ‘missing link’ that can disentangle the relationship between social class and political preferences (Weakliem and Heath, 1994; Brooks and Svallfors, 2010; Langsæther and Evans, 2020). This article explores this proposition both theoretically and empirically using survey data.
Contemporary class politics is multidimensional: the political spectrum consists of two overarching ideological dimensions involving a socioeconomic and a sociocultural axis. We build upon the extensive literature that conceives the welfare state as the main arena of contemporary class struggle. Political divides in this domain largely centre on downward economic redistribution (Korpi and Palme, 2003), but there are also salient disputes concerning distributive ‘deservingness’ that tie in with sociocultural issues, such as conflicts around the social rights of immigrants (Beramendi et al., 2015; Bornschier et al., 2021).

We argue that paying attention to multidimensionality is important for the conceptualization of social class per se. In addition to the hierarchical distinction between more and less advantaged positions (e.g. managers/professionals versus workers), class segments can also be distinguished horizontally through qualitative dissimilarities in work content and experiences associated with the job. Our study integrates arguments suggesting that such horizontal class distinctions—in particular those between managers and sociocultural professionals—are important for mapping political divides in contemporary society (Hout, Brooks and Manza, 1995; Kriesi, 1998; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018).

We propose a general framework for incorporating an individual’s social network into class analysis of political preferences. Using Sweden as a case, we study the extent to which the relationship between own class position and political attitudes is shaped by personal social networks, and whether the class profile of the individual’s social network influences attitudes over and above one’s own class position. We also assess to what extent class segregation in social networks calibrates aggregate class divisions in political attitudes. We utilize a dataset containing egocentric network data using two well-established measurements: the position generator and the name generator. Using these instruments, we can measure the class position of friends, acquaintances, family, and relatives of the respondent.

While there is some previous research on the class–attitude relationship that incorporates the class position of one’s romantic partner and/or parents (e.g. Edlund, 2003; Häusermann, Kurer and Schwander, 2016; Jaime-Castillo and Marqués-Perales, 2019), we know of no prior research that considers how the class profile of one’s extended personal network influences political attitudes.

**State-of-the-Art: Social Class and Political Attitudes**

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to the study of social class in politics. The ‘top-down’ approach is macro-oriented and focuses on political mobilization by political parties or trade unions at the organizational level (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Korpi, 1983). The ‘bottom-up’ approach, on the other hand, is more micro-oriented and focuses on the relationship between social class and political preferences among a given group of individuals. While we recognize the general necessity of integrating these two approaches (Manza and Brooks, 1999; Bornschier, 2009; Evans and Tilley, 2017), we consider our ‘bottom-up’ approach to be an essential first step towards incorporating personal networks into comprehensive models of contemporary class politics.

While we acknowledge that personal networks might also influence voting behaviour (e.g. Nieuwbeerta and Flap, 2000; Andersen and Heath, 2002; Vanhoutte and Hooghe, 2013), our focus is on political attitudes. Although the ideological messages conveyed by political actors and organized interests might have some bearing on attitudes as well (Svallfors, 2006; Edlund and Lindh, 2015), an advantage of focusing on attitudes rather than on voting behaviour is that they are not a direct function of the messages offered by political parties and their candidates. In a (hypothetical) situation where the parties/candidates in an election do not compete on class-relevant issues, there is little reason to expect class differences in voting for these different parties/candidates (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Robison et al., 2021). Hence, studying attitudes is appropriate in assessing the political relevance of social class among the general population.

In Sweden and most other Western democracies, there has been considerable continuity in class divides in political attitudes throughout recent decades. This suggests that social class remains politically significant within the electorate on the demand-side of politics, and that signs of decline in class voting might be partly due to ideological convergence between parties/candidates concerning class-relevant issues on the supply-side of politics (Oskarson and Demker, 2015; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Robison et al., 2021).

There are longstanding sociological debates on how to conceptualize social class (Wright, 2005). Most class research on political preferences is anchored in the tradition that distinguishes class positions based on structural locations in production units and labour markets (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). The most basic distinction among employees is the hierarchical division between more and less advantaged employment relations. Compared to managers and professionals (commonly termed ‘the service class’), workers enjoy less advantaged positions in labour markets and employing
organizations, as they have jobs with lower wages, employment security, promotion prospects, and educational qualifications required (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Evans and Tilley, 2017). Moreover, in sociology, nominal class schemes have traditionally been preferred since they can identify horizontal class divisions. During the first half of the last century, an important horizontal distinction in industrialized countries was the one between farmers and industrial workers. More recently, the focus has shifted to new horizontal cleavages inherent to post-industrial labour markets and work organizations.

Here, we utilize a class scheme developed by Oesch (2006) to analyze class divisions in post-industrial societies. This scheme identifies three horizontal ‘work logics’ among employees: technical, organizational, and interpersonal. These three types of work differ in the setting of the work process, the relation to authority, and the type of skills required. Jobs that involve interpersonal and caring work tasks are oriented to the client and work largely outside the lines of command, while jobs in business and administration are located in a bureaucratic command structure that is oriented towards fiscal efficiency and the maintenance of the employing organization. Technical work is largely set following technical production parameters, with higher-grade jobs typically working outside the lines of command and lower-grade jobs often being subject to strong supervision as part of an explicit command structure (Oesch, 2006).

As outlined in Table 1, combining two hierarchal levels (derived from employment relations) with three horizontal distinctions (work logics) results in six different class positions among employees: production workers, service workers, clerical workers, technical professionals, sociocultural professionals, and managers and administrative professionals. In addition, as is common practice, Oesch (2006) separates the self-employed based on their qualitatively different position in employment relations. Due to data limitations outlined below (see Measurements section), we group together all self-employed in a seventh class position located in the bottom-right hand corner of Table 1.

Turning to political attitudes, we focus on preferences for downward redistribution (Korpi and Palme, 2003; Brooks and Svallfors, 2010). In addition, to capture class divisions concerning distributive ‘deservingness’ that tie in with sociocultural issues (Beramendi et al., 2015; Van Oorschot et al., 2017; Bornschier et al., 2021), we also study welfare chauvinism regarding the social rights of immigrants, that is the view that immigrants should not have the same access to public welfare programs and other public goods as ‘natives’ (Mewes and Mau, 2012; Reeskens and Van Oorschot, 2012).

