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## Politics and the Professions in a time of crisis

### Abstract

*Class analysis has undergone a 'cultural turn' in recent years, driven most notably by the growing influence of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. We seek to connect this perspective with organization studies via an analysis of the political, economic and cultural cleavages that exist within a sample of professionals, managers and executives – summarily, the UK professional class. The results show that significant cleavages exist within the UK professional class in terms of economic and cultural capital composition and political dispositions. However, the most significant differences observable are not related to classic materialist 'left' and 'right' perspectives as recent research elsewhere suggests, but on more epiphenomenal issues such as immigration, equal rights and the environment. In an era where the professions find themselves in crisis (Leicht, 2016), the results imply that professional groups should take politics more seriously and actively articulate how professional expertise can contribute to the common good.*

**Keywords: professional class; Multiple Correspondence Analysis; Bourdieu; political dispositions; UK; expertise**

### Introduction

This article explores the political dispositions and orientations of the professional class in the UK. The article does so by subjecting survey data from the 2013 *British Social Attitudes Survey* to a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010). The political orientations of the professional class are particularly relevant to understand in an era characterised by growing market fundamentalism, cultural fragmentation and post-modern scepticism (Leicht, 2016) all of which challenge the value of professional expertise. Understanding the political dispositions of managers, professionals and other strategically positioned individuals in society is important because these individuals operate in or around the 'command posts of the economy' (Mills, 1956) and are therefore capable of shaping

surrounding structures in their own image. Indeed, many such individuals, whether from the private or public sectors, are key agents in the institutionalisation of neo-liberal reforms and austerity programmes (Reed and Wallace, 2015).

Such work is also of relevance for recent work (see, for example, Maclean, Harvey and Kling, 2014) which has sought to “re-connect class analysis with organizational theory” (1) on the premise that issues of class have slowly become less salient in the work of organization theorists. Class analysis in the social sciences is increasingly informed by the wider cultural turn in sociology and the growing influence of Pierre Bourdieu (Bennett, Savage, Bortolaia Silva, Warde, Gavo-Cal and Wright 2009; Savage et al., 2013; Skeggs, 2004). However, organization studies has been slow to respond to these wider shifts. Whilst the work of Bourdieu receives increasing attention in organizational theory and work sociology very few organizational studies have specifically addressed issues of class from Bourdieusian perspectives (although see Kerr and Robinson, 2012; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Maclean, Harvey and Chia, 2010; Maclean et al., 2014; McLeod, O’Donohoe and Townley, 2009), instead focusing on issues of domination within the narrower realm of organizational fields (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009; Golsorkhi et al, 2009; Kerr and Robinson, 2009; Wright, 2009). We contribute to organization theory by demonstrating the value of a Bourdieusian approach to understanding the distinctions that might exist within and between class fractions and, by extension, by interrogating the political conservatism or otherwise that UK managers evince.

The article is structured as follows. The next section introduces the concept of the professional class and discusses recent work which maps its internal divisions. The subsequent section discusses recent sociological work on class from a Bourdieusian

perspective. The methodology is then introduced and the sample described. Results are then presented with reference to geometric and cluster diagrams. The article concludes with a discussion of these results and their significance both methodologically and theoretically.

### **Internal divisions in the Professional Class**

The ‘professional class’ is used here, following Le Roux et al (2008), to denote the collective occupational categories of managers, professionals and administrators – elsewhere referred to as the “salarariat” (Goldthorpe and Marshall, 1992) or “service class” (Goldthrope, 1982). Class analysis, and class labels in particular, are undergoing a period of contestation and reconceptualization in the social sciences (Savage et al., 2013). The salariat, service class or, as we prefer here, the professional class, is generally associated with higher rewards, compensation and career structures than the ‘working class’ (Li et al., 2002). One key argument of Goldthorpe’s class schema was his characterization of the service class as “an essentially conservative element within modern societies” (1982: 80). In short, Goldthorpe’s thesis contends that the service class is both homogenous and conservative.

However, recent work exploring the professional class from a Bourdieusian perspective points towards greater fragmentation than is allowed for by the Goldthorpe thesis. For example, Marks and Baldry’s (2009) study highlights the multiple class positions with which IT workers self-identify, ranging from working through to upper middle class. Spence et al.’s (2015) study of promotions to managerial positions in professional service firms similarly shows how the values accorded to cultural capital are often country-specific, with French partners requiring higher amounts of institutionalized cultural capital than their British, Canadian or Spanish counterparts. Dezalay (1995) illustrates how different forms of social capital influence the ‘turf

battles' that ensue among professional bodies in France. Accordingly, the capital composition of those occupying managerial and senior administrative roles varies from one nation to another.

Capital composition also varies within nations, with the potential in some countries depending on levels of openness and inclusivity for those from different class backgrounds to be found occupying similar roles towards the end of their careers, depending on their levels of reflexivity (Maclean et al., 2012). McLeod et al. (2009: 1011) concur with this view with respect to the career trajectories of advertising personnel, stating that once they had begun to climb the ladder, 'the influence of their social class background was more subtle and less detrimental, due to the social capital they accumulated en route'. Elsewhere, Flemmen (2012) showed that in Norway there remains a persistent division in the upper class between 'owners' and 'employees' as evinced by the different forms of capital that each possesses. Maclean et al. (2010; 2014) demonstrate how pathways into senior corporate positions in France and Britain vary from one country to another, with cultural capital playing a key mediating role. Overall, the group of managers looked at by Maclean et al (et seq) is described as "variegated and fluid, connecting agents from different life worlds" (Maclean et al., 2015).

Hanlon's (1998) study of professionals in different jurisdictions similarly represents a direct challenge to Goldthorpe's thesis. He argues that service workers in both public and private sectors can be characterized by cleavages in cultural capital. Professionals who are similar to one another from either the public or private sector employ multiple definitions of "professionalism". Additionally, commercialism cannibalizes public service definitions of professional work. Hanlon (1998) suggests that such cleavages may cause professionals to change their political allegiances which, in turn, questions the extent to which the professional class might be thought of as either homogenous or conservative, as Goldthorpe suggests.

Beyond consideration of specific occupations or broad roles within the professional class, there have been very few studies that have sought to understand the capital composition and political dispositions of the professional class *tout court*. Those that have done so suggest that the professional class is internally divided. A key study to demonstrate this is that of Flemmen (2014), whose research on the Norwegian professional class we seek to build upon here. Countering Goldthorpe's (1982) depiction of the professional class as inherently conservative and wedded to the establishment, Flemmen (2014) reveals that the Norwegian professional class is actually fractured along lines of both economic and cultural capital. Specifically, Flemmen (2014) documents the inter-relationships between economic capital, cultural capital and political dispositions. He finds that, firstly, the Norwegian professional class is broadly bifurcated into those with higher cultural capital and lower economic capital and those with lower cultural capital and higher economic capital, conveniently reflecting Bourdieu's own findings on social space more generally in France in the 1960s. A key intermediate variable here is political disposition, with the first, cultural capital rich group displaying more left-wing tendencies in terms of their voting patterns and political views more broadly, while the latter group, richer in economic capital, exhibits more right-wing tendencies in terms of voting patterns and political views. Overall, the professional class is presented as characterized by a "systematic heterogeneity in [its] political leanings that follows the divisions constituted by the possession of forms of capital" (Flemmen, 2014: 17).

