

Social Class

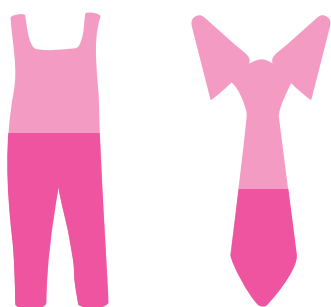
Identity, awareness and political attitudes: why are we still working class?

Despite a long-term decline in the size of the working class, the proportion of the public who identify themselves as working class has remained stable over time. This chapter explores the reasons for this apparent contradiction and its implications for social and political attitudes and politics more generally.

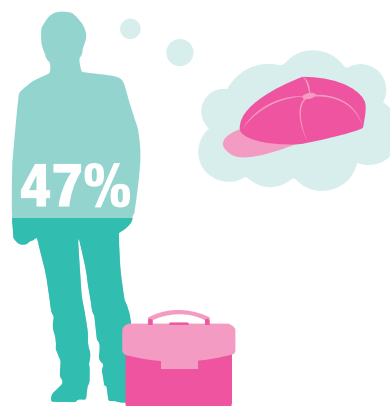
Majority consider themselves working class

Despite a decline in the number of routine and semi-routine workers in Britain, a majority of people still identify as working class.

60% **40%**



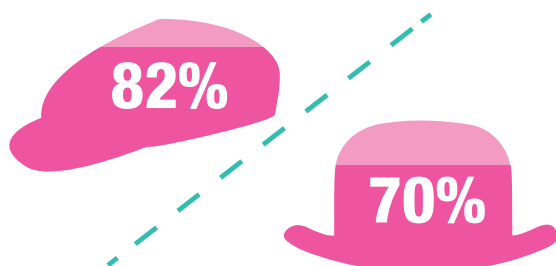
60% say they are working class, compared with 40% who say they are middle class. This proportion who consider themselves working class has not changed since 1983.



Just under half (47%) of those in jobs classified as managerial and professional consider themselves working class.

Class identity links with wider attitudes

Those who identify as working class tend to express distinct attitudes on immigration and social issues.



Those who identify as working class are more likely than those who identify as middle class to say that there is a wide divide between social classes (82% compared with 70%).

People who see society as divided between a large disadvantaged group and a small privileged elite feel more working class regardless of their actual class position.

Occupationally middle class people who feel they are working class do not differ in their attitudes towards redistribution from other middle class people but are much more like the working class on immigration and social issues.

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Introduction

Almost 20 years ago, just before Labour won the 1997 election, John Prescott supposedly announced that ‘we’re all middle class now’ and Tony Blair stated that his “historic mission” was “to liberate Britain from the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices”.¹ In the boom time of the 2000s with rising house values, a surging economy and a surplus of public money to be spent on the provision of social services, people just might have believed this was or could be true. But in post-crisis, post-recession Britain, with stagnant wages, part-time working, and zero-hours contracts, these ideas seem rather less plausible.

Nevertheless, many reputable sources have catalogued the decline of the working class in modern Britain. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and numerous academic analyses, the working class has been shrinking to a fraction of its former size. Official statistics make clear that what they call ‘routine and semi-routine workers’ no longer form the largest group in society. This change is, perhaps, not surprising given the dramatic decline of Britain as a manufacturing powerhouse and the rise of China and others as the suppliers of goods. In the advanced economies of the modern globalised world, manual workers in manufacturing industries are an endangered species.

But the number of manual workers in Britain today is only part of the picture. There is another working class: what we might call the working class of the mind. Though working class occupations are usually thought to amount nowadays to only around a quarter of the population (as discussed in our chapter on Work), 60% still claim to be ‘working class’ when asked to express a class identity (Heath et al., 2013). There is a big difference between being working class as defined by officials and social scientists in terms of occupation and being working class as defined by people themselves.