What are the mechanisms that link class positions to political attitudes in each of these dimensions? Hierarchical inequalities in economic risks and resources between workers (less advantaged) and managers/professionals (more advantaged) raise expectations of political class struggle concerning economic redistribution.

### Table 1. Class scheme and expectations in relation to political attitudes

| Attitude             | Employment relations | Work logic                   | Employees | Employer/Self-employed |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
|                      |                      | More advantaged              |           |                         |
| Preferences for redistribution | Managers and admins | Technical professionals | Sociocultural professionals | Employers / Self-employed |
| Welfare chauvinism   | Low                  | Mixed                        | Mixed     | Low                     |
|                      | Mixed                | Mixed                        | Low       | Mixed                   |
|                      | Clerical workers     | Production workers           | Service workers | Self-employed |
| Preferences for redistribution | Mixed    | High                          | High      | Low                     |
| Welfare chauvinism   | Mixed                | High                          | Mixed     | High                    |

*We combine all self-employed and employers into the same class position (‘Self-employed’) due to data limitations (see Measurements section). Since there are few self-employed professionals in our dataset, our group of ‘Self-employed’ mostly consists of self-employed individuals active in less advantaged occupations, presumably in small firms with no or only a few employees.*
Berglund and Oskarson, 2013; Kitschelt and Rehm, argue that working conditions and experiences matter for political attitudes. At one end of the spectrum, close supervision and monotonous working conditions—typically associated with the working classes and the work situation of production workers in particular—are supposed to socialize individuals towards more conformist, non-inclusive, and authoritarian attitudes. At the other end of the spectrum, jobs with a lot of self-direction and autonomy—typically associated with professional positions—are supposed to trigger more socially inclusive attitudes, in particular in jobs that involve interpersonal or caring relations (Kohn, 1969; see also Bengtsson, Berglund and Oskarson, 2013; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Recent research on redistributive preferences has incorporated such socialization arguments: jobs that primarily put value on economic efficiency are supposed to foster opposition to redistribution, whereas jobs that involve non-hierarchical interaction with clients and/or care relations are supposed to transmit egalitarian values (Kriesi, 1998; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Such qualitative differences in type of work to some extent reflect horizontal differences in the field of education (Van de Werfhorst and de Graaf, 2004; Stubager, 2008).

Furthermore, Kohn (1969) was among the first to argue that working conditions and experiences matter for political attitudes. At one end of the spectrum, close supervision and monotonous working conditions—typically associated with the working classes and the work situation of production workers in particular—are supposed to socialize individuals towards more conformist, non-inclusive, and authoritarian attitudes. At the other end of the spectrum, jobs with a lot of self-direction and autonomy—typically associated with professional positions—are supposed to trigger more socially inclusive attitudes, in particular in jobs that involve interpersonal or caring relations (Kohn, 1969; see also Bengtsson, Berglund and Oskarson, 2013; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Recent research on redistributive preferences has incorporated such socialization arguments: jobs that primarily put value on economic efficiency are supposed to foster opposition to redistribution, whereas jobs that involve non-hierarchical interaction with clients and/or care relations are supposed to transmit egalitarian values (Kriesi, 1998; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Such qualitative differences in type of work to some extent reflect horizontal differences in the field of education (Van de Werfhorst and de Graaf, 2004; Stubager, 2008).

While we do not have space to delve into the detailed rationale for each of the seven class positions, Table 1 summarizes our expectations based on the aforementioned arguments and recent empirical research (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Evans and Tilley, 2017; Lindh and McCall, 2020). While ‘High’ and ‘Low’ denote straightforward expectations of above- or below-average attitudes, respectively, the label ‘Mixed’ indicates that theory and previous research are less clear-cut, raising expectations of attitudes that are closer to the population average.

**The Case for Social Networks**

The argument that social factors beyond employment relations deserve analytical attention in class analysis is certainly not new. Most notably, some scholars have considered informal social relations part of how social class is conceptualized (Bourdieu, 1987; Savage et al., 2013), while others argue for distinguishing social classes in part based on individuals’ sense of social belonging and/or collective identity (Weeden and Grusky, 2005). Both of these approaches have been criticized on theoretical as well as empirical grounds (Goldthorpe, 2002; Mills, 2014)—which might in part explain why most current class research on political preferences is restricted to employment-based explanations.

Here, we take a different stance. Rather than defining class positions through social ties and/or sense of collective identity/belonging, we follow the current state-of-the-art in class analysis of political preferences by distinguishing class positions based on structural locations in labour markets and production units, while regarding the question of how class positions are reflected in personal social networks as an empirical one (Svallfors, 2006: pp. 9–12).² That is, while we maintain that class differences in political attitudes are anchored in employment relations and the work situation, we argue that the class profile of personal networks calibrates political divides. This argument is based on two main building blocks: social influence and class segregation in networks.

First, the notion of social influence posits that individuals take impression from others and modify their attitudes accordingly. In this regard, most previous research emphasizes ‘positive’ influence due to exposure to convincing arguments, tastes for similarity, identity formation, social pressure, and/or spontaneous imitation. The outcome of such a positive influence is often that one becomes more similar to those in one’s social environment. Furthermore, research has also considered ‘negative’ influences, such as when individuals deliberately or impulsively distance themselves from others, although empirical support for such negative influence is mixed (Marsden and Friedkin, 1993; Mäs and Flache, 2013; DellaPosta, Shi and Macy, 2015; Flache et al., 2017).

Second, class segregation in networks can be expected given that homogeneity is one of the most established general findings in social network analysis and beyond (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). The first reason for this is that people are more prone to associate with similar others in terms of background and interests (Homans, 1950). The second reason is that interaction opportunities are organized around workplaces, neighbourhoods, schools, and voluntary associations, and these interaction spaces tend to consist of people with similar backgrounds (Blau, 1977; Feld, 1981). These arguments are supported by studies...
showing that people with the same class position are more likely to form friendships (Wright and Cho, 1992; Bian et al., 2005). Therefore, we expect a considerable degree of class segregation in personal networks, meaning that people will tend to have more ties in their own—and to a lesser extent to their ‘neighbouring’—class position(s). We thus primarily expect people to have an above-average number of ties to others within their own class position, and secondarily to people in class positions with similar employment relations or work situations, while having a below-average number of ties to people in class positions without such employment-based structural connections.

