

# The declining electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups

ROBIN E. BEST\*

*Department of Political Science, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA*

This article examines changes in the electoral relevance of traditional social cleavage groups in eight West European democracies, where electoral relevance is defined as group contributions to party vote shares. The approach presented here demonstrates the critical importance of both the electoral behaviour and the size of the cleavage group when electoral outcomes are of interest. The findings from analyses of the behaviour and size of working class and religious citizens (1975–2002) reveal significant declines in the contributions of these groups to party vote shares. Analyses of the sources of these declines point to the importance of group size, suggesting that the changes we observe in election results and party strategies are likely to be long-lasting alterations in the electoral landscape of Western democracies.

**Keywords:** social cleavages; Western Europe; electoral relevance

## Social cleavages and election results in Western Europe

To what extent do social cleavages continue to shape election results in Western Europe? By many accounts, it is too soon to proclaim the death of traditional social cleavages such as class and religion. Although social characteristics arguably exert a lesser impact upon voting behaviour today than in the past, the cross-national variations in such patterns make generalization difficult, if not impossible. Literature in this area is often fraught with ambiguity. While some suggest that the linkages between cleavage groups and their traditional parties are on the decline (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Franklin, 1985; Clark and Lipset, 1991; Franklin *et al.*, 1992; Clark *et al.*, 1993; Nieuwbeerta, 1996; Nieuwbeerta and Ultee, 1999; De Graaf *et al.*, 2001; Knutsen, 2006), others view claims of cleavage decline with a heavy degree of scepticism and assert that cleavage structures remain mostly intact (e.g. Andersen, 1984; Evans, 1993, 1999; Brooks *et al.*, 2006; Elff, 2007). The most recent evidence encourages us to recognize country-level differences in cleavage structures and their varying patterns of influence on voting behaviour (Brooks *et al.*, 2006; Elff, 2007; see also Freire, 2006). As Elff (2007) argues, variations in the relationship between cleavage position and voting behaviour should be expected, since contextual features

\* E-mail: bestre@missouri.edu

such as party programmes will affect individual incentives to vote in line with cleavage positions. Due to contextual features, the voting behaviour of traditional social cleavage groups is likely to vary cross-nationally, even if there is a tendency for this behaviour to be on the decline.

The findings outlined above should shape our current understanding of electoral politics in Western Europe only if our concern is the voting behaviour of cleavage groups; often it is not. Scholars of electoral politics often have broader concerns that relate to overall patterns of support for political parties, electoral volatility, party system fragmentation, or other forms of macro-level changes in the distribution of the vote. When aggregate electoral outcomes are of interest, accounts of cleavage-based voting behaviour are not enough to link the behaviour of cleavage group members to party vote shares. While these studies may tell us about the likelihood that certain types of voters support certain types of parties, they do not tell us how (or even if) changing patterns of group-based voting behaviour are linked to shifts in party vote shares. In this article I demonstrate how such a link between traditional cleavage groups and party vote shares can be made. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the link between traditional cleavage groups and party vote shares can only be established by incorporating information on group size and turnout, in addition to voting behaviour. The voting behaviour of cleavage groups tells us only a fragment of a larger story, in that the votes of cleavage members matter more or less depending on the turnout and size of the cleavage group. Religious citizens, for example, who support their Christian democratic party without fail, will matter very little to the party's vote share if there are only a handful of them.

The simple truth is that the numbers of traditional cleavage groups have declined as a result of structural changes in the economies and societies of Western Europe. For instance, Crouch (2008) provides a recent and thorough description of the declines in the manufacturing industry and the restructuring of Western European economies that has diminished the numbers of the traditional working class (see also Broughton and ten Napel, 2000; Dogan, 2004). Regarding religion, the growing secularization of Western European societies is now a well-documented and virtually uncontested phenomenon (e.g. Dogan, 2004; Crouch, 2008). As Peter Mair notes, it is 'undeniable' that workers are still more likely to vote for leftist parties and religious citizens for Christian parties, but there are simply too few of them to have the effect on electoral politics that they once had (2008: 219).

It is this effect on electoral outcomes that determines the electoral relevance of cleavage groups. In order to provide a substantial contribution to a party's vote share, members of a cleavage group must not only support their party at election time, but also have enough members to contribute a sizeable figure to the party's vote total. With respect to social and Christian democratic parties, we have good reason to suspect that the electoral relevance of working class and religious citizens has declined. Many of these parties have experienced significant declines in their vote shares over the post-Second World War era. McDonald and Best (2006) found many negative and significant trends in the vote shares of social and Christian democratic parties.

Table 1. Trends in vote support for social and Christian democratic parties (1950–2002)

| Nation          | Party   | Mean vote% | Constant | SE    | Trend  | SE   | Incumbent | SE   | R <sup>2</sup> | N  |
|-----------------|---------|------------|----------|-------|--------|------|-----------|------|----------------|----|
| Belgium         | SP/PS   | 31.28      | 39.49    | 2.05  | -0.42* | 0.11 | -0.16     | 1.91 | 0.76           | 9  |
|                 | SP      | 12.61      | 20.26    | 3.56  | -0.11  | 0.07 | -2.86*    | 0.83 | 0.79           | 7  |
|                 | PS      | 13.00      | 18.82    | 4.85  | -0.09  | 0.10 | -2.39     | 1.13 | 0.58           | 7  |
|                 | PSC/CVP | 42.25      | 57.22    | 4.70  | -0.77  | 0.26 | -6.85     | 3.29 | 0.85           | 5  |
|                 | CVP     | 20.31      | 28.43    | 3.74  | -0.20* | 0.09 | -         | -    | 0.36           | 11 |
|                 | PSC     | 8.68       | 13.89    | 1.08  | -0.13* | 0.03 | -         | -    | 0.73           | 11 |
| Denmark         | SD      | 35.52      | 40.19    | 2.30  | -0.18* | 0.06 | 1.64      | 1.82 | 0.36           | 21 |
|                 | KrF     | 2.75       | 5.09     | 0.92  | -0.05* | 0.02 | -0.55     | 0.49 | 0.45           | 13 |
| France          | PS      | 22.16      | 11.90    | 3.78  | 0.33*  | 0.11 | -         | -    | 0.43           | 14 |
| Germany         | SPD     | 37.29      | 32.36    | 2.43  | 0.09   | 0.06 | 4.06*     | 1.87 | 0.42           | 14 |
|                 | CDU/CSU | 46.22      | 56.80    | 2.92  | -0.21* | 0.06 | -4.68*    | 1.90 | 0.57           | 14 |
| Great Britain   | Lab     | 40.69      | 44.87    | 3.12  | -0.20* | 0.08 | 4.52      | 2.62 | 0.50           | 15 |
|                 | Con     | -          | 47.33    | 2.02  | -0.28* | 0.07 | 2.38      | 2.08 | 0.60           | 15 |
| Ireland         | LP      | 11.67      | 13.60    | 1.89  | -0.02  | 0.05 | -3.27*    | 1.59 | 0.25           | 16 |
| Italy           | PCI/PDS | 26.19      | 27.09    | 3.59  | -0.06  | 0.13 | -         | -    | 0.02           | 11 |
|                 | DC      | 37.02      | 44.24    | 1.58  | -0.25* | 0.05 | -         | -    | 0.76           | 10 |
| The Netherlands | PvdA    | 28.08      | 31.94    | 3.39  | -0.09  | 0.08 | -1.53     | 2.59 | 0.11           | 15 |
|                 | CDA     | 28.81      | 29.84    | 20.62 | -0.12  | 0.37 | 5.87      | 6.82 | 0.37           | 8  |
|                 | KVP     | 27.12      | 37.22    | 2.87  | -0.56* | 0.15 | -         | -    | 0.75           | 7  |
|                 | ARP     | 9.52       | 11.66    | 0.58  | -0.04  | 0.03 | -1.57*    | 0.67 | 0.79           | 7  |
|                 | CHU     | 7.61       | 11.26    | 0.81  | -0.16* | 0.03 | -0.81     | 0.65 | 0.89           | 7  |