In this chapter we examine why this difference exists and its implications. Why do so many people in the professional and managerial occupations see themselves as working class? What are the implications of this for their social and political attitudes, and for politics more generally? The modern Labour Party moved away from its old working class rhetoric and appeals. Under Tony Blair it decided that the name of the game was appealing to the middle classes. But if the self-defined middle class is a minority is this the right thing to do? Can the politics of anti-austerity, such as that promulgated by the current Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, prove a successful strategy for appealing to the self-defined working class? Conversely, can the politics of anti-immigration do likewise for a leader such as Nigel Farage? Or does whether people identify as working class make less difference to their political attitudes and choices than whether or not they actually are in manual occupations?

¹ Blair stated this in his Labour conference leader’s speech in 1999. Prescott denies having made this oft-quoted claim however: <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/aug/05/corrections-and-clarifications>.

There is a big difference between being working class as defined by officials and social scientists in terms of occupation and being working class as defined by people themselves

Is social class about what people do or what people say?

Our focus on these questions is a response to a great deal of commentary and research that argues that in modern societies, (i) class identity has become of little importance and (ii) class position no longer influences how people see themselves and others (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). According to this perspective, traditional notions of social class simply do not resonate with ordinary people's experience of social life. A strand of this argument claims that working class people, in particular, have lost their sense of class identity, and that their sense of self no longer represents a distinctive expression of their social position and no longer informs their beliefs about politics and society (e.g. Savage et al., 2010). Other researchers, in contrast, have claimed that rather than class identity disappearing, most people simply follow John Prescott: they believe they are middle class.² As we shall see, neither perspective appears to be accurate.

Class identity and awareness

By class identification we simply mean the tendency for people to place themselves in a social class. It is distinct from 'class awareness', which is present when people believe that class position has important consequences, that there are barriers between classes, and that social class still has an impact on their own and others' lives (Vanneman and Cannon, 1987). We begin by assessing whether the prevalence of class identification has changed in recent years before turning to how class aware people appear to be.

The British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has asked people whether they identify with a particular class on a number of occasions in recent years. There are two stages to the question, and we ask respondents:

Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class?

If yes: Which one is that?

If no (or yes, but other than middle or working class): Most people say they belong to either the middle class or to the working class. Do you ever think of yourself as being in one of these classes?

In the top half of Table 1 we show the proportion who say they are middle or working class in response to the initial question, together with the proportion who say they do not identify with a particular class. In the bottom half we show the proportion who say they are

² The idea that everyone is becoming middle class has been a common theme in response to the growth of affluence in modern societies and also draws on the idea that social comparison processes with people around us result in self-placement in the middle of social hierarchies (Kelley and Evans, 1995). However, there is speculation that the recent economic crisis has re-shaped class perceptions because the pressures associated with recession heighten class awareness (Oddsson, 2010) and strengthen the impact of occupational class on class identity (Haddon, 2014), while at the same time increasing inequalities are serving to polarise class identities (Andersen and Curtis, 2012).

middle or working class in response to either the initial or the follow-up question, leaving aside the small proportion (3% in 2015) who still say they are neither middle nor working class.

Table 1 Class identification, 2003–2015

	2003	2005	2006	2012	2015
Unprompted	%	%	%	%	%
Middle	19	20	20	22	20
Working	27	26	33	29	23
None	54	54	48	48	57
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>947</i>	<i>2063</i>	<i>3230</i>	<i>1044</i>	<i>1079</i>
Prompted	%	%	%	%	%
Middle	38	39	38	37	40
Working	62	61	62	63	60
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>932</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>3105</i>	<i>1028</i>	<i>1053</i>

Table 1 shows that, when responding to our initial question, people are slightly more likely to say they are working class than middle class. However, when those who did not identify a class at our initial question are prompted to choose between these two options, overall people are significantly more likely to identify as working class than middle class (6 in 10 compared with 4 in 10). Moreover, the proportion saying they are working class has barely changed at all during the last dozen years. Furthermore, when we compare these results with answers to the same question collected as part of the British Election Study (BES) in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997, we find that the proportion identifying themselves as working class has barely changed in the past 33 years; in 1983 this proportion was 60%, while 34% identified themselves as middle class (although these proportions should be marginally lower, as those not identifying with a social class, even when prompted, were included in the base) (Heath et al., 2013).