The combination of these two phenomena—social influence and class segregation in networks—can have multiple implications for the class–attitude relationship, depending on the underlying processes. Here, we propose that ‘positive’ influence is predominant and that an individual’s attitudes will resemble the attitudes prevalent in the class positions in which they have social ties. Our expectations concerning class-specific social influence thus take the same form as our expectations for own class position (see Table 1). For example, because managers are expected to be more negative towards economic redistribution than the average individual, we also expect that having more social ties to managers is associated with below-average support for redistribution.

Although we find the theoretical mechanisms described quite plausible, it is important to note that the causal relationship between networks and political attitudes is complex, and, to some extent, inherently reflexive and self-reinforcing with two-way causality being an apparent issue. As noted above, people tend to befriend similar others and this also applies to political orientations (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987; Lazer et al., 2010; Vaisey and Lizardo, 2010). The probable co-evolution of network formation and political attitudes limits the possibility of interpreting cross-sectional associations between network ties and attitudes as exogenous causal effects. Nevertheless, we regard the examination of whether personal networks are related to political attitudes—and whether this can account for the class–attitude link—as an important first step that has substantive analytical value in its own right.

The Context of Sweden

Sweden has been used as a case in previous research on the class–attitude link (e.g. Brooks and Svallfors, 2010; Bengtsson, Berglund and Oskarson, 2013). In tandem with the country’s distinguished history of strong class mobilization via organized interests and political parties, the relationship between class position and political preferences is traditionally stronger in Sweden than in most other rich democracies (Korpi, 1983; Svallfors, 2006; Edlund and Lindh, 2015). At the same time, recent studies emphasize ongoing political realignment in the wake of the politicization of immigration and the electoral success of the radical right (the Sweden Democrats) (Oskarson and Demker, 2015; Rydgren and Van der Meiden, 2019). Taken together, this makes the Swedish context useful for taking the temperature of contemporary class politics in post-industrial welfare states.

Our theoretical framework incorporates basic stratification mechanisms that we believe are relevant to post-industrial economies in general. We thus expect basic patterns of class segregation in networks to be mostly similar across countries (Wright and Cho, 1992). Nonetheless, national context might calibrate the strength of class segregation in social networks to some extent. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Sweden is, among other things, characterized by relatively flat work organization and low levels of wage inequality (Edlund and Grönlund, 2010; le Grand and Tåhlin, 2013), which could possibly have some bearing on the social distance between class positions.

Data

We utilize the ‘Xenophobia survey’ designed by Rydgren at Stockholm University and collected by Statistics Sweden. The survey uses telephone interviews with a random sample of adults registered as residents in Sweden, conducted between November 2013 and February 2014, with a response rate of about 50 per cent. Respondents are representative of the population concerning gender, but individuals with higher education are slightly over-represented among respondents. These patterns resemble those of similar surveys (e.g., Svallfors, 2011). The survey is matched to administrative register data with information on sociodemographic characteristics.

Our analytical sample is delimited to individuals in the working-age population who currently have a job or own a firm (n = 1,475), because the survey did not ask for the occupation of people not currently employed. Supplementary Table SA1 shows descriptive statistics for our analytical sample.

Measurements

Political Attitudes

We constructed two additive indices based on ordinal Likert-type items with five response alternatives:
‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Neither agree nor disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly disagree’. To cover preferences for redistribution, we use two separate items on whether (i) ‘Income differences should be reduced’ and (ii) ‘It is the government’s responsibility to make sure that everyone who wants a job gets one’. Government responsibility is explicitly mentioned in item (ii) but not in item (i), which is probably why the correlation between the two items is rather low ($r = .25$). To measure welfare chauvinism, we combine two items on whether (iii) ‘Native Swedes should come before immigrants when it comes to jobs, housing, and benefits’ and (iv) ‘The state should spend less money on helping immigrants’. The correlation between these two items is relatively strong ($r = .50$). For comparative purposes, we standardize both indices with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one (so-called ‘$z$-scores’). That preferences for redistribution and welfare chauvinism are two distinct attitude dimensions is confirmed by the lack of correlation ($r = .02$) between the two indices at the individual level.

Own Class Position
As already outlined in Table 1, we use a collapsed version of Oesch’s (2006) class scheme that distinguishes between six different class positions among employees: production workers, service workers, clerical workers, technical professionals, sociocultural professionals, and managers and administrative professionals. The standard way to obtain the class position of respondents is to use four-digit ISCO occupational codes (we use ISCO-08) combined with information on self-employment. The data at hand accounts for self-reported occupation, including information on self-employment only when the respondent reports this as his or her ‘occupation’. To compensate for the lack of information on self-employment in the survey, we also rely on register data on firm ownership (SCB, 2016). For two main reasons, we sort all self-reported and registered firm owners into a seventh class position. First, with regard to the class profile of personal networks (see below), we cannot differentiate between ties based on type of self-employment. Second, concerning one’s own position, we cannot differentiate between employers and self-employed without employees since our dataset does not include information on the number of subordinates (if any). Since there are few self-employed professionals in our dataset, our group of self-employed mostly consists of self-employed individuals active in less advantaged occupations, presumably in small firms with no or only a few employees. The sample distribution of the class scheme is shown in the Supplementary Table SA1.

We present the results on the relationship between one’s own class position and attitudes with weighted effect coding (instead of ‘regular’ dummy coding). Weighted effect coding implies that estimated attitudes for each class position are compared to the sample average (i.e. ‘average opinion’) rather than to a specific reference category, as is the case with regular dummy coding (Te Grotenhuis et al., 2017). We do this to make comparisons between results for own class position and personal networks more intuitive, although the substantive interpretation is the same regardless of the coding procedure used.

Lastly, to get an indicator of the overall magnitude of attitude differences between (own) class positions, we take the standard deviation of the seven regression coefficients (one for each class position)—the so-called ‘kappa’ ($\kappa$) measure. As common in previous research, we compare $\kappa$ between a baseline model and subsequent models with additional controls to assess if other covariates account for the baseline association between own class position and preferences (Hout, Brooks and Manza, 1995; Brooks and Svallfors, 2010). In this case, our hypothesis is that the class profile of the social network partly accounts for this relationship, a proposition supported if $\kappa$ decreases substantially when adding the network measures to the statistical model.