Belgium (SP – Socialistische Partij/Flemish Socialist Party; PS – Parti Socialiste/Francophone Socialist Party; CVP – Christelijke Volkspartij/Christian People's Party; PSC – Parti Social Crétien/Christian Social Party), Denmark (SD – Socialdemokratiet/Social Democrats; KrF – Kristeligt Folkeparti/Christian People's Party), France (PS – Parti Socialiste/Socialist Party), Germany (SPD – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/Social Democratic Party of Germany; CDU/CDU – Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union/Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union), Great Britain (Lab – Labour Party; Con – Conservative Party), Ireland (LP – Labour Party), Italy (PCI – Partito Comunista Italiano/Communist Party; PDS – Partito Democratico della Sinistra/Democratic Party of the Left), the Netherlands (PvdA – Partij van de Arbeid/Labour Party; CDA – Christen-Democratisch Appel/Christian Democratic Appeal; KVP – Katholieke Volkspartij/Catholic People's Party; ARP – Anti-Revolutionaire Partij/Anti-Revolutionary Party; CHU – Christelijk-Historische Unie/Christian Historical Union).

Table entries are the results of regressing party vote shares in election years on time. Time is scored 0 in 1950. Each additional year adds one and months adds fractions.

\*Statistical significance at the 0.05 level for one-tailed tests.

Table 1 replicates and extends this analysis for 21 social and Christian democratic parties in eight Western democracies. Table entries report the results of regressing party vote shares on time (controlling for incumbency status) and the mean party vote

share. All Christian democratic parties and many social democratic parties exhibit significant declines in their vote shares over the post-Second World War era. While these two party families have clearly lost much of their electoral ground, the results also point to several interesting exceptions. The German SPD, the Irish Labour Party, and the Dutch PvdA have managed to avoid the declines that characterize parties in other nations, and the French PS displays a positive and significant trend. Overall, the negative trends in party vote shares suggest possible declines in the electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups for these parties.

In this article I utilize a simple method of calculating the electoral relevance of a cleavage group for party vote shares that accounts for both electoral behaviour and group size. Electoral relevance of working class and religious citizens is then analysed over time for eight Western European democracies. The contributions of this study to the current literature on the relevance of traditional social cleavages are threefold. First, I demonstrate that when electoral results are of concern, it is essential to account for both group behaviour (turnout and voting behaviour) and group size. Furthermore, the approach utilized here illustrates the differing impact of changes in the size, turnout, and voting behaviour of traditional cleavage groups across countries and cleavage groups. Second, the findings presented here demonstrate pervasive, cross-national declines in the electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups for their traditional parties. Despite the important cross-national differences that have been found in cleavage-based voting behaviour (e.g. Brooks *et al.*, 2006), even fiercely loyal party supporters are no match for the structural changes that have withered away their numbers. While patterns of voting behaviour may vary cross-nationally, the declining electoral relevance does not. Third, the results of this study speak to a recent strain of literature that examines changes in cleavage-based voting behaviour in response to changes in party policy offerings (Evans *et al.*, 1999; De Graaf *et al.*, 2001; Elff, 2009). Since declines in cleavage group size are unlikely to be counteracted by changes in party strategies, the results presented here illustrate little incentive for parties to employ electoral strategies that encourage traditional patterns of cleavage voting.

### The electoral relevance of cleavage groups

Ever since the influential work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), social cleavages have been linked to the political alignments and party systems of Western Europe. Due to their historical strength in Western Europe, the two social cleavages that have received the bulk of scholarly attention have been social class and religion. These cleavages have been particularly influential in electoral politics and party systems, as the electoral success of social and Christian democratic parties is often attributed to the electoral support of working class and religious citizens (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rose and Urwin, 1969, 1970). Two types of changes serve to undermine the electoral relevance of working class and religious citizens in Western Europe: changes in the behaviour of cleavage group members and changes in the size of these cleavage groups.

*Social cleavages and electoral behaviour*

Literature examining the continuance or decline of traditional social cleavages has generally focussed on the voting behaviour of cleavage group members, which is then contrasted with the voting behaviour of the opposing cleavage group(s) in measures such as the Alford index (see Manza *et al.* (1995) for a review of the literature on social class). These assessments of voting behaviour are often driven by theoretical and empirical developments that give us reason to expect declines in cleavage-based voting. For instance, Dalton's theory of cognitive mobilization suggests voters are relying less on social cues when casting their ballots as a result of educational increases and the prevalence of mass media (Dalton, 1984, 2002). An additional reason to suspect changes in voting behaviour comes from theories of value change and the growing importance of new issues. Inglehart (1977, 1984, 2008) suggests increases in material well-being have shifted the political preferences of some voters away from traditional cleavage politics. Studies that emphasize the importance of party strategies for cleavage-based voting are also directed at the degree of cleavage group loyalty towards political parties (Evans, 2000; DeGraaf *et al.*, 2001; Elff, 2007, 2009). This body of work generally argues that parties can shape and respond to the degree of cleavage voting by choosing whether to make cleavage-based electoral appeals (see also: Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Kitschelt, 1993, 1994). If parties emphasize cleavage issues in their electoral platforms, we can expect the amount of cleavage-based voting to increase, and vice versa.

Current debates over whether, where, and how much traditional social cleavages have (or have not) declined arise from this body of work that takes the voting behaviour of cleavage group members as its focal point. Commonly, the linkages between cleavage groups and their traditional parties are perceived to be on the decline (Dalton *et al.*, 1984; Franklin, 1985; Clark and Lipset, 1991; Franklin *et al.*, 1992; Clark *et al.*, 1993; Nieuwbeerta, 1996; Nieuwbeerta and Ultee, 1999; De Graaf *et al.*, 2001; Knutsen, 2006). However, the uses of different definitions, statistical techniques, countries, and time periods have produced contrasting accounts of whether the importance of cleavages such as social class have declined (e.g. Korpi, 1972; Zuckerman and Lichbach, 1977; Franklin and Mughan, 1978; Andersen, 1984; Manza *et al.*, 1995; Evans, 1999, 2000; Karvonen and Kuhnle, 2001; Brooks *et al.*, 2006; Knutsen, 2006; Güveli *et al.*, 2007; cf. Nieuwbeerta, 1996). For instance, Güveli *et al.* (2007) find that, while the old order of class-based voting may have declined, a new class structure has arisen that also has the capacity to structure the vote. Furthermore, some recent studies view claims of cleavage decline with a heavy degree of scepticism and assert that cleavage structures remain mostly intact (e.g. Andersen, 1984; Evans, 1993, 1999; Brooks *et al.* 2006; Elff, 2007). If cleavage-based patterns of voting behaviour have declined, this assertion requires many cross-national qualifications and exceptions (Brooks *et al.*, 2006; Elff, 2007).

Patterns of cleavage-based voting behaviour have been found to fluctuate across both countries and time, often leading us to question whether traditional cleavages

still provide structure to voting behaviour. However, the voting choices of traditional cleavage group members are only one component in the calculation of the relevance of these groups for their traditional parties, as I demonstrate below. An additional behavioural component – the turnout of cleavage group members – will also shape the electoral relevance of cleavage groups. Studies of cleavage structures often point to the historical role of labour unions and churches as mobilizing forces on cleavage group members (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). As the numerical strength of membership in labour unions and churches has declined, we can also expect mobilization of traditional cleavage groups to be on the decline.