Even though the proportion of people doing a working class job has declined, the level of identification with the working class has proven to be a remarkably stable feature of British society. Moreover, this experience stands in stark contrast with that of the United States, where the proportion of people identifying as working class has tracked the decline in the proportion engaged in working class occupations, with the consequence that more people now regard themselves as middle class than working class (Hout, 2008).³

But does this continuing sense of working class identity also mean that people are ‘class aware’? That is, is a working class identity associated with a belief that there are important differences and

³ Hout’s (2008) long-term analysis of the American National Election Studies (ANES) found there was a predictable shift in line with changes in class sizes: In the 1950s 40% of respondents placed themselves in the middle class and 60% in the working class. By 2000, 59% said “middle class” and 41% working class. There is hardly any such pattern observable for Britain over the same period (Heath et al, 2009; Evans and Tilley, 2017).

boundaries between classes? We can begin to address this issue, by examining how people responded when they were asked:

How difficult would you say it is for people to move from one class to another?

Very difficult,

Fairly difficult,

Not very difficult

Only a minority think that it is “not very difficult” to move between classes, and at just over a quarter, the proportion that do take that view has dropped from a little over a third in 2005

As shown in Table 2, in truth, only a minority think that it is “not very difficult” to move between classes, and at just over a quarter, the proportion that do take that view has dropped from a little over a third in 2005. This decline is consistent with the claim that the change in the economic climate between 2005 and 2015 has served to make people more aware of class differences. Meanwhile, it is also the case that those who identify as working class are rather more likely to believe movement between classes is “very difficult”. People’s class identity is, on this measure at least, linked to some extent with their class awareness.

Table 2 Perceived difficulty of moving between classes, by class identity, 2005 and 2015

Class identity (prompted)		Very difficult	Fairly difficult	Not very difficult	Unweighted base
2005					
Middle class	%	13	47	40	700
Working class	%	23	46	32	1121
All	%	19	46	35	1857
2015					
Middle class	%	17	54	30	443
Working class	%	25	51	24	615
All	%	21	52	26	1058

This last point is affirmed if we examine the responses to two questions on how wide the divide between the classes is that were asked in our most recent survey:

How wide are the differences between social classes in this country, do you think?

Very wide,

Fairly wide,

Not very wide,

No differences between classes

and:

Do you think these differences have become greater or less or have remained about the same?

Greater differences,

About the same,

Less differences

As the first part of Table 3 shows, almost no one believes there are no differences between classes, while 21% think either that there are no differences or that the differences are not very wide. Working class identifiers (18%) are less likely than those who identify as middle class to think there are either no differences or that they are not very wide (30%). Meanwhile, as shown in the second part of Table 3, rather more people (31%) think that social differences have become greater than believe they have become less (24%). Middle class identifiers (32%) are notably more likely than their working class counterparts (19%) to feel that differences have become less.

Table 3a Perceived differences between social classes, by class identity

Class identity (prompted)		Very wide	Fairly wide	Not very wide	No difference between classes	Unweighted base
Middle class	%	20	50	27	3	445
Working class	%	27	55	16	2	634
All	%	24	53	21	2	1079

Table 3b Perceived trend in differences between social classes, by class identity

Class identity (prompted)		Greater difference	About the same	Less difference	Unweighted base
Middle class	%	26	42	32	445
Working class	%	35	46	19	634
All	%	31	44	24	1079

A majority of people appear to perceive that there are class divisions and boundaries in British society

So class identity, and especially working class identity, is alive and well. At the same time, a majority of people appear to perceive that there are class divisions and boundaries in British society. Moreover, those who identify as working class are more likely to be aware of these divisions and boundaries. But what influences how people place themselves in classes?

What are the sources of working class identity?