Flemmen's (2014) study is innovative in that it applies Bourdieusian methods to demographic data and supplements this with consideration of political dispositions. However, it is not clear to what extent the results extend to other countries. As the literature on the professional class indicates, one might expect varying results in different countries as diverse

capitals are ascribed heterodox values across borders. The cleavages found by Flemmen (2014) that couple left-wing political dispositions with higher levels of cultural capital and right-wing political dispositions with higher levels of economic capital might not hold in other contexts, such as the UK.

### **Measuring class**

Bourdieu can be considered *inter alia* as a sociologist of practice, the body, education, fields, the economy, discourse and class. While not discounting his extensive pronouncements on these wide ranging sociological targets, we concentrate primarily here on the methodological platform that he built for class analysis, which culminated in his magnum opus *Distinction* in 1979. The value of a Bourdieusian approach to class is not that it permits a wholesale replacement of economic or occupation-based approaches to stratification, but rather that it considers the interactions between cultural capital, social capital and economic capital, permitting an exploration of how cultural criteria are indicative of relative position in the social space, rather than reified in grand, socio-economic categories. For example, it is recognized that occupation-based approaches to class “fail to encompass the cultural dimensions that also shape classes in the real world” (Crompton 2010: 12). The limitations of strictly employment-based class schema are evident, not only from the growing number of Bourdieusian studies on class and stratification, but also from the synthesis of Bourdieu with more orthodox, economic or occupation-based classification approaches (see, for example, Crompton and Scott, 2005 and Sayer, 2012). What the work of Bourdieu (1987) offers above all in relation to social class, according to Skeggs (2004: 21), is ‘explanatory power’. He uncovers the underlying logic of social stratification, demonstrating the

‘correspondence between social hierarchies and educational hierarchies’ (Dezalay, 1995: 340) which in France at least guarantees the reproduction of the establishment all the more effectively for assuming the appearance of a meritocracy.

The most prominent examples of such an approach in recent years are those drawn from the empirical projects of the *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Survey* (CCSE) and the *BBC’s Great British Class Survey* (GBCS). The interpretations of the CCSE were published in, for example, Bennett et al. (2009) and Le Roux et al. (2008). Broadly speaking this survey demonstrated how ‘lifestyle’ was inextricably bound up with different class fractions. For example, Le Roux et al. (2008) distinguish a ‘professional class’ (24%) from an ‘intermediate class’ of lower managerial workers, senior technicians and the self-employed (32%) and a larger ‘working class’ (44%). This study shows that class divisions cannot be explained by division of labour criteria alone and that more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which cultural preferences in relation to reading, sport, television and other activities, which exert a subtle yet nevertheless material influence on dispositions, can exert a powerful role in structuring contemporary society.

Whereas the CCSE represented the most comprehensive Bourdieusian empirical study since Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, first published in French in 1979, the GBCS significantly surpassed these in terms of both empirical scope and methodological reach. Based on a survey of over 160,000 individuals in the UK, Savage et al. (2013) mapped variables pertaining to social, cultural and economic capital. The correspondence analysis approach yielded seven discrete social ‘classes’ labeled by the authors as “elite”, “established middle class”, “technical experts”, “new affluent workers”, “traditional working class”, “emergent service workers” and the “precariat”. Dismissed by Mills (2014: 437) as an “arbitrary typology” which amounts to little

more than a “theory free (though Bourdieu inspired) data dredging exercise”, Savage et al.’s (2013) categories have been contested (Bradley, 2014) and defended (Savage et al., 2014) with equal vigor, suggesting that not all stratification scholars sign up to the centrality of culture to class analysis. Making sense of class and class analysis is clearly no longer quite so straightforward now that distinct economic and occupation-based classes are lacking (Crompton and Scott, 2005) and careers are no longer linear but often discontinuous. Even so, both the CCSE and GBCS studies have been very influential in wider society and accordingly they merit due scrutiny.

Notwithstanding their impact, a limitation of these studies is that they fail to discuss politics in any meaningful way. Following Bourdieu’s early elaboration of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), the key objective of the above studies is to position individuals in social space by reference to the type and amount of economic, social and cultural capital that they possess. While clearly very useful in understanding class composition and cleavages from a multidimensional perspective, such studies tell us little about whether the different classes identified are politically progressive, conservative, radical, etc. More work is needed to map political dispositions onto different elements of capital in order to explore this.

The present article seeks to explore political dispositions via an analysis of the UK professional class that elicits the relationships between the economic capital, cultural capital and political leanings of its members. Political dispositions tend not to feature prominently in Bourdieusian class analyses, but including them here permits a bridging of cultural dimensions with ideological orientations. This political focus is useful because Savage et al.’s (2013) sweeping work identified class categories that say relatively little about ideological inclinations – the categories might be sociologically useful but it is not clear to what extent the seven class

categories identified are politically useful, in the classical sense of ‘class in itself’ or ‘class for itself’. In other words, the present study offers insights into how politically progressive or conservative the UK professional class is and what such attitudes are most closely associated with in terms of cultural and economic capital.

## **Methodology**

Charlwood et al. (2014) note that British sociology tends to be dominated by qualitative approaches. This is certainly true of Bourdieusian studies on class (see, for example, Atkinson, 2010, 2012; Randle et al, 2014; O’Mahoney, 2007, Simpson et al, 2014; Riach and Cutcher, 2014) with a few exceptions (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015; Flemmen and Hjellbrekke, 2016 and see the CCSE and BBC surveys above). The dominance of qualitative approaches is especially curious given that Bourdieu’s theoretical constructs were elaborated while making heavy recourse to large scale data sets. Indeed, contemporary researchers are blessed with a variety and richness of social surveys “which previous generations of researchers could only dream of” (Charlwood et al., 2014: 163). Yet, as Flemmen (2015) notes, “there has been an almost bewildering neglect of the approach to quantification pioneered and advocated by Bourdieu” (188), even among Bourdieu-influenced scholars.