### *The declining size of traditional cleavage groups*

In addition to behavioural components, changes in the size of traditional cleavage groups have the potential to dramatically affect their relevance for party vote shares. Furthermore, there is little doubt that the numerical size of traditional cleavage groups has been on the decline. A growing service sector, increases in white-collar employment, declines in industrial labour, and increased secularism have reduced the numbers of working class or religious voters in Western societies (Heath *et al.*, 1985; Kitschelt, 1993; Pontusson, 1995; Broughton and ten Napel, 2000; Dogan, 2001; Knutsen, 2004; Norris and Inglehart, 2004). And while most studies of the class cleavage make little more than passing reference to changes in the size of the working class, Heath *et al.* demonstrate that about half of the decline in Labour's vote share in Great Britain between 1964 and 1983 could be attributed to the declining size of the working class (1985: 35–37).

Scholarship on social cleavages has typically favoured examinations of behavioural changes instead of changes in cleavage group size; even after the potential influence of group size on cleavage relevance has been amply acknowledged. For instance, Brooks *et al.* (2006) state that changes in relevant social cleavages 'take one of two forms: either change in the partisan alignments of specific groups or change in the relative size of groups' (p. 91) before moving on to examine only the voting behaviour of cleavage group members. Similarly, De Graaf *et al.* (2001) recognize the importance of 'compositional' changes in society that alter the size of cleavage groups and, consequently, the vote shares of political parties, but then examine only behavioural elements of change. Despite the paucity of studies that cite declining size as the primary source of cleavage decline (but see Dogan, 2001, 2004), the fact that all Western democracies have experienced de-industrialization and secularization makes the size of traditional groups a potentially critical influence on the electoral relevance of social cleavages. As Van Holsteyn and Irwin note, 'No political party based upon religion can gain votes if there are no adherents who identify with the relevant religious group' (2000: 79). The same can be said of parties based upon social class. In fact, in the following analyses changes in the size of traditional cleavage groups stand out as one of the crucial elements in their declining electoral relevance.

*Assessing electoral relevance*

The proportion of the vote a party receives from a cleavage group defines the electoral relevance of a cleavage group for a party's vote share. Electoral behaviour (voting behaviour and turnout) is not the sole determinant of electoral relevance, but interacts with cleavage group size to determine the group's electoral relevance for a party of interest. Thus, looking at any one aspect alone will provide an incomplete picture of electoral relevance.<sup>1</sup> The loyalty of cleavage groups towards their traditional parties matters very little in terms of party support if the cleavage group has few members. Of course, a large cleavage group will be inconsequential for party vote shares if no member of the group votes for the party. And neither the size nor the loyalty of the group will matter if nobody in the group turns out to vote. Thus, the proper measurement of electoral relevance is the following interaction of size, turnout, and loyalty.

$$(\text{Size of the Group}) * (\text{Turnout of the Group}) * (\text{Loyalty of the Group})$$

where Size of the Group = the proportion of the electorate belonging to a cleavage group; Turnout of the Group = the proportion of the cleavage group that voted in a given election; and Loyalty of the Group = the proportion of cleavage group votes cast for the party of interest.

This equation tells us the total percentage of electoral support given to a political party by a cleavage group or, in other words, the *contribution* of the group to party vote shares (see also Axelrod's (1972) use of a similar equation to estimate party support in the USA). This is the number of interest when one is concerned with electoral outcomes, since it tells us how much electoral support a political party derives from a cleavage group.

Changes in any one of the three variables – size, turnout, and loyalty – will alter the contribution of a cleavage group to party vote shares. For instance, if in country X the working class constitutes 50% of the population, casts 60% of their ballots for the social democratic party, and has a turnout rate of 80%, then the contribution of the working class to the social democratic party is 24%. Thirty years later, the working class in country X which constitutes 20% of the population at present, has a turnout rate of 80%, and casts 80% of their ballots for the social democratic party. If one looks only at voting patterns it will appear as though the strength of the class cleavage has increased – a higher percentage of the working class now votes for the social democratic party. But this higher level of loyalty may mean little to the social democratic party, who now receives a contribution of only 13% from the smaller working class population. Size, loyalty, and turnout are interrelated when it comes to electoral relevance. If any one of these variables drops to zero, the others become irrelevant.

<sup>1</sup> Brooks *et al.* (2006) make a similar point by stating that changes in the size of cleavage groups are especially “important for assessing the overall impact of cleavages on party strategies and election outcomes (p. 91)” before moving on to focus on voting patterns.

Changes in size, loyalty, and turnout also bear different, and important, implications for the future of electoral alignments. If the electoral relevance of cleavage groups has declined only due to changes in electoral behaviour, then the future of cleavage politics can be moulded by political actors. Loyalty and turnout rates are a result of the choices made by voters and political parties, so that declines in loyalty could be reversed by changes in party strategies (e.g. Elff, 2007). In contrast, declines that are the result of changes in the size of a cleavage group are not so easily remedied. The size of the working class population and the degree of secularism are the product of broad structural changes in society that are unlikely to be reversed. Changes produced by the diminishing size of cleavage groups will signal lasting declines in electoral relevance, which in turn will likely bring lasting changes to electoral competition and party strategies (Mair, 2008).

### Data and analysis

Investigating trends in electoral relevance requires data on voter behaviour and characteristics that span both countries and time. The Eurobarometer survey series are the data source that contains the necessary information in yearly surveys from 1975–2002. Furthermore, these are the same data used recently by Elff who concludes, ‘Reports of the death of social cleavages are exaggerated’ (2007: 289). The results of the following analyses bear rather different implications about the future of traditional cleavage groups.

Data are gathered from 26 surveys in the Eurobarometer series, one representing each year from 1975–2002.<sup>2</sup> Data are available through the entire time period for eight nations: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands. These countries provide a nice sampling of the historical strengths of the class and religious cleavages as recorded in the literature.<sup>3</sup> In two of these nations, Denmark and Great Britain, social class has historically been a strong influence on voting behaviour. Slightly lower levels of class voting have been reported in Belgium and Germany. Even lower levels of class voting have been reported in the remaining countries – France, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands – where religion often trumps class as the dominant cleavage influence on voting behaviour (Rose, 1974; Franklin, 1985; Nieuwebeerta and DeGraaf, 1999).

Scholarship on the class cleavage usually focuses on the different voting patterns of manual and non-manual members of the labour force. Furthermore,

<sup>2</sup> Data for religious cleavage indicators extend only to 1995. In Italy, where the party system was reconfigured in the 1990s, I only include observations from 1975–92.

<sup>3</sup> The 26 Eurobarometer surveys were selected from the Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970–2002, ICPSR study #4357. Surveys for each year were selected on the basis of data availability of questions on occupation, religion, and party support. The surveys included are Eurobarometers 40, 60, 80, 100, 120, 130, 160, 180, 200, 210, 230, 260, 270, 300, 320, 340, 360, 380, 400, 410, 440, 460, 471, 510, 541, and 563. Surveys from years 1998 and 2001 are excluded due to the absence of the vote intention question.



accounts of the evolution of social democratic parties stress the linkages between these parties and the industrial working class. Following this tradition, I focus on the contribution of manual workers and households headed by manual workers to social democratic parties.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were coded as manual workers if they, or the head of their household, were currently employed as a skilled or unskilled manual worker or supervisor.<sup>5</sup> The Eurobarometer regularly asks respondents to place themselves and their head of household into an occupational category, which I use to identify respondents as manual workers.