We first examine how far class identity varies according to the jobs that people do and thus the occupational class to which sociologists and statisticians think they belong. For this purpose we define three occupational classes using the established (NS-SEC) class schema that has been developed by the ONS (see Technical Details for more information). These are employers, managers, professionals

and higher supervisors (who may be regarded as the middle class), intermediate, small employers, own account workers, lower supervisory and lower technical workers (intermediate class) and routine and semi-routine workers (working class). Table 4 shows the proportion of those in each of these three occupational classes who identify as working class. That proportion has remained relatively stable over the last decade: consistently around 4 in 5 objectively working class people identify as working class, as do just under half of objectively middle class people. The proportion of intermediate workers who identify as working class tends to fall somewhere in between these two groups. In short, almost half of those who are objectively middle class identify as working class and this has shown no sign of changing in recent years.

Table 4 Working class identity by occupational class, 2003–2015

% identifying as working class	2003	2005	2006	2012	2015
Occupational class					
Managerial and professional	44	43	44	43	47
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	70	68	70	73	64
Semi-routine and routine	77	76	78	81	77
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>907</i>	<i>1908</i>	<i>3014</i>	<i>990</i>	<i>1050</i>

So why is there such a gap between the prevalence of class identity, the occupational classifications of the ONS, and John Prescott? One possibility is that although occupationally middle class people say they are working class they do not mean it as strongly. They might call themselves middle class but they do not really believe they have a lot in common with working class people. This possibility can be assessed by examining people's answers to the following question:

***Some people feel they have a lot in common with other people of their own class, but others don't feel this way so much. How about you? Would you say you feel ... pretty close to other [middle/working] class people, or, that you don't feel much closer to them than you do to people in other classes?*⁴**

⁴ Those who said they were middle class were asked how close they were to middle class people, while those who identified as working class were asked about their closeness to working class people.

Table 5 Reported closeness to those who share the same class identity, by occupational class, 2005 and 2015

Occupational class			Class identity				Unweighted base
			Working class		Middle class		
			Feel close to other working class people	Do not feel close to other working class people	Feel close to other middle class people	Do not feel close to other middle class people	
2005							
All	%	24	37	23	16	1843	
Managerial & professional	%	13	29	33	25	657	
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	%	26	42	19	13	649	
Semi-routine & routine	%	35	41	17	8	537	
2015							
All	%	28	30	25	17	1006	
Managerial & professional	%	17	27	33	24	402	
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	%	32	31	23	14	315	
Semi-routine & routine	%	40	34	16	10	289	

Among those in a semi-routine or routine (working class) occupation, on balance rather more (40%) say that they feel close to other working class people than say they do not (34%)

Table 5 reveals there is some apparent truth to our supposition. Among those in a semi-routine or routine (working class) occupation, on balance rather more (40%) say that they feel close to other working class people than say they do not (34%). In contrast, among those in professional and managerial (middle class) occupations, the balance is in the other direction (17% say they feel close but 27% that they do not). This replicates a not dissimilar pattern that was previously in evidence in 2005. It appears that those who are occupationally working class who also identify as working class are more likely to feel closer to the working class than do occupationally middle class people who claim to be working class.

Many of those in middle class jobs who claim to be working class, do in fact come disproportionately from working class backgrounds

One possible reason why this might be the case is that those in middle class occupations base their judgments on how close they feel to other working class people on different criteria to those employed by people in working class occupations. In particular, someone who themselves is in a middle class occupation but whose parents were in working class jobs may still claim to be working class, but perhaps feel that they do not have as much in common with those who have not been occupationally upwardly mobile. Certainly, as Table 6 shows, many of those in middle class jobs who claim to be working class, do in fact come disproportionately from working class backgrounds. No less than 61% of those in a professional or managerial job, and whose father was in a routine or semi-routine job, describe themselves as working class, compared

with just 24% of those whose father occupied a similar position to themselves. A similar pattern is evident among those who are occupationally intermediate class, although relatively small base sizes for these categories mean that these findings should be treated with caution.

