

# The Decline of Class Voting in Sweden 1968–2014

Reconsiderations, Explanations,  
and the Role of the New Middle Class

Erik Vestin

The history of voting behavior in Western democracies in the 20th century is to a great extent the history of class voting. Understanding its decline is an important part of understanding the current political situation.

In this thesis, Erik Vestin contributes to the discussion of this issue, with four studies of class and politics on the mass level in Sweden, employing the surveys of the Swedish National Election Studies for a period of almost 50 years.

In the vast literature on class and voting behavior, there are two main interpretations of the decline in class voting: realignment and dealignment. The first holds that the ties between the socio-economic structure and the political parties are on their way towards general dissolution. The second holds that a new order is coming to replace the old one.

The first studies in this dissertation look into the central predictions and assumptions of a specific variant of the realignment interpretation, namely the new class schema by Swiss scholar Daniel Oesch, centered on a typology of work logics. The results show that the historical predictions of increasing explanatory power are not borne out. Indeed, the development of class voting in the Oesch schema is remarkably similar to what we see in a traditional schema. In addition, the causal effects of work logics claimed by Oesch and others do not turn up when tested with panel data and a stronger identification strategy than earlier studies.

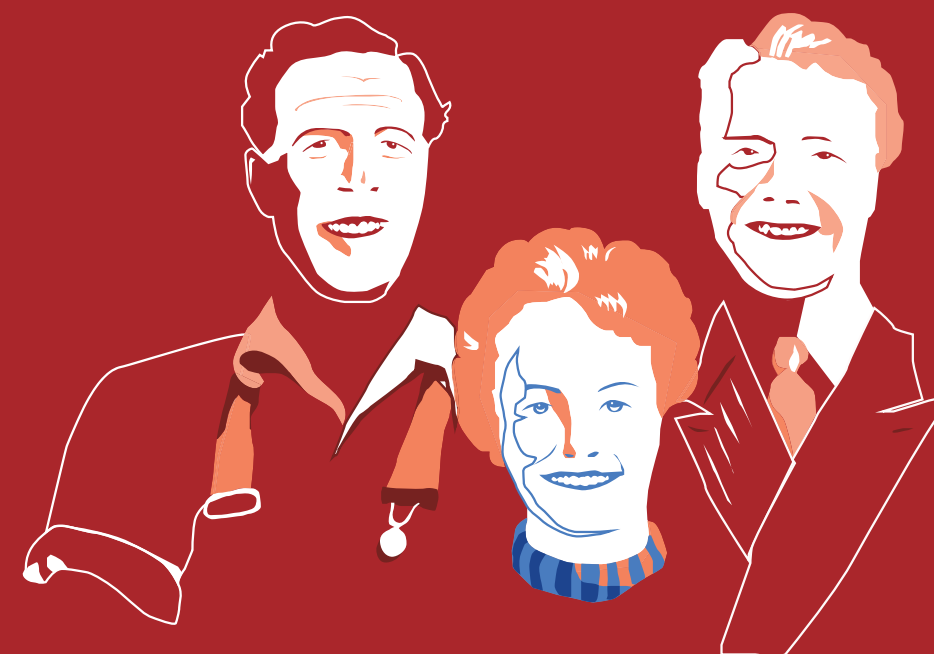
The later studies engage in debates within the dealignment literature. The last generation of class research has put a considerable emphasis on the contemporary situation in society, and forgotten about generational replacement as a possible mechanism for political change. One of the studies shows that generational replacement is a better explanation for the historical decline of class voting in Sweden, than currently popular ideas about ideological convergence between the parties. The last article studies swing voters (voters that consider voting for either of the major political blocs) and finds, contrary to many expectations, that this group does not consist of voters from the middle class to any disproportionate extent. The increase in swing voters is thus not a function of an increasing share of middle class voters without clear political alignments, but something that happens throughout the class structure.

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