Two indicators of religious affiliation are used: denomination and the frequency of church attendance. Churchgoers are often cited to be the most loyal to Christian democratic parties, although Christians often represent the potential base from which Christian democratic parties can derive their support (Broughton and ten Napel, 2000). Respondents are first coded as simply being 'Christian'. However, there is reason to suspect that different denominations may exhibit different patterns. In Belgium and Italy, the relevant denomination for support for a Christian democratic party is Catholic, in Denmark it is Protestant, and in Germany and the Netherlands Christian democratic parties have drawn their support roughly equally from both Catholics and Protestants (Rose, 1974).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I also separate Christians into Catholics and Protestants. Following convention in the literature, respondents are coded as 'churchgoers' if they report going to church at least once a week.

The Eurobarometer surveys use two types of questions to gauge the voting behaviour of the respondent: reported past voting behaviour and vote intention in the next election. Since questions of past voting behaviour are asked irregularly throughout the series, I use only the vote intention question as the measure of party support and turnout.<sup>7</sup> I restrict the analysis of party support to those parties

<sup>4</sup> Notably, current research asserting that social class continues to structure the vote often does so by demonstrating the contemporary inaccuracy of the working/non-working class dichotomy (e.g. Güveli *et al.*, 2007). The goal of this study, however, is not to assess whether a new class structure is affecting voting behaviour, but to examine changes in the electoral relevance of the traditional class order for social democratic or communist parties. Since party vote shares are of concern here, and social democratic and communist parties arose and solidified on the basis of the traditional class structure, the traditional class structure is the most relevant for the current project.

<sup>5</sup> For ease of reference, I use the term manual worker to refer to respondents employed in a manual occupation as well as respondents in households headed by a manual worker. This coding matches other studies of working class citizens using similar Eurobarometer data, such as Elff (2009). It may, however, underestimate the population of working class citizens, as unemployed or retired manual workers are not included. Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer survey series does not contain questions on occupational history prior to the late 1980s. Descriptive statistics of the percentages of manual workers and religious citizens in the first and last years of the Eurobarometer surveys are presented in the Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> In the Netherlands, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) formed as the result of a merger of three Christian democratic parties in 1977. Since data availability begins around the time of this merger, I examine cross-denominational support for the CDA.

<sup>7</sup> The vote intention question asks respondents which party they would vote for if the national election were held tomorrow. Respondents who answered the question by saying that they "would not vote" were coded as not voting. Respondents who answered the question with a party choice were coded as voting in the election.

identified in Table 1.<sup>8</sup> Manual workers were coded as being ‘loyal’ if they intended to vote for social democratic parties or, in the case of Italy, communist parties.<sup>9</sup> Religious respondents were coded as being ‘loyal’ if they intended to vote for Christian democratic parties. Examination of the data reveals volatility in the measure of party support and, to a lesser extent, turnout rates. This is unsurprising, since partisan support may fluctuate between elections in response to current events, governmental performance, or any other number of factors. The following analyses therefore employ three-election moving averages of cleavage loyalty, size, and turnout.<sup>10</sup>

### *The electoral relevance of social class and religion in the 1970s*

The early years of the Eurobarometer surveys provide the benchmark for analysing subsequent declines in the electoral relevance of social class and religion. Table 2 lists the average contribution of manual workers to social democratic parties in the earliest years of the survey – 1975–77 – as well as their loyalty rates towards social democratic parties during these years. To compare the electoral relevance of manual workers with the electorate in general, Table 2 also lists the total amount of national support gained by social democratic parties (National Turnout\*National Loyalty) and national loyalty to social democratic parties.

While manual workers are commonly portrayed as core constituents for social democratic parties, we can see that they contributed rather low percentages of support to social democratic vote shares in the 1970s. In all countries, social democratic parties derived less than half of their total support from manual workers. Furthermore, the contributions of manual workers to social democratic parties range from a low of almost 5% in Ireland and Italy to a high of a 15.4% contribution to the Labour Party in Great Britain. In substantive terms, these figures suggest the vast majority of social democratic vote shares were gathered from the non-manual population. However, the contributions of manual workers to social democratic parties do correspond to cross-national differences in the class cleavage. The class cleavage is commonly regarded as strong in Denmark and Great Britain, and weaker

<sup>8</sup> The question of which parties to include in an analysis of social cleavages is always a difficult one. Here, I restrict the analysis to include only the major social or Christian democratic party in each country for which data are available. The findings therefore speak to the vote shares of what are usually the major cleavage-based parties of a country.

<sup>9</sup> Hereafter, I refer to the social democratic and communist parties collectively as ‘social democratic’ parties.

<sup>10</sup> The use of the vote intention question as a measure of party support gives reason to question how well this measure tracks actual party vote shares during this time period. Generally, the Eurobarometer surveys provide a fairly accurate measure of true electoral support for social and Christian democratic parties, with some exceptions. For example, support for the Labour Party in Great Britain and the German SPD is often overestimated in the survey data, while support for the German Christian democrats and the Dutch Christian democrats are consistently underestimated. Although these discrepancies suggest that results for these countries should be interpreted with some caution, the Eurobarometer surveys do a good job of capturing the actual trends in party vote shares that are of ultimate interest in this study.

Table 2. Contributions and loyalty rates of manual workers to social democratic vote shares (1975–77)

|                 | Manual workers |         | All respondents |                  |
|-----------------|----------------|---------|-----------------|------------------|
|                 | Contribution   | Loyalty | Contribution    | National loyalty |
| Belgium         | 9.7            | 36.2    | 26.7            | 26.7             |
| Denmark         | 11.4           | 57.8    | 29.5            | 38.8             |
| France          | 9.9            | 49.1    | 29.3            | 37.7             |
| Germany         | 11.9           | 55.7    | 36.6            | 44.1             |
| Great Britain   | 15.4           | 48.0    | 28.3            | 35.7             |
| Ireland         | 4.9            | 20.3    | 9.9             | 13.5             |
| Italy           | 8.1            | 38.5    | 23.2            | 23.2             |
| The Netherlands | 7.9            | 47.1    | 23.3            | 31.2             |

Table calculations are from the Eurobarometer survey series: 1975–77. The contributions of manual workers to social democratic parties are calculated by multiplying the size, turnout, and loyalty of manual workers. The contributions of all respondents are calculated by multiplying national turnout rates by national loyalty rates.

in countries where other cleavage divides – such as religion – are important, as in Belgium, Ireland, and Italy. Thus, the figures for manual workers appear to tap the cross-national variations in the class cleavage rather well, but illustrate that manual workers made only a very small contribution to social democratic parties.

The figures for manual workers look a bit different if we look only at initial loyalty rates. In Denmark and Germany, a majority of manual workers cast their ballots for social democratic parties. In all countries considered, the loyalty rates of manual workers towards social democratic parties were higher than those of the general electorate. If social democratic vote shares are of interest, then loyalty rates clearly do not provide a complete picture. Although a majority of Danish and German manual workers supported social democratic parties, they accounted for less than a third of social democratic vote shares.

Table 3 presents similar figures for Christians, churchgoers, and Christian democratic parties. In sharp contrast to their social democratic counterparts, Christian democratic parties derived almost all of their support from their cleavage base: the Christian population. On average, only about 2% of the national vote going to Christian democratic parties came from non-Christians. A strong share of this support came from churchgoers, who constituted over half of the national support for Christian democratic parties in Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands. In absolute terms, churchgoers gave a sizable 14–25% of the vote and Christians gave a significant 25–39% of the vote to Christian democratic parties.<sup>11</sup> The Christian population appears to have been critically relevant to the vote shares of Christian democratic parties.

<sup>11</sup> This claim excludes Denmark, where the Christian People's Party has never overcome its minor party status.