Class Profile of the Personal Network
Our analysis uses egocentric network measurements of the two main designs used in previous literature—the position generator and the name generator. The position generator asks respondents to state in which occupations or positions they know someone, based on a fixed list spanning the occupational structure (Lin and Dumin, 1986). In the survey at hand, the respondent is asked about whether they have a friend, acquaintance, family member, or relative in 36 occupational positions selected and assumed to represent the occupational structure. Table 2 shows the occupations included and the share of respondents with social ties in each occupation. The occupational positions are not very specific, and typically do not involve any information about employment status (i.e. employee or self-employed). However, assuming that these ties generally refer to employees (rather than self-employed individuals), the information provided is enough to sort these occupations into the seven class positions. Based on this categorization, we constructed seven class-specific measures that count how many ties the respondent has in each class position. In combination, these seven network measures can be used to assess the class profile of the
social network (Verhaeghe and Li, 2015). To account for the fact that the absolute number of occupational positions included varies between the seven class positions, we standardize the counts in each measure with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one (‘z-scores’). Still, network estimates might be less reliable for class positions (self-employed, technical professionals, and clerical workers) with relatively few occupations included in the position generator (Hällsten, Edling and Rydgren, 2015). Descriptive statistics in unstandardized form can be seen in the Supplementary Table SA1.

The name generator method elicits a name from the respondent based on a certain criterion, such as best friend or someone they can talk to (McCallister and Fischer, 1978). In the current study, respondents were asked about the (up to) five friends and acquaintances with whom they most often spend time or have contact with in their leisure time. This measure thus gets at relatively intimate/strong ties. Respondents were then asked about the characteristics of these friends, including their occupation. We code the occupations of the friends and acquaintances mentioned into the class scheme in the same way as the respondents’ own class positions, with the only difference that we do not have register-based information on self-employment.

Both the name and position generator instruments use the idea of sampling from the respondent’s social

### Table 2. List of occupations in the position generator

| Occupation                        | Class position              | Share with ties (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Insurance representative          | Managers and admins         | 26                  |
| School principal                  | Managers and admins         | 36                  |
| Finance manager                   | Managers and admins         | 36                  |
| Accountant                        | Managers and admins         | 44                  |
| Credit and loans officer          | Managers and admins         | 48                  |
| Lawyer                            | Managers and admins         | 50                  |
| Chief executive                   | Managers and admins         | 61                  |
| Commercial sales representative   | Managers and admins         | 73                  |
| Engineer                          | Technical professionals     | 67                  |
| Computer technician               | Technical professionals     | 70                  |
| Dentist                           | Sociocultural professionals | 34                  |
| Journalist                        | Sociocultural professionals | 40                  |
| Researcher                        | Sociocultural professionals | 44                  |
| Medical doctor                    | Sociocultural professionals | 56                  |
| Social work professional          | Sociocultural professionals | 57                  |
| Primary or secondary schoolteacher| Sociocultural professionals | 80                  |
| Mail carrier                      | Clerical workers            | 33                  |
| Receptionist                      | Clerical workers            | 34                  |
| Secretary                         | Clerical workers            | 44                  |
| Warehouse porter                  | Production workers          | 44                  |
| Truck driver                      | Production workers          | 58                  |
| Mechanic                          | Production workers          | 59                  |
| Plant or machine operator         | Production workers          | 60                  |
| Construction worker               | Production workers          | 70                  |
| Handyman                          | Production workers          | 78                  |
| Taxi driver                       | Service workers             | 34                  |
| Building caretaker                | Service workers             | 40                  |
| Waiter                            | Service workers             | 45                  |
| Cleaner                           | Service workers             | 46                  |
| Police officer                    | Service workers             | 51                  |
| Shop sales assistants             | Service workers             | 52                  |
| Cook                              | Service workers             | 55                  |
| Hairdresser                       | Service workers             | 57                  |
| Childcare worker                  | Service workers             | 60                  |
| Health care assistant             | Service workers             | 72                  |
| Self-employed with staff          | Self-employed               | 78                  |
network, but the two designs have different, complementary, strengths. The name generator samples from, and can thus elicit much information about, a specific part of the social network defined by the researcher, in this case intimate/strong friendship ties. The position generator, on the other hand, is neutral to the role and strength of ties, meaning that it in principle takes into consideration anyone who the respondent knows. However, validation tests of this instrument suggest that, in practice, the relationships that respondents tend to think about are friends and relatives with whom they have relations of medium strength, that is, not intimate but not very distant (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Molina et al., 2020). Although both of these measures have limitations in estimating the full size of the network, we consider them apt at capturing the general class profile of the respondent’s social network.

When it comes to political attitudes, an assumption in our main analysis is that having social ties in a certain class position has the same influence on attitudes regardless of the respondent’s own class position. We believe that this parsimonious model comes a long way in demonstrating the relevance of personal networks, but we do relax this assumption in subsequent analyses. That is, our main analysis does not include interaction effects, but we use the F-test to examine whether a model with interaction effects has a significantly better fit to the data.

Lastly, the purpose of using both network measurement instruments in our study is to provide a comprehensive test of the empirical relevance of our approach. However, we do not test specific hypotheses concerning differences between measurement techniques and the different aspects of networks that they might capture. For this reason, and because the overall findings concerning political attitudes turned out to be relatively similar for the two network measures, we save space and avoid repetition by only reporting results for the position generator in the main analysis, while the Supplementary Material provide the corresponding results for the name generator.