The intention here is not to suggest that quantitative or qualitative methods are innately superior or inferior to each other. Indeed, Bourdieu often used both simultaneously such that one could correct or mitigate the limitations of the other. Rather, the point is that a certain degree of reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) is required when applying any type of research method. This is particularly important when using labels or interrogating research objects such as that of the ‘professional class’, which might connote a certain unitary or homogenized set of

characteristics whereas underlying such labels lies a more complex constellation of different professional fields (e.g. legal, accounting, medical etc). One should also be very skeptical about the value of using surveys to canvass political opinion, suggesting that these often succeeded only in eliciting the opinions of those who already had strong opinions, i.e. the educated classes (Bourdieu, 1979). The methodological imperative here is to penetrate beneath the superficial level of political opinion and to understand the underlying mechanisms of opinion formation. Political opinions in this sense are often an expression of a class habitus, otherwise understood as “class unconsciousness rather than class consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1979: 492). In order to explore these issues in a reflexive manner, Bourdieu went to great lengths in elaborating a distinctly relational mode of quantitative analysis known as Multiple Correspondence Analysis.

The appendix to *Distinction* (see in particular the English translation, Bourdieu, 1986: 503-518) provides a helpful summary of Bourdieu’s method, explaining in some detail how his original study (carried out in 1963 in Paris, Lille and an unnamed French provincial town) was conducted. The times in which Bourdieu’s (1986: 505) study was located were very different to the present, with individual classes arguably more apparent in French society of the day. Hence, Bourdieu writes of the socio-occupational class fractions with which his researchers engaged, including “independent craftsmen and shopkeepers”, “junior executives”, “senior executives” and “teachers” and finds that these map in a relatively straightforward manner to mainstream classes, with the proviso that “semi-skilled workers” and “unskilled labourers” were underrepresented in the survey.

To conduct the present analysis, data is required on political attitudes on a number of social and cultural issues as well as information related to the cultural and economic capital of the UK professional class. The article makes use of the 2013 British Social Attitudes survey

(BSA, Park et al, 2013), which includes a significant number of relevant questions on public attitudes in Britain on a range of issues as well as indicators of respondents' social, economic and educational backgrounds. The BSA has been conducted annually since 1983 and the relevant data is freely available from the UK Data Service. Based on the respondents' answers related to their occupation groups, a subset of the BSA data was created in order to capture relevant groups of the UK professional class, focusing on managers, professionals and employers. Since the BSA is conducted on a representative sample of the UK population, we assume that the constructed sample is also representative of the UK professional class. Table 1 presents the distribution of the relevant occupational groups of the individuals included in this study. The table reports that there are 430 respondents belonging to the professional class, which represents 12.2% of the total number of respondents in the BSA. Out of the 430 respondents, 272 (63% of the sample) are men and 158 (37%) are women. Moreover, 380 respondents (88% of the sample) reside in England, 30 (7%) in Scotland and 20 (5%) in Wales.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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As mentioned earlier, the article employs MCA to permit analysis of the relationships between economic capital and cultural capital, “the structure of social space as observed in advanced societies [being] the product of two fundamental principles of differentiation – economic capital and cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1996: 5), to which were added the political attributions of the UK professional class. MCA is a technique for the analysis of nominal and ordinal data with the use of geometric modelling and the construction of clouds (spaces) of categories and individuals. Therefore, in relation to traditional statistical methods, such as linear regression, MCA allows for

a more dynamic analysis of relations through the construction of spaces rather than the use of linear models (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010). The categories selected in terms of forms of capital and political dispositions help us to construct the social space and, building on this and closely related to it, political space, while the opinions of the individuals in relation to these categories help us to locate their position within the social topography of these spaces. In effect, the distance between individuals on the relevant space represents the divergences in their responses to the various categories used in the analysis.

Two spaces were constructed: one on professional class attitudes on a number of social issues (political space) and one on the socio-economic background of the different respondents within the professional class (social space). The choice of variables follows closely Flemmen's (2014) MCA of the Norwegian professional class. For the construction of the political space, questions were selected relating to important social issues, including government spending, immigration, unemployment, climate change, religion and racism. In total nine questions were used, which help to construct the political space using 40 active categories. Table 2 provides details on the questions and active categories used for the construction of political space.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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For the construction of the social space for the UK professional class, respondents' answers to specific questions were taken as indicators of their economic and educational background. The variables employed include, amongst others, household income to capture levels of economic capital and occupational group together with educational level as broad measures of cultural capital. Overall, we devise five questions which contribute to 19 active categories for the

construction of social space. Table 3 provides a detailed overview of these questions and their corresponding active categories.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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## Results

### *Political Space*

Our analysis constructed the political space as having three dimensions, which account for 60.29% of the total variance in the active categories.<sup>1</sup> The first axis accounts for 46.19% of the variance and reflects bifurcation in views relating largely to immigration, racial prejudice and the importance of climate change. As such, these differences are referred to here in terms of cultural liberalism. The second axis lacks a salient bifurcation in terms of an obvious line of demarcation on political views and accounts for 8.53% of the variance. The third axis accounts for 5.57% of the variance and indicates a tentative bifurcation in terms of views on inequality, government spending priorities and preferences for private or public institutions. We have labelled this axis in terms of its left and right political dimensions, but it should be recognised that the results and differences here are much less pronounced than they are for the results and differences relating to cultural liberalism. In this study, for reasons of interpretability, we focus on planes 1-3. Figure 1 presents the cloud of individuals in planes 1-3.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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<sup>1</sup> We determine the number of axes based on the rate of decrease of eigenvalues and also on the interpretation of dimensions. The variances are determined by the rates of the modified eigenvalues.

Table 4 presents the categories of contributions above average for axes 1 to 3, while Figure 2 reveals the active categories with above average contribution for planes 1-3.<sup>2</sup> The horizontal axis accounts for 46.19% of the total variance. It is determined by categories related to, *inter alia*, levels of immigration (28.1%), the impact of immigration on everyday life in Britain (27.3%), jobseekers' allowance (8.5%) and climate change (7.5%). To the right of the axis can be found beliefs that the impact of immigration on British cultural life is positive, that no decrease in numbers of immigrants is necessary and that jobseekers' allowance is too low. To the left of the horizontal axis, on the other hand, can be found support for opinions that immigration should be significantly reduced, that there is little evidence of climate change and that the highest priority of government spending should be on private companies. In addition, there is agreement that immigration significantly undermines British cultural life. Moreover, to the left of the axis can be found opinions towards immigrants which might reasonably be labelled prejudiced, whereas no such prejudice is apparent to the right of the axis. Overall, this axis is presented as broadly separating liberal from illiberal views.