Table 3. Contributions and loyalty rates of Christians to Christian party vote shares (1975–77)

|                 | Christians   |         | Churchgoers  |         | All respondents |         |
|-----------------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
|                 | Contribution | Loyalty | Contribution | Loyalty | Contribution    | Loyalty |
| Belgium         | 39.2         | 53.0    | 24.7         | 71.4    | 42.7            | 42.7    |
| Denmark         | 2.0          | 3.0     | 1.0          | 27.9    | 2.1             | 2.7     |
| Germany         | 36.5         | 49.5    | 14.0         | 72.4    | 38.7            | 46.6    |
| Italy           | 38.1         | 41.5    | 22.1         | 65.7    | 38.5            | 38.5    |
| The Netherlands | 24.9         | 49.3    | 16.7         | 70.5    | 26.3            | 35.1    |

Table calculations are from the Eurobarometer survey series: 1975–77. The contributions of Christians/churchgoers to Christian democratic parties are calculated by multiplying the size, turnout, and loyalty of Christians/churchgoers. The contributions of all respondents are calculated by multiplying national turnout rates by national loyalty rates.

Table 4. Contributions and loyalty rates of Catholics and Protestants to Christian party vote shares (1975–77)

|             | Catholics    |         | Catholic Churchgoers |         | Protestants  |         | Protestants Churchgoers |         |
|-------------|--------------|---------|----------------------|---------|--------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|
|             | Contribution | Loyalty | Contribution         | Loyalty | Contribution | Loyalty | Contribution            | Loyalty |
| Belgium     | 39.2         | 53.4    | 24.6                 | 71.8    |              |         |                         |         |
| Denmark     |              |         |                      |         | 1.3          | 3.2     | 0.7                     | 30.0    |
| Germany     | 21.7         | 61.8    | 13.0                 | 77.3    | 14.8         | 38.3    | 10.6                    | 40.6    |
| Italy       | 38.1         | 41.5    | 22.2                 | 65.7    |              |         |                         |         |
| Netherlands | 14.5         | 53.7    | 9.1                  | 73.1    | 10.5         | 44.8    | 7.6                     | 67.7    |

Table calculations are from the Eurobarometer survey series: 1975–77. Contributions are calculated by multiplying size, turnout, and loyalty.

Loyalty rates of the religious population tell only a slightly different story. A majority of Christian voters in Belgium and almost half of Christian voters in Germany and the Netherlands supported Christian democratic parties, although Christians accounted for almost the entire vote share of these parties. Churchgoers, while constituting a sizeable but lower proportion of Christian democratic vote shares, were fiercely loyal towards these parties, casting between 66% and 72% of their ballots for Christian democrats in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Churchgoers were more loyal party supporters, but Christians contributed more to Christian democratic vote shares.

Table 4 examines the contributions and loyalty rates by denomination. In Belgium, Italy, and Great Britain, the contributions and loyalty rates of Catholics or Protestants largely match the figures for Christians. However, in Germany and the Netherlands, Christian support for Christian democratic parties is split between Catholics and

Protestants. In both countries, Catholics appear to have been more consequential than Protestants for party vote shares and exhibit higher loyalty rates.

### *The electoral relevance of social class and religion (1975–2002)*

The following analyses investigate whether there have been temporal changes in cleavage contributions to party vote shares by regressing the contributions of manual workers and Christians on time for each of the eight countries. To tease out the independent effects that changes in size, loyalty, and turnout have had on the contributions of cleavage groups to social or Christian democratic parties, cleavage contributions are also calculated varying only one variable at a time – size, turnout, or loyalty – while holding the other two variables constant at their 1975–77 values. When these calculations are regressed on time, the results illustrate the independent effects of changes in size, loyalty, and turnout on the total contributions of cleavage groups.<sup>12</sup>

### **Manual workers**

Table 5 presents the results of regressions for manual workers. Manual workers contributed a low percentage of support to social democratic vote shares at the beginning of the series, and they have become noticeably less relevant over time. Across all countries, the manual worker contribution to social democratic parties has declined significantly since the 1970s, particularly in Italy and the Netherlands. While manual workers gave between 5% and 16% of the national vote to social democratic parties in the 1970s, these results suggest that they contributed even less to social democratic vote shares in subsequent decades. Social democratic parties appear to have lost a good deal of the vote share they received from manual workers in the past.

Generally speaking, declines in all three factors – size, turnout, and loyalty – have driven the declines in the contributions of manual workers we observe. Of these three components of cleavage group contributions, the most consistent results are found regarding the size of the population of manual workers. Declines in the size of the manual worker population have driven significant declines in manual worker contributions in all eight countries, particularly in Belgium, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. The findings also reveal important declines in the proportions of manual workers who support social democratic parties, with significant decreases in manual worker loyalty rates in six of the nations considered: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands.

<sup>12</sup> Bartolini and Mair (1990) find support for the continued relevance of the class cleavage after examining the degree to which votes changed between blocs of parties. The findings presented here do not change if the relevant party blocs are examined in place of individual parties (specifically, parties belonging to social democratic and communist party families in reference to social class, and parties belonging to the Christian democratic party family in reference to religion), with two exceptions. Analysis of party blocs reveals less evidence of declining cleavage group contributions in reference to religion in Denmark and manual workers in Ireland.

Table 5. Sources of change in the contributions of manual workers to social democratic parties: size, turnout, and loyalty

|                 | Contribution |      | Size   |      | Turnout |      | Loyalty |      |
|-----------------|--------------|------|--------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
|                 | Trend        | SE   | Trend  | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend   | SE   |
| Belgium         | -0.29*       | 0.04 | -0.18* | 0.03 | -0.03*  | 0.01 | -0.16*  | 0.03 |
| Denmark         | -0.22*       | 0.02 | -0.12* | 0.03 | 0.04    | 0.02 | -0.16*  | 0.02 |
| France          | -0.12*       | 0.03 | -0.06* | 0.02 | 0.01    | 0.01 | -0.09*  | 0.03 |
| Germany         | -0.21*       | 0.02 | -0.10* | 0.01 | -0.06*  | 0.01 | -0.07*  | 0.02 |
| Great Britain   | -0.26*       | 0.07 | -0.28* | 0.03 | -0.06*  | 0.02 | 0.17*   | 0.07 |
| Ireland         | -0.08*       | 0.03 | -0.05* | 0.01 | -0.05*  | 0.01 | 0.01    | 0.03 |
| Italy           | -0.44*       | 0.06 | -0.17* | 0.03 | -0.03*  | 0.01 | -0.37*  | 0.06 |
| The Netherlands | -0.38*       | 0.04 | -0.24* | 0.02 | -0.05*  | 0.02 | -0.14*  | 0.03 |

Table entries are the results of regressing the variables on time. Size, turnout, and loyalty regressions represent the trends in the contribution when only the reported variable is allowed to vary and the others are held constant at their 1975–77 values.

$N = 23$  for Belgium, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, 24 for Denmark, Germany, and Ireland, and 17 for Italy.

\*Statistical significance at the 0.05 level for one-tailed tests.

Turnout rates also appear to have played a more modest role in the declines we observe in manual worker contributions, with relatively small declines apparent in Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Great Britain deserves special consideration. The contribution of manual workers to the British Labour Party exhibits a decline similar to that found in other countries. However, loyalty rates among British manual workers display significant *increases*. If one looks only at the loyalty rates of manual workers, then cleavage-based politics appears to be not only alive and well, but also on the rise. The increasing tendency of manual workers to support Labour, however, appears to have been overwhelmed by declines in their numbers. Manual workers contribute less to Labour's vote share not because they are voting for different parties, but simply because there are fewer of them.

## Religion

Although less scholarly attention has been devoted to religion, it has been cited as the cleavage of greater importance (e.g. Dogan, 2004). The figures presented in Table 3 give credence to this claim. Unlike the contributions of manual workers to social democratic parties, the religious population constituted almost all of the electoral support for Christian democratic parties. Thus, any declines in the contributions of religious citizens could have severe consequences for party vote shares. Table 6 presents the results of regressions of the contributions of Christians and churchgoers to Christian democratic party vote shares over time.