Other Covariates
Our analysis risks confusing network effects with individual- or contextual-level confounders that correlate with social network characteristics. For instance, social ties in some class positions might be more common in urban areas, while social ties in other class positions might be more common in rural areas. Meanwhile, place of residence might also have an independent effect on attitudes (Maxwell, 2019). We can do quite a lot to mitigate demographic and socioeconomic confounders. All models include sociodemographic controls for age, gender, and immigration background (whether the respondent and/or both parents were born abroad). In addition, we report models controlling for education, income, and place of residence. Our measurement of education covers both the level (number of years in education) and field of education (technical, sociocultural, managerial, or ‘other’) acquired from administrative registers (SCB, 2016). We cover income with a linear measure of individual earnings acquired from tax registers. For place of residence, data on the municipal respondents are registered in are used, distinguishing between three different nominal categories: ‘larger city’, ‘small city/suburb’, and ‘rural area’ (SKL, 2011). Given the complex relationship between class position and factors such as education, income, and place of residence, it might be difficult to substantively interpret the estimates of own class position in models where these covariates are included. However, we enter these additional controls mainly to provide a stronger robustness test for the network estimates.

Lastly, to ascertain that our network measures capture something more than the influence of close family, we also include controls for the class positions of the respondent’s mother, father, and romantic partner (if any). This is measured in the same way as own class position, except that we do not have information on self-employment. In addition, we sort parents/partners without a history of paid work into a residual category for each variable. However, a set of individual- and context-level characteristics, such as workplace conditions, cultural capital, and personality, remain unobserved.

Results
Class Segregation in Social Networks
Figure 1 presents the class profile of social networks by own class position. Based on multivariate regression analysis, the figure shows the estimated number of ties by the respondent’s own class position, both overall and in each class position (both expressed as z-scores), controlling for gender, immigration background, and age. While there are few class differences in the overall number of ties, we find substantial differences in the composition of networks, showing three main patterns. First, there is a rather strong tendency to have above-average ties with others in the same class position. Second, there is some hierarchical segregation: managers and professionals have somewhat less contact with workers, with a mirroring pattern from the perspective of workers.
Third, there is some indication of horizontal segregation among employees based on type of work (work logic). To test this formally, we make 12 pairwise comparisons/tests for the hypothesis that cross-class ties are more common between hierarchically distinct positions with the same work logic than between positions that are both hierarchically and horizontally divided. Eight of these pairwise comparisons are in the expected direction, of which four are statistically significant ($P < .05$). Compared to technical professionals, sociocultural professionals have slightly more ties to service workers. Similarly, service workers have significantly more ties to sociocultural professionals than production workers do. Finally, clerical workers are more likely than both service and production workers to have ties to managers and administrative professionals. Taken together, this gives mixed support for the expectation of above-average ties within work logics. Nevertheless, our overall interpretation is that social distance tends to be larger between class positions that cross both hierarchical and horizontal divisions, which is especially apparent for the large gulf between sociocultural professionals and production workers. However, descriptive statistics (see Supplementary Table SA1) show that crosscutting social ties are also frequent: the average respondent has ties to more than half of the occupations listed in Table 2. In addition, none of the predictions by own class position are more than one-half standard deviation from the average (see Figure 1). People thus tend to have ties also in other class positions than their own.

These overall patterns also appear in corresponding analyses based on the name generator, even though the name generator shows a stronger tendency of above-average ties within one’s own class position (see Supplementary Figure SA1). It goes beyond the scope of this article to sort out if this discrepancy between measurements is substantive or more of a methodological artefact tied to technical differences between the two instruments.

### Preferences for Redistribution

We now turn to the multivariate analysis of political attitudes. Table 3 displays the respective influence of own class position and the class profile of one’s social network on preferences for redistribution. Model 1 only includes the respondent’s own class position and sociodemographic controls (age, gender, and immigration background). Because we use weighted effect coding, the regression coefficients for each (own) class position show estimated attitudes compared to ‘average opinion’ in the analytical sample. The significance tests thus say whether the estimated attitude for each class position is different from ‘average opinion’ in statistically significant terms. The results suggest that attitudes vary substantively between (own) class positions: the difference between those with the highest (service workers, $b = .205$)
and the lowest (managers and admins, $b = -.301$) support for redistribution is .506 standard deviations. Furthermore, when it comes to estimates for specific positions, overall results correspond well to our theoretical expectations (see Table 1). Managers and administrative professionals as well as the self-employed have significantly lower support for redistribution than average, while service and production workers express attitudes towards redistribution that are significantly more positive than average.

Table 3. Preferences for redistribution by own class position and class profile of the social network (position generator). OLS regression analysis.

| Own class position | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Managers and admins | -0.301*** | 0.053   | -0.220*** | 0.055   | -0.173** | 0.058   | -0.133*  | 0.058   | -0.129*  | 0.059   |
| Technical professionals | -0.144** | 0.068   | -0.113   | 0.068   | -0.046   | 0.075   | -0.036   | 0.075   | -0.037   | 0.077   |
| Sociocultural professionals | 0.178**  | 0.059   | 0.147*   | 0.060   | 0.174**  | 0.069   | 0.152**  | 0.069   | 0.141**  | 0.069   |
| Clerical workers     | 0.078    | 0.096   | 0.071*   | 0.096   | 0.047    | 0.098   | 0.037    | 0.098   | 0.042    | 0.099   |
| Production workers   | 0.123    | 0.063   | 0.086    | 0.065   | 0.069    | 0.068   | 0.055    | 0.068   | 0.053    | 0.069   |
| Service workers      | 0.205*** | 0.054   | 0.126**  | 0.055   | 0.113**  | 0.057   | 0.063    | 0.058   | 0.055    | 0.058   |
| Self-employed        | -0.179*  | 0.080   | -0.102   | 0.080   | -0.248*** | 0.081   | -0.174** | 0.082   | -0.149   | 0.083   |

Class profile of the social network

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Managers and admins | -0.140*** | 0.033   | -0.120*** | 0.034   | -0.109** | 0.034   |
| Technical professionals | -0.067*  | 0.029   | -0.054   | 0.030   | -0.057   | 0.030   |
| Sociocultural professionals | 0.021    | 0.031   | 0.030    | 0.032   | 0.034    | 0.032   |
| Clerical workers     | 0.012    | 0.030   | 0.011    | 0.030   | 0.009    | 0.030   |
| Production workers   | -0.081*  | 0.033   | -0.084   | 0.034   | -0.090** | 0.035   |
| Service workers      | 0.125*** | 0.035   | 0.103**  | 0.035   | 0.095**  | 0.036   |
| Self-Employed        | -0.047   | 0.027   | -0.047   | 0.027   | -0.045   | 0.027   |