The vertical axis on Figure 2 is shaped *inter alia* by issues such as government spending and the provision of public services (22%), the impact of immigration on daily life in Britain (26.1%) and religion (18.5%). On the positive side of the axis lie favourable opinions concerning numbers of immigrants residing in Britain followed by mixed opinions on their actual impact on cultural life. This implies that respondents seem to appreciate the economic benefits of immigration (hence they seek no cap on immigration and are happy for it to increase) but are less persuaded by its impact on community cohesion and cultural life. Further, there is evidence of

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<sup>2</sup> Table 1A of the appendix reports all contributions for axes 1 to 3 for the political space.

belief that education ought to be the top priority of government spending while there is no evidence of belief in religion. On the negative side of the axis can be found a strong Catholic religious sentiment accompanied by opinions that defence should be prioritized in government spending. Moreover, there is a belief that the income gap is too narrow and that private companies are better at offering services to unemployed people than the public sector. The article thus conjectures that this axis represents a separation between left-wing and right-wing opinions, although again it should be recognized that this separation is not as marked as the separation between liberal and anti-liberal cultural sentiments. This is, of course, in itself a real finding.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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### *Social Space*

The social space is three-dimensional and these three dimensions account for 83.99% of the total variation. The first axis which accounts for 73.11% of the variation is reflective of economic capital, the second represents 7.51% and reflects the source of capital, while the third accounts for 3.37% and denotes cultural capital. Again, for reasons of interpretability, the article focuses on axes 1 and 3 as these produce the more obviously discrete bifurcations. Figure 3 presents the cloud of individuals for planes 1-3. However, it is worth emphasizing the rather large extent to which economic capital determines the social space dimensions in this study.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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Table 5 displays the categories of contributions above average for axes 1 to 3 for the social space, while Figure 4 shows the active categories (questions) with above average contribution for planes 1-3.<sup>3</sup> The horizontal axis is primarily shaped by income levels and their sources (54.8%) and less so by educational level (23.7%) and occupational group (17.6%). Differences on this axis therefore appear to be driven primarily by discrepancies in levels of economic capital. From Table 5, we can observe that the right side of the axis is reflective of high economic capital (e.g. Income > £3.7K per month), while the left side of lower economic capital (e.g. Income < £1.2K per month). The vertical axis is primarily influenced by the respondents' educational background (46.7%) and membership of occupational groups (39.3%). It can thus be inferred that this axis is representative of cultural capital. On the upper side of the axis can be found categories of lower cultural capital (more than 20% of the variance is propelled by individuals with a school leaving qualification) while on the low side are categories indicative of higher cultural capital (more than 30% of the variance is determined by self-employed professional workers and individuals with postgraduate qualifications).

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Insert Table 5 about here

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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### *Social fractions projected onto political space*

The main purpose of this study is to examine the political dispositions of the UK professional class and how diverse aspects of economic and cultural capital impact on these dispositions. As a

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<sup>3</sup> Table 2A of the appendix presents all contributions for axes 1 to 3 for the social space.

next step, each of the social space axes were split into three equal portions and then combined in order to create nine class fractions. These nine fractions were then projected onto the political space with a view to examine the political dispositions of these constructed classes. This was achieved through MCA by using the constructed social classes as a supplementary variable on the social space. Figure 5 presents the results of this analysis. Class fractions of lower cultural capital appear to be associated with more left-wing and illiberal beliefs, regardless of their levels of economic capital. Moreover, class fractions of high cultural capital combined with high or middle economic capital seem to be related to liberal and right-wing opinions. At an extreme end, it was found that the class fraction of high cultural and low economic capital is placed on the extremes of illiberal opinions in the social space. Overall, though, the most significant source of division relates to liberal versus illiberal views and on that axis alone one can see that higher cultural and economic capital tend towards liberal views, whereas lower cultural and economic capital tend towards illiberal views. Notably, these results are markedly different from Flemmen's (2014) findings, which are reflected upon in the discussion below.

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Insert Figure 5 about here

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To further examine the political opinions of the UK professional class, the respondents' political party preferences were also projected onto the constructed social space. Figure 6 presents the results of this analysis. Although the distance between the British Conservative and Labour parties in relation to the horizontal axis of liberal and illiberal opinions is significant, their distance relative to the right-wing and left-wing axis is surprisingly minimal. Indeed, the results here are startling in terms of the insignificance of left-wing versus right-wing criteria. In fact,

only Plaid Cymru and Green Party voters are associated with left-wing political dispositions, with UKIP voters strongly associated with right-wing political dispositions. The differences between all other parties' voters (that is to say, the voters rather than the parties themselves) are virtually all explained by liberal versus illiberal cultural dispositions which relate primarily to apparent racial prejudice as well as to views on immigration and climate change. It is unclear from the data presented whether this dominance of liberal vs illiberal attitudes over left vs right dispositions reflects the relatively weak identification of a left-right wing split among our sample or the politically centrist nature of the parties voted for.

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Insert Figure 6 about here

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## **Discussion**

In broad terms the results here demonstrate, in line with other studies, that the British professional class is characterized by heterogeneity in terms of its cultural capital, economic capital and political dispositions. This represents a further challenge to Goldthorpe's (1982) characterization of the service class as both homogenous and politically conservative. However, the results also indicate that the cleavages evident within the British professional class are not the same as analogous research suggests, such as Flemmen's (2014) study pertaining to Norway. Adopting very similar categories and variables as those employed in the present study, Flemmen (2014) shows that the Norwegian professional class is divided along a classic left-right continuum, with those on the left of the political spectrum associated with higher amounts of cultural capital and lower levels of economic capital, while those on the right of the political spectrum in Norway tend to be associated with lower amounts of cultural capital and higher

levels of economic capital. Moreover, Flemmen (2014) finds that left-wing dispositions are inclined to go hand-in-hand with culturally liberal attitudes towards issues such as equal rights and the environment.

In striking contrast to Flemmen's (2014) depiction of the Norwegian professional class, we fail to find a significant bifurcation along left-right lines. By far the more important source of distinction for the British professional class from a political perspective appears to be *the degree of cultural liberalism exhibited*. Apparent racial prejudice combined with particular attitudes towards rising immigration and climate change produced much more polarity than attitudes towards government spending priorities, public versus private institutions or inequality. Indeed, the projection of political dispositions onto voting patterns from the UK 2010 general election confirms more starkly the absence of a pronounced left-right divide. This absence is arguably more suggestive of political indifference than active conservatism.

Furthermore, the 'higher cultural-lower economic' versus 'lower cultural-higher economic' split observed by Flemmen (2014) and equally emphasized by Bourdieu in his reference to the former as the "dominated dominants" (Emirbayer and Williams, 2005: 693), was not something that was discernible in the UK sample here. There is a broad tendency for higher cultural capital to be twinned with higher economic capital and lower cultural capital to be allied with lower economic capital in the context of political dispositions.