Table 6. Sources of change in the contributions of Christians to Christian democratic parties: size, turnout, and loyalty

|                 | Christians   |      |        |      |         |      |         |      | Churchgoers  |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
|-----------------|--------------|------|--------|------|---------|------|---------|------|--------------|------|--------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
|                 | Contribution |      | Size   |      | Turnout |      | Loyalty |      | Contribution |      | Size   |      | Turnout |      | Loyalty |      |
|                 | Trend        | SE   | Trend  | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend        | SE   | Trend  | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend   | SE   |
| Belgium         | -1.05*       | 0.11 | -0.18* | 0.06 | -0.09*  | 0.03 | -0.88*  | 0.08 | -0.86*       | 0.07 | -0.73* | 0.21 | -0.03*  | 0.01 | -0.23*  | 0.06 |
| Denmark         | -0.05*       | 0.01 | -0.01* | 0.00 | 0.01*   | 0.00 | -0.05*  | 0.02 | -0.02*       | 0.01 | -0.02* | 0.01 | 0.01*   | 0.00 | -0.01   | 0.01 |
| Germany         | -0.59*       | 0.09 | -0.09* | 0.02 | -0.15*  | 0.04 | -0.39*  | 0.09 | -0.41*       | 0.04 | -0.29* | 0.03 | -0.04*  | 0.02 | -0.17*  | 0.04 |
| Italy           | -0.69*       | 0.15 | -0.07* | 0.02 | -0.14*  | 0.03 | -0.52*  | 0.16 | -0.15*       | 0.11 | 0.29*  | 0.31 | -0.08*  | 0.01 | -0.32*  | 0.09 |
| The Netherlands | -0.56*       | 0.11 | -0.43* | 0.03 | 0.10    | 0.08 | -0.28*  | 0.09 | -0.47*       | 0.06 | -0.44* | 0.14 | 0.11*   | 0.04 | -0.16*  | 0.03 |

Table entries are the results of regressing the variables on time. Size, turnout, and loyalty regressions represent the trends in the contribution when only the reported variable is allowed to vary and the others are held constant at their 1975–77 values.

For Christian regressions:  $N = 19$  for Germany, 18 for Denmark and the Netherlands, 17 for Belgium, and 15 for Italy.

For churchgoer regressions:  $N = 14$  for Germany, 13 for Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands, and 12 for Denmark.

\*Statistical significance at the 0.05 level for one-tailed tests.

The results display declines in the contributions of both Christians and churchgoers to Christian democratic parties in all countries. These declines are both substantively and statistically significant. The declining contribution of Christians amounts to a loss of at least 14% of the vote since 1975 in all countries but Denmark. Most of these declines are driven by declining contributions of churchgoers. In Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, churchgoer contributions to Christian democratic parties have dropped between 12% and 22% since the 1970s. Christian democratic parties are gathering much less of the vote from religious citizens than in the past. Considering their initial levels of support, this is likely to have severe consequences for Christian democratic parties.

Declines in the size of the religious population often stand out as the largest contributor to these trends, although in some cases declining loyalty rates have played the most prominent role. In Germany and the Netherlands, declining contributions have been driven mostly by dwindling numbers of religious citizens. In Great Britain and Italy, however, the declining contributions of Christians can be mainly attributed to declining loyalty rates. In Italy, the proportion of the population that reports attending church at least once a week has actually increased. Belgium also presents an interesting case. While the declining contributions of Belgian Christians have been driven by declining loyalty rates, the declining contributions of churchgoers have been driven primarily by declines in size.

Table 7 presents the results of similar regressions by denomination. The patterns of decline mirror the patterns found for Christians, with the exceptions of Germany and the Netherlands where both Catholics and Protestants constitute the basis of support for Christian democratic parties. The declines in the contributions of Catholics in both countries have been larger than the declines for Protestants. This holds both among identifiers and churchgoers. Identifiers in Germany appear to have become less loyal, while the declining contributions of Catholic churchgoers can be largely explained in terms of declines in size. In the Netherlands, both the size and loyalty of Catholic and Protestant identifiers have declined, while the size of Catholic churchgoers and the loyalty of Protestant churchgoers explain the declining contributions of these groups.

### **Cleavage groups, vote shares, and party strategies**

While most scholarship on the continuity or decline of traditional social cleavages has focussed on changes in the voting behaviour of cleavage group members, the analyses presented above examine changes in the electoral relevance of traditional social cleavage groups for the vote shares of their traditional parties. The analyses demonstrate that when traditional social cleavage groups are viewed in terms of electoral relevance, rather than their voting behaviour alone, the general picture is one of decline.

These findings highlight three contributions of this study to the existing literature on traditional social cleavages. First, when electoral results are of concern, examination of the voting behaviour of traditional cleavage group members



Table 7. Sources of change in the contributions of Catholics and Protestants: size, turnout, and loyalty

|                 | Catholics            |      |        |      |         |      |         |      | Protestants            |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
|-----------------|----------------------|------|--------|------|---------|------|---------|------|------------------------|------|--------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
|                 | Contribution         |      | Size   |      | Turnout |      | Loyalty |      | Contribution           |      | Size   |      | Turnout |      | Loyalty |      |
|                 | Trend                | SE   | Trend  | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend                  | SE   | Trend  | SE   | Trend   | SE   | Trend   | SE   |
| Belgium         | -1.06*               | 0.10 | -0.20* | 0.06 | -0.09*  | 0.03 | -0.88*  | 0.08 |                        |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
| Denmark         |                      |      |        |      |         |      |         |      | -0.04*                 | 0.01 | 0.01   | 0.01 | 0.01*   | 0.00 | -0.03*  | 0.01 |
| Germany         | -0.37*               | 0.08 | -0.06  | 0.04 | -0.10*  | 0.02 | -0.25*  | 0.06 | -0.22*                 | 0.04 | -0.04* | 0.02 | -0.05*  | 0.02 | -0.14*  | 0.05 |
| Italy           | -0.69*               | 0.15 | -0.08* | 0.02 | -0.14*  | 0.03 | -0.52*  | 0.16 |                        |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
| The Netherlands | -0.35*               | 0.07 | -0.26* | 0.02 | 0.07    | 0.05 | -0.19*  | 0.06 | -0.21*                 | 0.05 | -0.18* | 0.02 | 0.03    | 0.03 | -0.09*  | 0.04 |
|                 | Catholic Churchgoers |      |        |      |         |      |         |      | Protestant Churchgoers |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
| Belgium         | -0.86*               | 0.07 | -0.74* | 0.21 | -0.03*  | 0.01 | -0.23*  | 0.06 |                        |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
| Denmark         |                      |      |        |      |         |      |         |      | -0.01                  | 0.01 | -0.01  | 0.01 | 0.00*   | 0.00 | -0.00   | 0.00 |
| Germany         | -0.40*               | 0.10 | -0.34* | 0.09 | -0.05*  | 0.02 | -0.11   | 0.08 | -0.01                  | 0.10 | 0.00   | 0.04 | 0.01*   | 0.00 | -0.02   | 0.01 |
| Italy           | -0.15                | 0.11 | 0.28   | 0.31 | -0.08*  | 0.01 | -0.32*  | 0.09 |                        |      |        |      |         |      |         |      |
| The Netherlands | -0.32*               | 0.03 | -0.33* | 0.06 | 0.07*   | 0.03 | -0.02   | 0.02 | -0.15*                 | 0.03 | -0.11  | 0.08 | 0.04*   | 0.02 | -0.09*  | 0.02 |

Table entries are the results of regressing the variables on time. Size, turnout, and loyalty regressions represent the trends in contributions when only the reported variable varies, while the others are held constant at their 1975–77 values.