Income

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Earnings            | -0.159*** | 0.031   | -0.134*** | 0.031   | -0.134*** | 0.032   |

Education level

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Years of education  | -0.065  | 0.036   | -0.062  | 0.037   | -0.054  | 0.038   |

Education field

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Management field    | -0.073  | 0.066   | -0.032  | 0.066   | -0.027  | 0.067   |
| Technical field     | -0.018  | 0.053   | -0.018  | 0.053   | -0.014  | 0.053   |
| Sociocultural field | 0.070   | 0.048   | 0.050   | 0.048   | 0.043   | 0.048   |
| Other field         | -0.023  | 0.047   | -0.022  | 0.047   | -0.019  | 0.048   |

Place of residence

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| Larger city        | 0.040   | 0.051   | 0.025   | 0.053   | 0.034   | 0.054   |
| Medium city or suburb | -0.006  | 0.026   | -0.004  | 0.026   | -0.002  | 0.026   |
| Rural              | -0.014  | 0.039   | -0.008  | 0.040   | -0.016  | 0.040   |

Constant

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| 1.423              | 1.423   | 1.423   | 1.423   | 1.423   | 1.423   |
| 0.086              | 0.115   | 0.109   | 0.131   | 0.141   |
| 0.184              | 0.132   | 0.143   | 0.107   | 0.098   |

Prob > F (compared to model 1)

|                     | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                     | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    | $b$     | S.E.    |
| 0.000              | 0.000   | 0.000   | 0.000   | 0.000   |

*Weighted effect coding

**z-score coding

***p < 0.001,

**p < 0.01,

*p < 0.05

The dependent variable is standardized (z-score). Socio-demographic controls consist of gender, age, age$^2$, and immigration background. Family class includes the class position of mother, father, and partner (if any) coded into three separate variables.
Turning to social networks, Model 2 reveals associations between attitudes and the class profile of the network. For example, more ties with service workers are associated with stronger support while more ties to managers and administrators are associated with lower support for redistribution, which is in line with expectations. In addition, there is a negative and significant association between ties to production workers and support for redistribution, which is not in line with expectations.

Comparing results between models is informative of how the class profiles of the social networks matter. First, differences between (own) class positions are reduced when adding the network measures to the model, suggesting that personal networks partly account for the relationship between class position and preferences for redistribution. As described previously, a method for assessing this systematically is to compare $\kappa$ between models. In this case, comparing Model 1 and Model 2, the network measures account for 28 per cent of the baseline attitude differences between class positions. Moreover, the overall increase in explained variance ($R^2$) suggests that the class profile of the network enhances predictive power over and above own class position. Moreover, the $F$-test ($P = .00$) suggests that Model 2 has a significantly better fit to the data than Model 1.

Setting networks aside for a moment, Model 3 tests for the impact of income, education, and place of residence. Results show that higher income has substantive negative impact on support for redistribution, whereas neither education nor place of residence is associated with attitudes. The coefficients for own class position are reduced, suggesting that income to some extent accounts for the relationship between own class position and preferences for redistribution ($\kappa$ is about 22 per cent lower in Model 3 than in Model 1).

Model 4 includes both the network measures and the other main covariates. The respective estimates for networks and income remain mostly intact. Moreover, the estimates for own class position are further reduced, with $\kappa$-comparisons suggesting that income and networks together account for about 42 per cent of the link between own class position and preferences for redistribution. Thus, while there is some overlap with income, there is little reason to suspect that the demonstrated significance of networks is due to confounders related to individuals’ own socioeconomic locations in the broader stratification order.

Lastly, Model 5 introduces controls for family class, including separate variables for the class position of each parent and one’s romantic partner (if any). While adding these variables slightly increases explained variance and captures a few additional percent of baseline attitude differences between (own) class positions, the network coefficients remain substantively the same, suggesting that our network estimates capture something more than the social influence of one’s family ties.

Welfare Chauvinism

As can be seen in Table 4, similarly to preferences for redistribution, Model 1 shows that there are substantive class differences in welfare chauvinism. The difference in point estimates between those with the most (production workers, $b = .471$) and the least (sociocultural professionals, $b = -.351$) chauvinism is .822 standard deviations. Moreover, estimates for specific positions fit relatively well with expectations: sociocultural professionals have significantly more inclusive views, while production workers and the self-employed have significantly more chauvinistic attitudes than average.

Turning to Model 2, the results show that attitudes are also associated with the class profile of the network. For example, more ties to production and/or service workers are associated with more chauvinism while more ties with sociocultural professionals are associated with more inclusive attitudes. The comparison of $\kappa$ between Models 1 and 2 suggests that the network measures account for 26 per cent of the baseline association between own class position and welfare chauvinism. In addition, the substantive increase in explained variance ($R^2$) suggests that the class profile of the network has standalone predictive power, thus accounting for some of the variation in welfare chauvinism between individuals in the same class position. The $F$-test ($P = .00$) also suggests that Model 2 is preferable to Model 1.

Model 3 introduces the other covariates while leaving out networks. The results suggest that these attitudes have more to do with level and field of education than with income. In addition to higher education decreasing chauvinism, we find that those with a technical education are somewhat more, and those with a sociocultural education somewhat less, chauvinist than the average. Place of residence is also significantly related to attitudes, as those living in smaller cities and rural areas appear to be less inclusive, while those living in a larger city seem to be somewhat more inclusive than the average. The comparison of $\kappa$ suggests that the covariates in Model 3 account for about 45 per cent of the relationship between own class position and welfare chauvinism.

Model 4 reintroduces the network measures. Just as with preferences for redistribution, the network estimates stay mostly the same when controlling for additional covariates, even though the estimate for ties to...
While both level and field of education remain significant predictors, place of residence turns statistically insignificant when controlling for personal networks. The reduction in \( \kappa \) indicates that networks and other covariates together account for about 50 per cent of the association between own class position and welfare chauvinism. Controlling for the class position of close family and kin does not change our main results (see Model 5).