What do these results imply specifically for our understanding of the politics of the professional class? Although the results are unanticipated on the basis of findings from existing research (Flemmen, 2014 in particular), they are perhaps explicable by reference to recent changes in Western democracies. As Mair (2006) has pointed out, Western liberal democracies have become "hollowed out" in terms of their politics, with both elites and masses retreating

substantially from the political arena. Politics has become a professionalized sphere in which technocratic policies and temporally-constrained electoral cycle agendas predominate, with politicians singularly failing to act according to Bourdieu's (1996: 339) exhortation provided at the end of *The State Nobility*: namely to "assume the function that was for a long time fulfilled by the intellectual, that is, enter the political arena in the name of the values and truths acquired in and through autonomy". Political parties, pre- and post-financial crisis, battle for the centre-ground, vying furiously to capture voters who historically might have positioned themselves in opposing camps according to a clear left-right divide. Tariq Ali (2015) calls this centre-ground the "extreme centre, which currently rules over large tracts of Europe and includes left, centre left, centre right and centre parties" (20). The centre-ground is not devoid of politics but represents in fact obfuscatory nomenclature beneath which can be found broad convergence around neo-liberal orthodoxy, austerity, neo-imperialism in the form of military intervention and economic globalization as proselytized by international financial institutions. That individuals from the professional class have adopted dispositions that permit doctrines from the 'extreme centre' to go unchallenged seems to be evident from the data presented above.

This has serious implications for professional groups. The consequences of 'extreme centre' policies have led to widening inequality and/or stagnating incomes in many Western countries, in turn leading to disenchantment with political orthodoxy and the professional experts that support it. This has paved the way for petty demagoguery and the rise of right-wing nationalism in many liberal democracies. In the UK and the US, for example, governments have come to power that actively attack and show disdain for the values and beliefs of middle class intelligentsia from which professional cadres are recruited. Professions are therefore both in crisis and under attack (Leicht, 2016). Certain professions have in many ways brought this upon

themselves, wedding themselves to excessive commercialism and a commitment to market forces that inevitably come to attack professional monopolies and the privileges afforded by them. For professions to protect their role as trusted interpreters of information we would argue that more needs to be done to actively outline how professional work contributes to the public good. The public good can be interpreted in various ways, but the political apathy of professionals demonstrated here is suggestive of a lack of active concern with the social consequences of professional work. In this regard the professions themselves are responsible for the more widespread phenomenon of “knowledge based claims losing their caché” (Leicht, 2016: 109-110).

More broadly, the present article demonstrates the value of applying a Bourdieusian approach to class analysis, mapping as it does different forms of capital onto broad occupational categories. This builds upon recent work on class in the UK (Bennett et al, 2009; Savage et al, 2013, 2014) that has hitherto failed to explore political dispositions in a meaningful way. We suggest that the implications of such dispositions for society-at-large in terms of their effect on organizational decision-making may be far-reaching. Future research could usefully explore the homology of political dispositions with various forms of capital in other European and non-European contexts in order to assess the wider applicability of the present article’s results as well as those of other studies such as that of Flemmen (2014).

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**Table 1**  
Occupational Groups of Respondents within the Professional Class

	Count	Percent
Manager - Large Organisation	159	36.98
Manager - Small Organisation	78	18.14
Employer-Small Organisation	55	12.79
Professional Worker - Self-Employed	33	7.67
Professional Worker - Employed	105	24.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2**  
Active Questions for the construction of the Political Space

Variable	Question	Categories
Spend	Here are some items of government spending. Which of them, if any, would be your highest priority for extra spending?	9 ( <i>Education/ Defence/ Health/ Housing/ Transport/ Roads/ Police/ Social Security/ Industry</i> )
Dole	Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view: Benefits for unemployed people are <i>too low</i> and cause hardship, or, benefits for unemployed people are <i>too high</i> and discourage them from finding jobs?	4 ( <i>Too low/ Too high/ Neither/ Both</i> )
CCBelieve	View on Climate Change (CC) and Causes	3 ( <i>No CC/ CC not due to human actions/ CC due to human actions</i> )
Letin	Do you think the number of immigrants to Britain nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little or reduced a lot?	5 ( <i>Increase a lot/ Increase a little/ Same/ Reduce a little/ Reduce a lot</i> )
Mig_Culture	On a scale of 0 to 10, would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries?	5 ( <i>Likert-scale, recoded from 10-point scale</i> )
SRPrejudice	Self-Rated racial prejudice	3 ( <i>Very prejudiced/ A little prejudiced/ Not prejudiced</i> )
Services	There are different views about who would be best at helping long-term unemployed people find work and making sure they are actively seeking work. Who you think would be best overall at making sure services go to the people who need them most?	3 ( <i>Government/ Private Companies/ Voluntary Bodies</i> )
Income_Gap	Thinking of income levels generally in Britain today, would you say that the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large, about right, or, too small?	3
Religion	Respondent's Religion	5 ( <i>CoE/ Catholic/ Other Christian/ Non-Christian/ No religion</i> )

**Table 3**  
Variables used for the construction of the Social Space

Variable	Question	Categories
RNSEG	Respondent's Socio-Economic Group	5
Tenure	Does your household own or rent its accommodation?	2 ( <i>Own/ Rent</i> )
Inc_Source	Main Source of income for the respondent's household	3 <i>(Employment/ Pension/ Other)</i>
HH_Income	Household's gross income (categorised)	4
Edu_Level	Highest completed general education	5

**Table 4**

Contributions for the Political Space.

We present contributions above average by axis, in declining order separately for the positive and negative side of each axis

	Axis 1: Liberal vs. Illiberal	%	Axis 2:	%	Axis 3: Left-wing vs. Right-wing	%
+	Number of immigrants should: Stay same	10.40	Religion: Non-Christian	17.20	Number of immigrants should: Increase a little	8.20
	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a lot	9.40	No Climate Change	9.90	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a lot	7.20
	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a little	5.40	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a lot	7.10	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Undermine it a little	6.30
	Benefits for unemployed people are: Too low	3.30	Highest priority for government spending: Police	5.90	Who is better at offering services to unemployed people: Government	3.90
	Racial prejudice: Not at all	3.20	Number of immigrants should: Increase a lot	5.00	Number of immigrants should: Increase a lot	3.50
			Highest priority for government spending: Defence	4.20	Racial prejudice: Little	3.50
			Racial prejudice: Very high	4.20	Highest priority for government spending: Education	2.50
			Who is better at offering services to unemployed people: Private companies	2.80	No religion	2.50
			Number of immigrants should: Increase a little	2.70		
			Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Undermine it a lot	2.70		
			Gap between high and low incomes is: Right	2.60		