For Catholics,  $N = 17$  for Belgium and Germany, 18 for the Netherlands, and 15 for Italy.

For Protestants,  $N = 18$  for the Netherlands, 19 for Germany, and 17 for Denmark.

For Catholic churchgoers,  $N = 13$  for Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and 12 for Italy.

For Protestant churchgoers,  $N = 12$  for Denmark, 14 for Germany, and 13 for the Netherlands.

\*Statistical significance at the 0.05 level for one-tailed tests.

provides only a piece of the picture. The results for both manual worker and religious contributions clearly demonstrate that the electoral relevance of a cleavage group is not equivalent to the electoral behaviour of the cleavage group. For instance, if one looks only at the loyalty rates of British manual workers, then the electoral strength of manual workers appears to have increased over time, even though the contribution of manual workers to Labour has declined over this period. More generally, the results demonstrate that strong loyalty rates do not always translate into a high level of electoral relevance. Important cross-national differences in cleavage-based voting behaviour (e.g. Brooks *et al.*, 2006), but even where cleavage group members remain strong supporters of their traditional parties their loyalty cannot make up for what they have lost in numbers. While patterns of voting behaviour may vary cross-nationally, the declining electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups does not. More generally, the analyses presented here demonstrate that all three components (size, turnout, and loyalty) interact to determine the size of the group's contribution to a party's vote share.

Second, the findings presented here demonstrate pervasive, cross-national declines in the electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups that are heavily driven by socio-demographic changes. While there is a wealth of literature documenting changes in traditional cleavage-based voting behaviour, the findings presented here stress the importance of declines in group size. Much of the declining relevance of these groups can be traced to the simple fact that there are fewer members of these cleavage groups than there were in the past. These findings are significant in that they signal declines due to widespread changes in the structure of Western European societies. Since these structural changes are likely irreversible, the declining relevance of traditional cleavage groups is likely irreparable. No amount of political manipulation will shift the post-industrial economies of today back to the industrialized economies of the past. And while there is always a slight chance that societies will become more religious, the changes that we observe are likely to be permanent alterations in the political landscape. Social and Christian democratic parties will have to respond to the declining size of their core base by altering their electoral strategies or will face declining vote shares. This means that party strategies are likely to become increasingly catch-all in nature, partisan alignments are likely to become increasingly variable, and electoral politics in Western European democracies is likely to be fundamentally different from the past (Mair, 2008).

Third, the results of this study speak to recent research that views cleavage-based, or ideological, voting behaviour in light of party policy offerings (Evans *et al.*, 1999; DeGraaf *et al.*, 2001; Lachat, 2008; Elff, 2009). Generally, the argument of these studies is that cleavage-based voting depends on the strategies of political parties. When political parties stake out distinct positions on cleavage-based issues, the amount of cleavage-based voting is expected to increase. The findings presented here do not dispute this argument, but question the incentives for parties to pursue such cleavage-reinforcing strategies. Parties may always have reason to stake out clear policy positions, but it is not clear that staking out clear positions on cleavage-based

issues – at least as traditionally defined – will provide an electoral benefit. Since declines in cleavage group size are unlikely to be counteracted by changes in party strategies, the results presented here illustrate little incentive for parties to employ electoral strategies that encourage traditional patterns of cleavage voting.

There are strong signs that social and Christian democratic party strategies will (continue to) depart from traditional cleavage-based politics. If these parties perceive the declining size of their traditional constituencies, as they surely do, they can alter their electoral strategies in ways that depart from traditional cleavage politics in the hopes of gaining votes from elsewhere. And since party appeals may serve to either strengthen or weaken cleavage attachments (Dalton, 2002), political parties themselves may encourage disloyalty by de-emphasizing cleavage issues. Examination of the timing of these declines and the role of party strategies is a necessary and fruitful avenue for future research. Furthermore, the extant literature gives us good reason to suspect that the social democratic parties of Great Britain and Ireland may have prevented declining loyalty rates among manual workers by making stronger cleavage-based electoral appeals.

Party strategies have also played a likely role in producing the interesting disjunctions observed between the declining electoral relevance of manual workers and the trends in social democratic party vote shares. In France, Germany, and the Netherlands, the contribution of manual workers to social democratic parties has declined, yet the vote shares of these parties display no evidence of these declines. Declining support from the working class may not matter to general patterns of electoral support if parties counteract these losses with gains in other areas. For instance, Kitschelt's (1994) description of the social democratic dilemma details the changes in strategy that are often necessary for social democratic parties to avoid declining vote shares when their traditional constituencies have diminished.

Social democratic parties may be particularly adept at finding new constituencies, since the manual working class has never constituted a majority (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986). The findings presented here suggest that some social democratic parties have been more successful than others at representing more diverse constituencies. While the traditional working class was comprised of a roughly homogenous group of male, unionized, industrial manual labourers, the new 'service proletariat' (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1993) is more heterogeneous in both composition and political interests than the traditional working class (Oesch, 2006; Güveli *et al.*, 2007). Lower-level service workers tend to be heavily female, and often young and economically mobile (Esping-Andersen, 1993; Bernardi and Garrido, 2008), making it difficult for parties to rely on this new 'class' as a political base. Nonetheless, fluctuations in social democratic party vote shares are likely due to their willingness and ability to appeal to these new social groups (Güveli *et al.*, 2007). As the traditional industrial order continues to decline, social democratic vote shares are likely to become more dependent on the new service classes.

The declining electoral relevance of religion is more striking in two respects. First, all Christian democratic parties considered have lost electoral ground over

the post-Second World War era. Second, the large contributions of religious citizens to Christian democratic parties in the 1970s have declined significantly in all countries. What we are witnessing is a cross-national decline in the electoral relevance of religious citizens for Christian democratic vote shares, which have also rapidly declined (presumably) as a result of growing secularism. This significant loss of the Christian base of support is not likely to be easily overcome, although there are certainly alternative strategies and constituencies available to Christian democrats (van Kersbergen, 2008).

This study stands apart from typical accounts of cleavage politics in that it has considered cleavage groups in connection with party vote shares. Viewed from this perspective, the general conclusion is that the electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups, specifically manual workers and Christians, has declined. These cleavage groups give lower degrees of electoral support to social and Christian democratic parties than they did in the past. Whether it is changes in party strategies or party vote shares, the declining electoral relevance of traditional cleavage groups will continue to change the nature of electoral politics in Western democracies. Future party alignments and electoral strategies are unlikely to resemble those of the past.

## References

- Andersen, J.G. (1984), 'Decline of class voting or change in class voting? Social classes and party choice in Denmark in the 1970s', *European Journal of Political Research* 12: 243–259.
- Axelrod, R. (1972), 'Where the votes come from: an analysis of electoral coalitions, 1952–1968', *American Political Science Review* 66: 11–20.
- Bartolini, S. and P. Mair (1990), *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernardi, F. and L. Garrido (2008), 'Is there a new service proletariat? Post-industrial employment growth and social inequality in Spain', *European Sociological Review* 24: 299–313.
- Brooks, C., P. Nieuwbeerta and J. Manza (2006), 'Cleavage-based voting behavior in cross-national perspective: evidence from six postwar democracies', *Social Science Research* 35: 88–128.
- Broughton, D. and H. ten Napel (eds) (2000), *Religion and Mass Electoral Behavior in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Clark, T.N. and S.M. Lipset (1991), 'Are social classes dying?', *International Sociology* 6: 397–410.
- Clark, T.N., S.M. Lipset and M. Rempel (1993), 'The declining political significance of social class', *International Sociology* 8: 293–316.
- Crouch, C. (2008), 'Change in European societies since the 1970s', *West European Politics* 31: 1–14.
- Dalton, R.J. (1984), 'Cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment in advanced industrial democracies', *Journal of Politics* 46: 264–284.
- (2002), 'Political cleavages, issues, and electoral change', in L. LeDuc, R.G. Niemi and P. Norris (eds), *Comparing Democracies 2*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 189–209.
- Dalton, R.J., S.C. Flanagan and P.A. Beck (eds) (1984), *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- DeGraaf, N.D., A. Heath and A. Need (2001), 'Declining cleavages and political choices: the interplay of social and political factors in the Netherlands', *Electoral Studies* 20: 1–15.
- Dogan, M. (2001), 'Class, religion, party: triple decline of electoral cleavages in Western Europe', in L. Karvonen and S. Kuhnle (eds), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, New York: Routledge Press, pp. 90–110.
- (2004), 'From social class and religious identity to status incongruence in post-industrial societies', *Comparative Sociology* 3: 163–197.