Table 4. Welfare chauvinism by own class position and class profile of the social network (position generator). OLS regression analysis.

| Own class position\(^a\)          | Model 1                      | Model 2                      | Model 3                      | Model 4                      | Model 5                      |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Managers and admins              | -0.225*** 0.053             | -0.137* 0.054              | -0.124* 0.057              | -0.093 0.057                | -0.086 0.057                |
| Technical professionals          | -0.196*** 0.068             | -0.128* 0.067              | -0.150* 0.074              | -0.137 0.074                | -0.127 0.075                |
| Sociocultural professionals      | -0.351*** 0.059             | -0.234*** 0.059            | -0.092 0.068               | -0.068 0.067                | -0.056 0.068                |
| Clerical workers                 | -0.070 0.096                | -0.123 0.094               | -0.155 0.097               | -0.165 0.095                | -0.172 0.096                |
| Production workers               | 0.471*** 0.063              | 0.320*** 0.064             | 0.244*** 0.067             | 0.201** 0.067               | 0.192** 0.067               |
| Service workers                  | 0.183*** 0.054              | 0.094 0.054                | 0.075 0.056                | 0.048 0.056                 | 0.026 0.057                 |
| Self-employed                    | 0.187* 0.080                | 0.191* 0.079               | 0.142 0.080                | 0.156 0.080                 | 0.172* 0.081                |

| Class profile of the social network\(^b\) | Model 1                      | Model 2                      | Model 3                      | Model 4                      | Model 5                      |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Managers and admins                        | 0.033 0.033                 | 0.029 0.033                 | 0.028 0.034                 | 0.029 0.034                 | 0.029 0.034                 |
| Technical professionals                    | -0.029 0.029                | -0.018 0.029                | -0.019 0.029                | -0.019 0.029                | -0.019 0.029                |
| Sociocultural professionals               | -0.237*** 0.030             | -0.190*** 0.031            | -0.173*** 0.032            | -0.173*** 0.032            | -0.173*** 0.032            |
| Clerical workers                           | -0.005 0.029                | -0.013 0.029                | -0.010 0.029                | -0.010 0.029                | -0.010 0.029                |
| Production workers                         | 0.077 0.032                 | 0.049 0.033                 | 0.042 0.034                 | 0.042 0.034                 | 0.042 0.034                 |
| Service workers                            | 0.123*** 0.034              | 0.107** 0.035              | 0.102** 0.035              | 0.102** 0.035              | 0.102** 0.035              |
| Self-Employed                              | 0.002 0.026                 | 0.004 0.026                 | 0.006 0.026                 | 0.006 0.026                 | 0.006 0.026                 |

| Income\(^b\)                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Earnings                                  | 0.013 0.031                 | 0.014 0.030                 | 0.019 0.031                 | 0.019 0.031                 | 0.019 0.031                 |

| Education level\(^b\)                    |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Years of education                        | -0.238*** 0.036             | -0.160*** 0.037             | -0.152*** 0.037             | -0.152*** 0.037             | -0.152*** 0.037             |

| Education field\(^b\)                    |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Management field                          | -0.019 0.065                | -0.026 0.065                | -0.016 0.065                | -0.016 0.065                | -0.016 0.065                |
| Technical field                           | 0.144** 0.052               | 0.128* 0.051                | 0.112* 0.052                | 0.112* 0.052                | 0.112* 0.052                |
| Sociocultural field                       | -0.096* 0.047               | -0.093* 0.047               | 0.047 0.047                 | -0.083 0.047                | -0.083 0.047                |
| Other field                               | -0.005 0.047                | 0.007 0.046                 | 0.005 0.047                 | 0.004 0.047                 | 0.004 0.047                 |

| Place of residence\(^b\)                  |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Larger city                               | -0.140** 0.051              | -0.058 0.052                | -0.063 0.053                | -0.063 0.053                | -0.063 0.053                |
| Medium city or suburb                     | -0.004 0.026                | 0.001 0.023                 | 0.009 0.026                 | 0.009 0.026                 | 0.009 0.026                 |
| Rural                                     | 0.086* 0.038                | 0.032 0.039                 | 0.022 0.039                 | 0.022 0.039                 | 0.022 0.039                 |

| Constant                                  | 0.269 0.298                 | 0.204 0.292                 | 0.292 0.305                 | 0.305 0.302                 | 0.302 0.169                 |

| Sociodemographic controls                 |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Yes                                       |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| No                                        |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |

| Observations                              | 1,417                       | 1,417                       | 1,417                       | 1,417                       | 1,417                       |
| R-squared                                 | 0.091                       | 0.153                       | 0.142                       | 0.174                       | 0.186                       |

| Summary indicator own class position (\(\kappa\))  | 0.269                       | 0.198                       | 0.198                       | 0.134                       | 0.133                       |

| Prob > F (compared to model 1)              | 0.000                       | 0.000                       | 0.000                       | 0.000                       | 0.000                       |

\(^a\)Weighted effect coding  
\(^b\)\(z\)-scores  
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The dependent variable is standardized (\(z\)-score). Socio-demographic controls consist of gender, age, age\(^2\), and immigration background. Family class includes the class position of mother, father, and partner (if any) coded into three separate variables.
Correspondence Between Own Position and Social Network Ties

If a social influence mechanism was active, we might expect a congruence between how own position and social ties impact attitudes. That is, assuming that positive influence is the predominant pattern in our data, we would expect above-average social ties to a specific position to be associated with attitudes typical of that class position.

Figure 2 contains a scatter plot of the regression coefficients from the previous multivariate analysis (based on Model 2 in Tables 3 and 4), illustrating the level of correspondence between how own class position (y-axis) and class-specific social ties (x-axis) relate to attitudes. The correlation between the two estimates/axes is .75 for redistribution, .65 for welfare chauvinism, and .68 for the two dimensions combined. Through this analysis, a pattern in line with social influence becomes visible also for individual network coefficients that are not statistically significant, which might be because attitudes associated with these positions (e.g., clerical workers) do not diverge from average opinion (see y-axis). The Supplementary Material contain a corresponding Figure SA2 based on the name generator that reveals even stronger correlations (redistribution, .79; welfare chauvinism, .92; both combined, .82).