Table 6 Proportion identifying as working class, by father's occupational class and respondent's occupational class

Respondent's occupational class	% identify as working class			Father's occupational class	
	Father: managerial and professional	Father: intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	Father: semi-routine and routine		
Managerial and professional	24	49	61		
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	36	69	73		
Semi-routine and routine	‡	68	75		

‡ = percentage not shown as base is less than 50

The bases for Table 6 can be found in the appendix to this chapter

So family background matters to people's class identity and given that 14% of the managerial and professional class are from working class backgrounds (and an additional 29% are from what we term intermediate class backgrounds) this goes a long way to explaining the continuing sense of being working class among many people in middle class jobs. Other factors matter too though. Educational attainment is intimately bound up with occupational achievement and people's understanding of class position (Robinson and Kelley, 1979; Stubager et al., 2016). It would be surprising if educational attainment didn't shape someone's sense of class identification even within occupational classes. Table 7 shows how education makes a difference within occupational classes: the impact of having a degree is strong within the managerial and professional and intermediate occupational classes, but insufficient respondents in the working class (6%) have degrees for reliable estimates to be calculated.

Table 7 Proportion identifying as working class, by educational level and respondent's occupational class, 2012 and 2015 combined

Respondent's occupational class	% identify as working class				Respondent's highest educational qualification			
	None	O level	A level	Degree				
Managerial and professional	‡	50	49	28				
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	70	68	69	40				
Semi-routine and routine	75	75	76	‡				

‡ = percentage not shown as base is under 50

The bases for Table 7 can be found in the appendix to this chapter

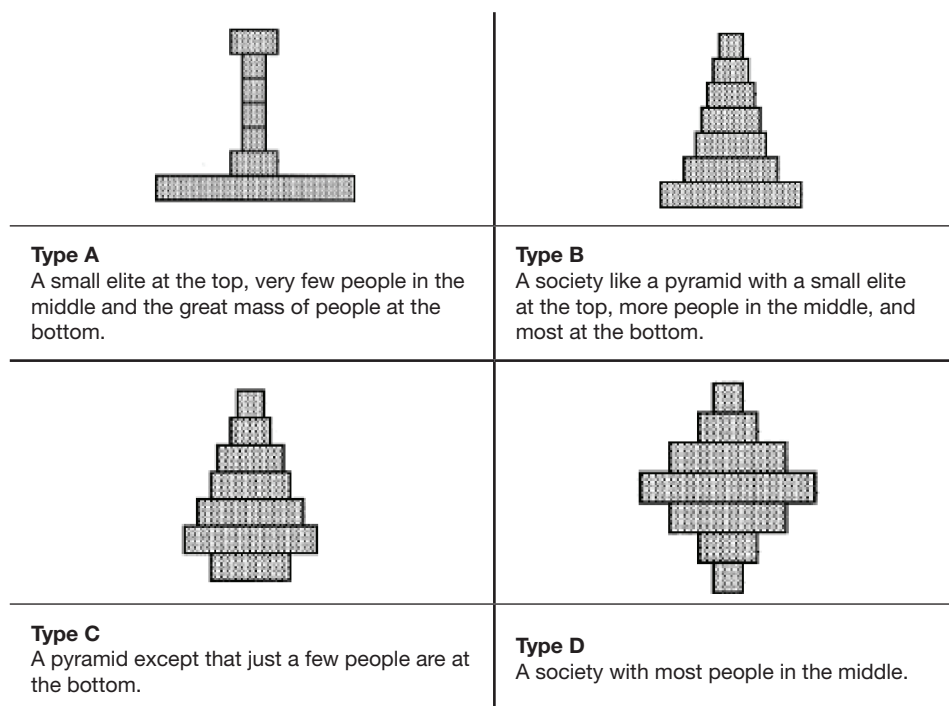
People who see themselves as at the bottom of a structure in which there are a few super rich and then everyone else might well think of themselves as 'working class' relatively speaking even if they do hold a middle class job

Images of inequality

That social background and educational qualifications matter for an individual's class self-concept regardless of their current job makes sense from what we know about psychological research about how self-concepts are formed. However, this may not be the only reason why those in middle class occupations are divided in their sense of class identity. The failure of many people in middle class occupations to regard themselves as middle class can also be, in part, understood by looking at how people visualise the structure of our society.