- Number of immigrants should: Reduce a lot	12.40	Who is better at offering services to unemployed people: Voluntary bodies	6.00	Religion: Catholic	10.50
Racial prejudice: Little	8.20	Number of immigrants should: Reduce a little	3.80	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: None	9.70
Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Undermine it a little	6.60	Highest priority for government spending: Health	3.70	Highest priority for government spending: Defence	6.10
Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Undermine it a lot	5.70	Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a little	3.70	Gap between high and low incomes is: Too small	4.40
No Climate Change	3.50			Highest priority for government spending: Social security	4.10
Benefits for unemployed people are: Too high	3.10			Religion: Non Christian	4.10
There is climate change, not due to human actions	2.80			Who is better at offering services to unemployed people: Private companies	3.10
Gap between high and low incomes is: Right	2.60			Migrants' impact on Britain's cultural life: Enrich it a little	2.70
Highest priority for government spending: Private companies	2.50				

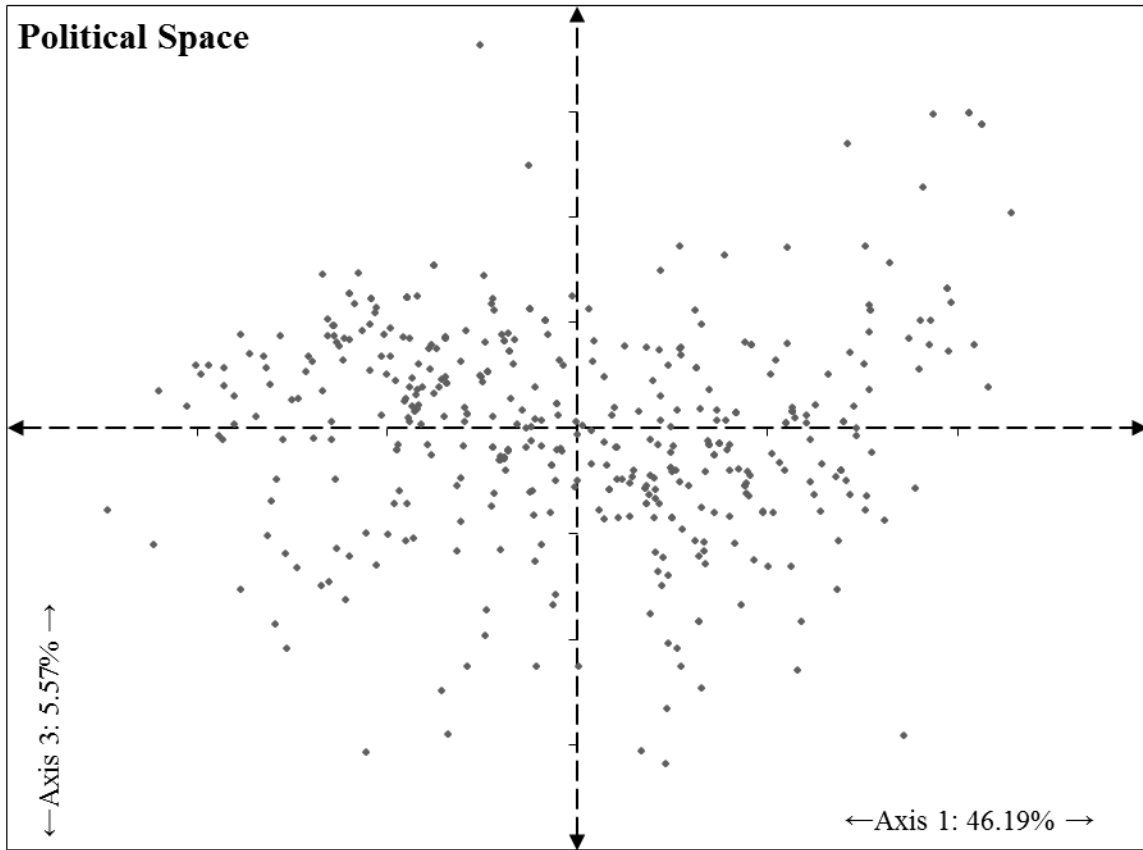
**Table 5**

Contributions for the Social Space.

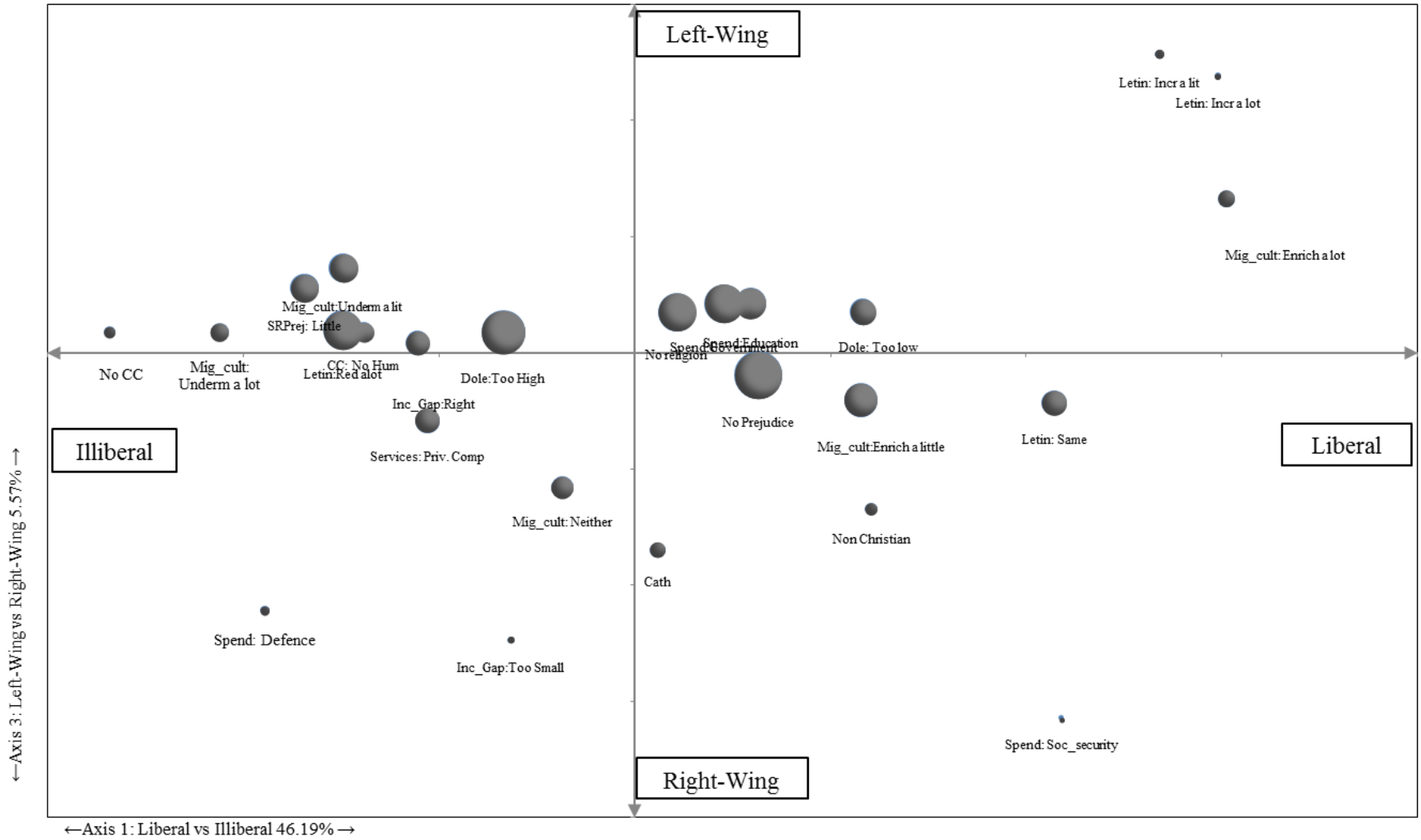
We present contributions above average by axis, in declining order separately for the positive and negative side of each axis