Thus far, we have assumed that the influence of social ties is independent of own class position. We relax this assumption by specifying an additional model (not included in the tables) for each dependent variable, containing interaction terms between own class position and the network measures (7 × 6 = 42 additional coefficients). Using Model 2 as the baseline for these comparisons, non-significant F-tests for both the position generator (redistribution, P = .94; chauvinism, P = .11) and the name generator (redistribution, P = .92; chauvinism, P = .60) suggest that the interaction model is not a significantly better fit to the data than the more restricted model used in our main analysis. While this does not necessarily mean that our parsimonious model is the ‘best’ one available, it provides some indication that it is a useful point of departure for analyzing these complex relationships through survey data.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article brings new knowledge on the political significance of social class among the general population. While previous research provides a detailed picture of prevailing class divides in political attitudes, knowledge
on the social structures that enforce this robust relationship is rather limited. We argued that a reason for this is that prior research has focused too one-sidedly on individualistic economic explanations, while disregarding how social factors beyond the direct employment situation might also influence political preferences.

We proposed a general framework for incorporating personal social networks into class analysis of political preferences. We built incrementally on the current state-of-the-art in the field by defining class positions based on employment relations and the work situation, while treating the question of the extent to which class positions reflect on social relations that extend beyond formal workplace organization as an empirical one. An advantage of this approach is that it does not rest on contested theoretical assumptions concerning subjective class identity and/or the actual cohesiveness of classes as social groups.

Using Sweden as a case, we provided an empirical assessment of the proposed framework based on two established egocentric network measurements (position and name generator). We found considerable class segregation in networks, as people tend to have more ties to others in their own class position. There was also hierarchical segregation as managers and professionals tend to have fewer ties to working class individuals, and vice versa. Moreover, we found some indications that social distance is larger between class positions that cross both hierarchical and horizontal employment-based boundaries, as most distinctively manifested in the social gulf between socio-cultural professionals and production workers.

Concerning political preferences, we found that the class profile of the social network both increases predictive power and accounts for a sizable share of the relationship between own class position and political attitudes in terms of preferences for redistribution and welfare chauvinism. Moreover, there was a congruence between how own class position and social ties relate to attitudes (see Figure 2). This indicated that a social influence mechanism is at work, whereby individuals tend to develop attitudes partly based on the class position of those with whom they are connected. In this regard, having ties with others in the same class position fortifies attitudes that correspond to one’s own structural location in the labour market and production units, while having social ties in other class positions makes one’s attitudes more typical of those structural locations.

Taken together, how do these concurrent network processes calibrate the strength of aggregate political divides across social classes? Empirically, we found that attitude differences between class positions diminish when controlling for the class profile of personal networks. This suggests that class divides in political attitudes are greater than they would be in a hypothetical situation without any class segregation in networks, that is if social ties were random across class positions.

We want to emphasize that this first attempt at probing this largely untapped subject is not without limitations. Most obviously perhaps, the observational and cross-sectional design of our empirical study did not allow us to assess the complex issue of causality. Furthermore, both theory and empirical findings suggested that a social influence mechanism operating via the class composition of networks is key, but we did not disentangle the finer details and mechanisms behind this intricate relationship. We thus look forward to future research that refines our arguments, for example by distinguishing between strong and weak ties, disentangling positive and negative influence, or by studying other types of political orientations (e.g. vote choice and/or sociopolitical identity, see note 2). Moreover, comparing countries with different political-institutional regimes would be one way to integrate our approach with ‘top-down’ approaches to the study of class politics.

We have argued and demonstrated empirically that accounting for social networks conveys a more complete understanding of the political significance of social class among the general population. While political divides are anchored in employment relations and work experiences, our results suggest that a substantive part of the class-attitude relationship is shaped by a person’s social network, and that the class profile of social networks influences attitudes over and above one’s own class position. In addition, our results suggest that class segregation in social networks fortifies aggregate class divides in political attitudes. We thus conclude that social networks constitute a (hitherto) ‘missing link’ in class analysis of political preferences that merits careful consideration in theoretical models of contemporary politics.

**Supplementary Data**

Supplementary data are available at ESR online.

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**Notes**

1 While Oesch (2006) distinguishes between three different work logics, his description suggests that the quality of each work logic—in terms of work
experience, relation to authority, and type of skills—differs substantially across different hierarchical/skill levels, and particularly so within the technical work logic.

2 While we use Oesch’s (2006) class scheme in our study, the general framework that we propose is also compatible with other class schemas derived from employment relations, such as the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) scheme (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). Moreover, we are not arguing that social identities and subjective group membership are irrelevant per se or unrelated to social class. To the contrary, while not the focus of this article, we consider it an important empirical question how one’s class position shapes social and political identities, with personal networks being a potential intervening factor (see, e.g. Bornschier et al., 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019). Our main point here is that class positions and social networks, respectively, are conceptually distinct from subjective identities and group membership.

3 For both network instruments, respondents were free to consider their romantic partner and/or parents. Based on the construction of the position generator in our survey, we cannot differentiate ties based on relationship type (family versus non-family, etc.). This is however possible for the name generator. As only about 20 per cent of the ties mentioned are to family members, this suggests that this measure mainly captures something other than within-family ties.

4 The two network measures behave very similarly with regard to welfare chauvinism. When it comes to redistribution, some network coefficients and the predictive power of the model as a whole are stronger in the position generator. Furthermore, for the name generator, adding the network measures does not significantly improve model fit (F-test, $P = .06$). Yet, the overall pattern of the relationship to attitudes is similar in the two network instruments (see Figure 2 and Supplementary Figure SA2).

5 We have also computed our main models with the level of education specified in categories (elementary, secondary, tertiary). These additional analyses suggest that the impact of the level of education on attitudes is relatively ‘linear’ in our dataset. Moreover, our results concerning the impact of one’s own class position and personal networks on attitudes are the same irrespective of coding of education level.

6 None of the four pair-wise tests that show an unexpected pattern are statistically significant.

7 In addition, one might argue that a bigger social network can help to attain social capital and provide an informal safety net in economically uncertain situations (Lin, 2001), which might lessen the perceived need for the welfare state. Based on such reasoning, the general number of social ties should matter (in addition to network profile). We tested this in a separate model (not in table) that includes the total number of ties. We find a weak negative association, meaning that people with more ties in general tend to be slightly more opposed to redistribution. However, this variable does not add substantively to the explained variance, neither does it account for attitude differences between class positions. We did the same test for welfare chauvinism, finding no association between network size and attitudes.

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