People who see themselves as at the bottom of a structure in which there are a few super rich and then everyone else might well think of themselves as 'working class' relatively speaking even if they do hold a middle class job. The emphasis in the popular media on the lives of the super-rich, on the earnings and bonuses of bankers, and on the surprisingly large sums of money paid to managerial staff even in the public sector, might well result in these phenomena becoming a yard stick or even a grievance. We can examine this possibility by looking at the answers to a question asked as part of the 2009 survey.⁵ Respondents were shown five diagrams of different types of society, together with brief summaries of what they represented. These are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Images of Society⁶



The most popular view of society was Type B (a society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle and

⁵ This question is part of a module on inequality fielded as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and has been asked in some countries since the late 1980s (Evans et al., 1992) as a way of gauging people's view of their society's structure of inequality.

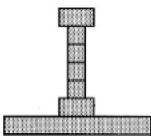
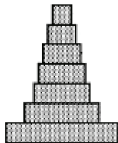
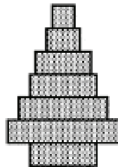
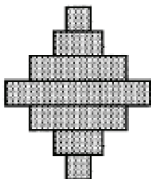
⁶ Another image of society that was also included – 'an upside down pyramid' – is not shown because it was not seen as plausible: only 30 respondents picked it.

Those middle class people who see society as a division between a large disadvantaged group and a small privileged elite are much more likely to regard themselves as working class (59%) than are those who see society as either having relatively few people at the bottom (16%) or even most people in the middle (16%)

most at the bottom); this was chosen by 41%. Twenty per cent of people in each case selected Type C and Type D, while 15% chose Type A.

Table 8 shows the proportions among those who selected each of the images of society who identify as working class. Our analysis indicates that people who see society as a division between a large disadvantaged group and a small privileged elite are much more likely to regard themselves as working class (66%) than are those who see society as either having relatively few people at the bottom (28%) or even most people in the middle (26%). These patterns are echoed even more strongly within the middle class itself. Middle class people who see society as a division between a large disadvantaged group and a small privileged elite are almost as likely to see themselves as working class (59%) as are people in general, whereas only very few (16%) of those who see society as having relatively few people at the bottom or most people in the middle do so. However, caution must be applied to these findings due to the small sub-samples involved. If this analysis is correct, it is quite possible that occupationally middle class people who think of themselves as working class believe they are part of a large and relatively disadvantaged group. The salience in the media of the super-rich, city bankers, and chief executives of big companies can plausibly make even the middle classes feel that they are in fact still part of the working class.

Table 8 Proportion identifying as working class, by respondent's occupational class and perceived image of society, 2009

Image of society	Managerial, professional and intermediate	All
% identify as working class		
	59	66
	31	46
	16	28
	16	26

The bases for Table 8 can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Class identity and political attitudes

But does any of this matter when it comes to people's social and political attitudes? Are these attitudes influenced at all by the class with which people identify? One way of addressing this question would be to examine the link between class identity and party choice. However, this would not necessarily be that informative as parties, especially the Labour Party, have in recent decades radically changed their class image.⁷ Instead, therefore, we examine the link between identity on the one hand and values and attitudes on the other. People's values and attitudes are less constrained by the nature of the policies that parties represent. They tell us about what people would like to see happen regardless of what the main political parties offer. Among the subjects in the 2015 survey where attitudes might be thought to be influenced by class identity, are the questions that comprise our regular 'left-right' scale. This scale includes questions about inequality and redistribution, such as whether "Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off", whether "Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers", and the survey's libertarian-authoritarianism scale that captures attitudes towards such issues as the death penalty, homosexuality and morality (see Technical Details for the full details of both these scales). We can also examine attitudes to a particularly important current issue - immigration.