	Axis 1: Economic Capital	%	Axis 2: Source of Capital	%	Axis 3: Cultural Capital	%
+	Income>3.7k per month	10.40	Main Income Source: Pension	14.20	Education: A/O levels	21.40
	Main Income Source: Employment	7.30	Income: 1.2k-2.2k per month	11.50	Manager - Small Organisation	7.70
			Education: University degree	6.30	Education: University degree	6.90
					Manager - Large Organisation	5.30
-	Income< 1.2k per month	18.20	Main Income Source: Other	24.00	Professional Worker - Self- Employed	21.80
	Education: Other	15.00	Tenure: Rent	17.00	Education: Postgraduate degree	10.40
	Employer-Small Organisation	8.10	Income<1.2k per month	7.80	Main Income Source: Pension	6.90
	Main Income Source: Pension	7.70				
	Main Income Source: Other	7.20				

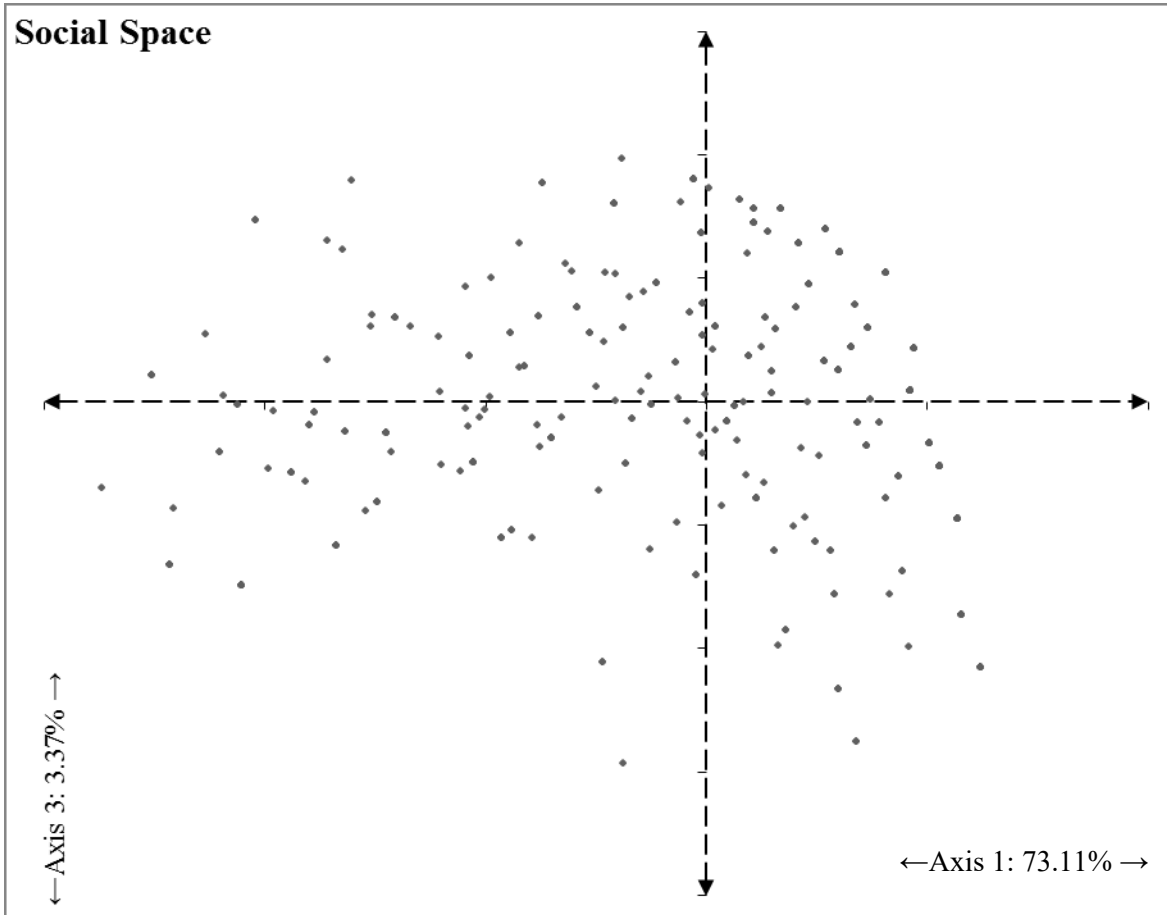
**Figure 1**  
Political Space: Cloud of Individuals, planes 1-3