- Elff, M. (2007), 'Social structure and electoral behavior in comparative perspective: the decline of social cleavages in Western Europe revisited', *Perspectives on Politics* 5: 277–294.
- (2009), 'Social divisions, party positions, and electoral behavior', *Electoral Studies* 28: 297–308.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (ed.) (1993), *Changing Classes*, London: Sage Publications.
- Evans, G. (1993), 'The decline of class divisions in Britain? Class and ideological preferences in the 1960s and the 1980s', *British Journal of Sociology* 44: 449–471.
- (ed.) (1999), *The End of Class Politics?*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- (2000), 'The continued significance of class voting', *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 401–417.
- Evans, G., A. Heath and C. Payne (1999), 'Class: labour as a catch-all party?', in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds), *Critical Elections. British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, London: Sage, pp. 87–101.
- Franklin, M.N. (1985), *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Franklin, M., T. Mackie and H. Valen (eds) (1992), *Electoral Change: Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Franklin, M. and A. Mughan (1978), 'The decline of class voting in Britain: problems of analysis and interpretation', *American Political Science Review* 72: 523–534.
- Freire, A. (2006), 'Bringing social identities back in: the social anchors of left-right orientation in Western Europe', *International Political Science Review* 27: 359–378.
- Güveli, A., A. Need and N.D. de Graaf (2007), 'The rise of "New" social classes within the service class in the Netherlands: political orientation of social and cultural specialists and technocrats between 1979 and 2003', *Acta Sociologica* 50: 129–146.
- Heath, A., R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985), *How Britain Votes*, Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1977), *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (1984), 'The changing structure of political cleavages in western society', in R.J. Dalton, S.C. Flanagan and P.A. Beck (eds), *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2008), 'Changing values among western publics from 1970 to 2006', *West European Politics* 31: 130–146.
- Karvonen, L. and S. Kuhnle (2001), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, New York: Routledge Press.
- Kitschelt, H. (1993), 'Class structure and social democratic party strategy', *British Journal of Political Science* 23: 299–337.
- (1994), *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Knutsen, O. (2004), *Social Structure and Party Choice in Western Europe*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (2006), *Class Voting in Western Europe*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Korpi, W. (1972), 'Some problems in the measurement of class voting', *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 627–642.
- Lachat, R. (2008), 'The impact of party polarization on ideological voting', *Electoral Studies* 27: 687–698.
- Lipset, S.M. and S. Rokkan (1967), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, New York: The Free Press.
- Mair, P. (2008), 'The challenge to party government', *West European Politics* 31: 211–234.
- Manza, J.M. Hout and C. Brooks (1995), 'Class voting in capitalist democracies since World War II: dealignment, realignment, or trendless fluctuation?', *Annual Review of Sociology* 21: 137–162.
- McDonald, M.D. and R. Best (2006), 'Equilibria and restoring forces in models of vote dynamics', *Political Analysis* 14: 369–392.
- Nieuwbeerta, P. (1996), 'The democratic class struggle in postwar societies: class voting in twenty countries, 1954–1990', *Acta Sociologica* 39: 345–383.
- Nieuwbeerta, P. and N.D. DeGraaf (1999), 'Traditional class voting in twenty postwar societies', in G. Evans (ed.), *The End of Class Politics?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 23–56.
- Nieuwbeerta, P. and W. Ultee (1999), 'Class voting in western industrialized countries, 1945–1990: systemizing and testing explanations', *European Journal of Political Research* 35: 123–160.
- Norris, P. and R. Inglehart (2004), *Sacred and Secular*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oesch, D. (2006), 'Coming to grips with a changing class structure: an analysis of employment stratification in Britain, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland', *International Sociology* 21: 263–288.

- Pontusson, J. (1995), 'Explaining the decline of European social democracy', *World Politics* 47: 495–533.
- Przeworski, A. and J. Sprague (1986), *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rose, R. and D. Urwin (1969), 'Social cohesion, political parties and strains in regimes', *Comparative Political Studies* 2: 7–67.
- (1970), 'Persistence and change in western party systems since 1945', *Political Studies* 18: 287–319.
- Rose, R. (ed.) (1974), *Electoral Behavior*, New York: The Free Press.
- Van Holsteyn, J.J.M. and G.A. Irwin (2000), 'The bells toll no more: the declining influence of religion on voting behavior in the Netherlands', in D. Broughton and H. ten Napel (eds), *Religion and Mass Electoral Behavior in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Van Kersbergen, K. (2008), 'The Christian democratic phoenix and modern unsecular politics', *Party Politics* 14: 259–279.
- Zuckerman, A. and M.I. Lichbach (1977), 'Stability and change in European electorates', *World Politics* 29: 523–551.

## Appendix

The percentages of manual workers and religious citizens in the first and last available years of the Eurobarometer surveys

| Country         | Manual workers |           | Christians |           | Churchgoers |           |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
|                 | First year     | Last year | First year | Last year | First year  | Last year |
| Belgium         | 26.7           | 20.6      | 76.0       | 68.6      | 33.0        | 17.2      |
| Denmark         | 26.8           | 18.1      | 80.2       | 76.5      | 4.5         | 3.6       |
| France          | 26.0           | 24.9      | –          | –         | –           | –         |
| Germany         | 25.8           | 20.3      | 87.4       | 84.9      | 21.6        | 12.5      |
| Great Britain   | 42.4           | 29.2      | –          | –         | –           | –         |
| Ireland         | 32.4           | 27.0      | –          | –         | –           | –         |
| Italy           | 21.2           | 15.1      | 93.1       | 90.4      | 35.1        | 42.1      |
| The Netherlands | 23.0           | 13.0      | 66.9       | 37.6      | 26.9        | 13.7      |

Table entries are 3-year averages. Figures for manual workers represent the percentage of respondents in households headed by a manual worker.

The percentages of Catholics and Protestants in the first and last available years of the Eurobarometer surveys

| Country         | Catholics  |           | Catholic churchgoers |           | Protestants |           | Protestant churchgoers |           |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
|                 | First year | Last year | First year           | Last year | First year  | Last year | First year             | Last year |
| Belgium         | 75.4       | 67.5      | 33.0                 | 17.0      | –           | –         | –                      | –         |
| Denmark         | –          | –         | –                    | –         | 79.3        | 75.6      | 4.0                    | 3.4       |
| Germany         | 41.0       | 39.4      | 18.8                 | 9.7       | 46.4        | 45.2      | 2.7                    | 2.7       |
| Italy           | 93.1       | 90.1      | 35.1                 | 42.0      | –           | –         | –                      | –         |
| The Netherlands | 35.3       | 20.4      | 14.2                 | 4.6       | 31.6        | 17.2      | 12.8                   | 9.1       |

Table entries are three-year averages.