In Table 9 we show how attitudes towards these three subjects vary both by occupational class and class identity. For ease of interpretation we dichotomise the various scales. A right-wing response is coded as an average score of greater than 2.5 on the five item left-right scale (where the values range from 1, meaning very left-wing, to 5, very right-wing), and authoritarian is coded as greater than 3.6 on the five item libertarian-authoritarianism scale (where again the values range from 1, very libertarian, to 5, very authoritarian) (Evans, Heath and Lalljee, 1996). Similarly, on immigration, respondents who choose between 6-10 in response to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely bad and 10 is extremely good, would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries?" are coded as pro-immigrant, whereas those who choose a response between 0-5 are coded as anti-immigrant.

⁷ Evans and Tilley (2017) show how for much of the 20th century Labour was regarded as the party of the working class, and regarded itself as such, but by 1997 New Labour was explicitly rejecting such linkages. Class voting dropped accordingly (Evans and Tilley, 2012). Party choice is therefore no longer a good guide to measuring the implications of class identity.

Table 9 Libertarian-authoritarian and left-right values and attitudes towards immigration, by occupational class and class identity

		Libertarian	Authoritarian		Left	Right		Anti-immigrant	Pro-immigrant
Occupational class									
Managerial and professional	%	59	41	%	44	56	%	46	54
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	%	39	61	%	51	49	%	65	35
Semi-routine and routine	%	40	60	%	58	42	%	69	31
Class identity									
Middle class	%	55	45	%	40	60	%	48	52
Working class	%	40	60	%	49	51	%	65	35

The bases for Table 9 can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Those in routine and semi-routine occupations are more left-wing, authoritarian and anti-immigrant than those in professional and managerial jobs

Those in routine and semi-routine occupations are more left-wing, authoritarian and anti-immigrant than those in professional and managerial jobs. They disagree about immigration and on libertarian-authoritarian values in particular, while the division between them on left-right values is rather less sharp. Thus, for example, whereas a majority (69%) of those in routine and semi-routine occupations hold anti-immigrant views, a majority of those in professional and managerial occupations (54%) are pro-immigrant in their stance on the subject. Meanwhile, on both immigration and libertarian-authoritarian values those in intermediate occupations hold almost identical views to those in working class jobs. At the same time, the balance of opinion among those who identify as working class is also more likely than among those who consider themselves to be middle class to be left-wing, authoritarian and anti-immigrant, and again especially so in respect of the latter two.

However, on its own Table 9 does not tell us whether class identity makes any difference to people's attitudes. Perhaps the differences in attitudes by class identity simply arise out of the fact that those who identify as working class are disproportionately engaged in routine and semi-routine occupations. As such, it is important to take into account the overlap between occupational and subjective class and see if the latter still matters substantially. In Table 10 we show what happens when we take into account someone's occupational class and their class identity simultaneously. For each combination of occupational class and class identity it shows, first, the proportion who are right-wing; second, the proportion who are authoritarian; and third, the proportion who are pro-immigrant. Thus, for example, the 59% figure in the top left-hand corner of the table means that 59% of those in professional and managerial occupations who identify as middle class are classified as right-wing. Meanwhile as 60% of those in the same occupational group who identify as working class

are right-wing, this means that class identity does not make any difference to the prevalence of right-wing values among those who are in professional and managerial occupations.

Table 10 Prevalence of right-wing, authoritarian and pro-immigrant attitudes, by occupational class and class identity

	Managerial and professional	Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	Semi-routine and routine	Unweighted base
% right-wing				
Middle class identifier	59	61	59	378
Working class identifier	60	47	47	524
% authoritarian				
Middle class identifier	38	55	49	381
Working class identifier	56	60	63	526
% pro-immigration				
Middle class identifier	64	42	34	427
Working class identifier	38	32	31	610

This, however, is not the general message of the table. Rather it is the exception. Within each occupational class, those who identify as working class are more likely to be authoritarian and less likely to be pro-immigrant. At the same time, with the singular exception of those in professional and managerial occupations, those who identify as working class are also less likely to be right-wing in their values. All of these effects prove to be significant when modelled statistically.⁸ Evidently while having a working class identity and being middle class does not make you more likely to want to redistribute wealth, it does make you more authoritarian and less pro-immigrant and thus in these subjects at least more likely to have an outlook that is very similar to that of those who are occupationally working class.