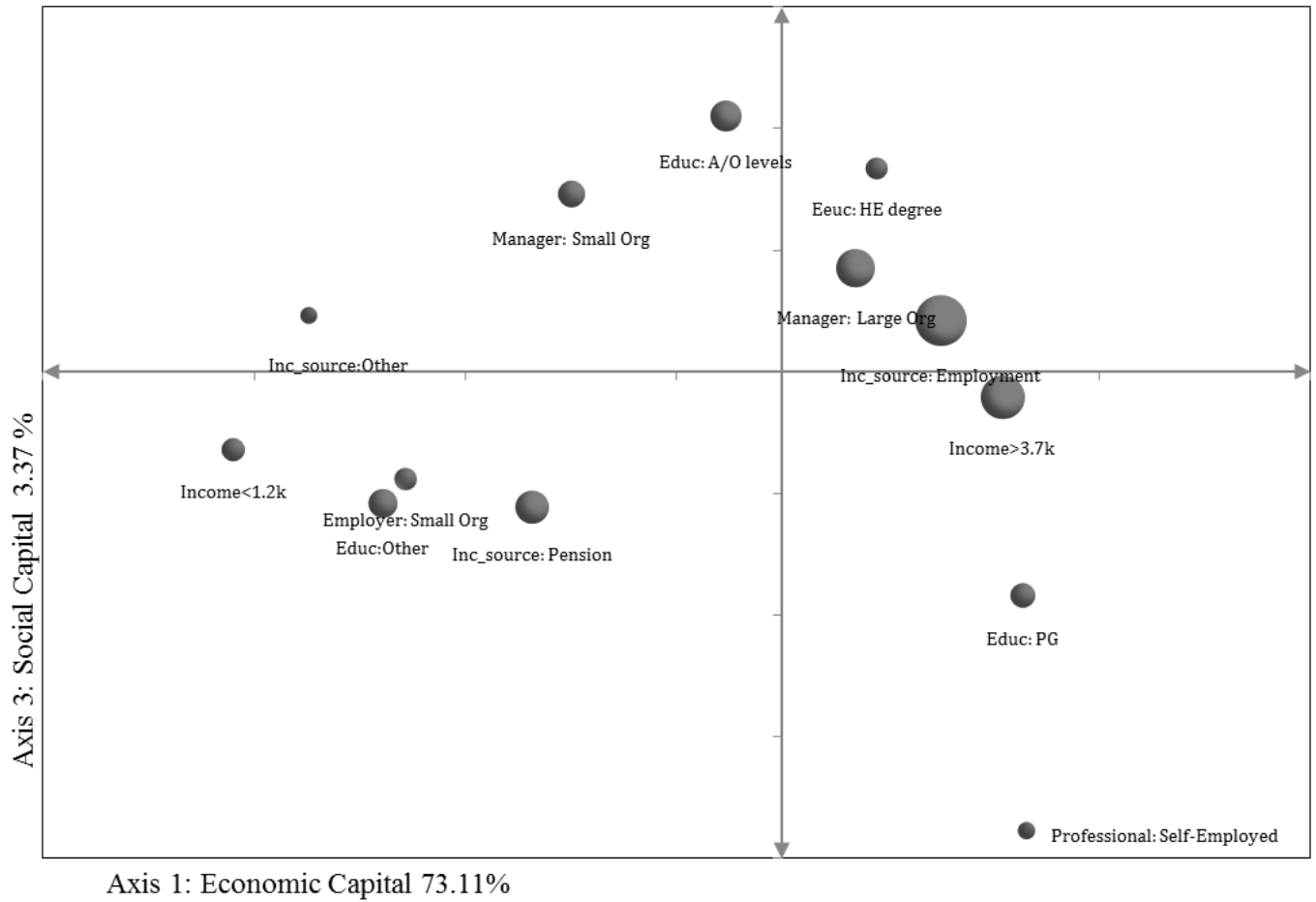
**Figure 2**  
 Political Space: Active categories, planes 1-3



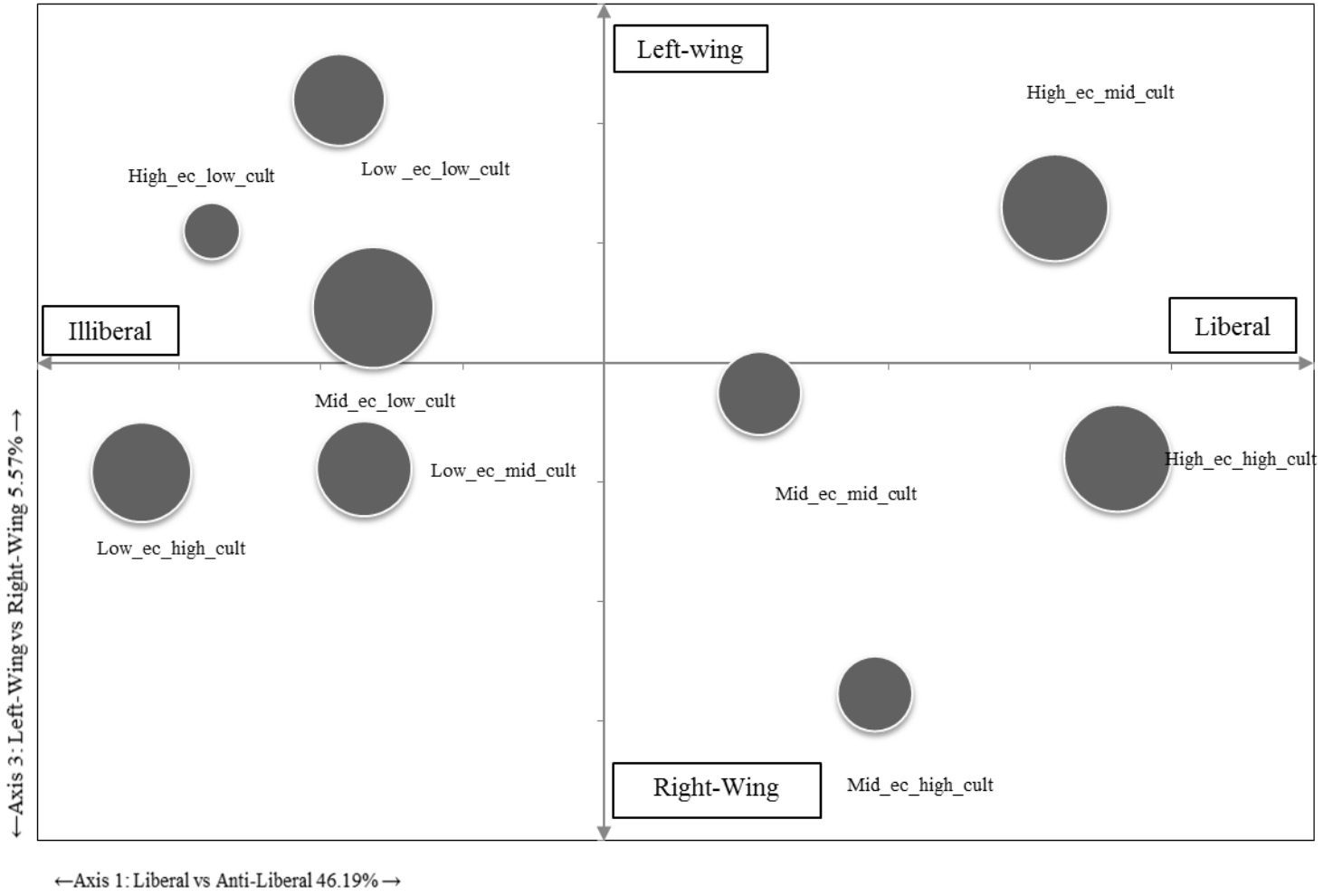
**Figure 3**  
Social Space: Cloud of Individuals, planes 1-3



**Figure 4**  
Social Space: Active categories, planes 1-3



**Figure 5**  
Class fractions projected on the political space



**Figure 6**  
**Political Parties**

Supplementary Variable: If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support? Projection on the political space, planes 1-3