Conclusions

Working class identity remains widespread in Britain. Even though only a minority of people are engaged in working class occupations, a majority of us still think of ourselves as working class. Those in middle class occupations still think of themselves to a surprising degree as working class, and especially so if their family background was working class or they have never been to university. And this sense of working class identity apparently means that they are less libertarian and less pro-immigrant, but not necessarily more left-wing

⁸ These differences are generated using a logistic regression. The percentage differences are the marginal effect of being in each of the class groups versus being in the manager/professional class and being a working class identifier versus a middle class identifier. All of the differences are significant at the 5% level.



The current sources of working class identity amongst those in middle class jobs may now be beginning to dry up 

– even though those with a working class identity are particularly likely to think that class differences and barriers remain important.

So contrary to the expectations of some academic researchers, social class still has resonance for people, we are clearly not ‘all middle class now’. However, the current sources of working class identity amongst those in middle class jobs may now be beginning to dry up. The ‘golden age’ of upward social mobility in the second half of the 20th century saw many people from working class backgrounds end up in middle class jobs (Bukodi et al., 2015). However, that transformation of the occupational structure has now very much slowed, if not stalled completely. As a result, the proportion of first generation people in the middle classes who come from working class backgrounds is set to fall. Meanwhile, the proportion in middle class occupations who have higher educational qualifications is set to rise as the massive increase in higher education over the last few decades works its way through the cohorts that occupy middle class jobs – jobs that are far more dependent on educational qualifications for access than they used to be. Working your way up from the shop floor without educational qualifications is not the norm in today’s credentialist society.

Between them these processes would lead one to expect working class identification to decline among those in middle class jobs. As a result, we should see a closer match between class identity and objective class. This would ensure that social attitudes become more libertarian, but not more economically right-wing - and are thus be likely to be more sympathetic to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The decline of working class identity and the further decline of left-wing politics are unlikely to go hand in hand.

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Acknowledgements

NatCen Social Research is grateful to The Danish Research Council (grant number 1327-00113), Jesus College Major Research Grants Fund and Nuffield College for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

Appendix

Bases for Table 6 are as follows:

Table A.1 Bases for Proportion identifying as working class, by father's occupational class and respondent's occupational class, 2015

% identify as working class	Father's occupational class		
	Managerial and professional	Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	Semi-routine and routine
Managerial and professional	150	118	113
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	77	116	119
Semi-routine and routine	38	91	145

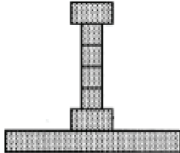
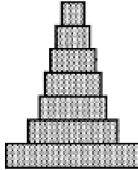
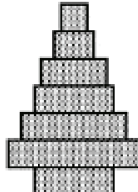
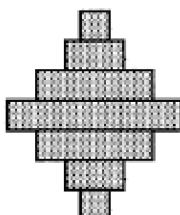
Bases for Table 7 are as follows:

Table A.2 Bases for Working class identification by educational level and respondent's occupational class, 2012 and 2015.

% identify as working class	Respondent's highest educational qualification			
	None	O level	A level	Degree
Managerial and professional	41	122	255	346
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	155	190	202	78
Semi-routine and routine	263	179	106	19

Bases for Table 8 are as follows:

Table A.3 Bases for Proportion identifying as working class, by respondent's occupational class and image of society

Image of society	Managerial, professional and intermediate	All
	50	131
	171	371
	102	170
	98	184

Bases for Table 9 are as follows:

Table A.4 Bases for left-right and libertarian-authoritarian values and attitudes towards immigration by occupational class and class identity

	Libertarian/ authoritarian	Left/right	Anti-immigrant/pro- immigrant
Occupational class			
Managerial and professional	1419	1419	810
Intermediate, self-employed and lower supervisory	1098	1089	639
Semi-routine and routine	988	986	610
Class identity			
Middle class	402	398	449
Working class	539	536	640