

# Protection versus compensation: The class divide in advanced democracies

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## Abstract

Many scholars have argued that governments' neglect of the working class in advanced democracies has led to lower levels of compensatory redistribution than would arise if governments were sufficiently attuned to working-class demands. This paper shows that scholars' focus on compensatory redistribution is misguided, since working-class citizens are not very different from higher-class citizens in terms of their support for redistributive taxation and social spending. There is a much greater class divide over what this paper calls 'protective' measures: policies that attempt to protect workers' jobs and employment prospects through industrial subsidies, employment guarantees, tariffs, and immigration restrictions. Drawing on twenty years of survey data from sixteen advanced democracies, this paper documents this class divide and shows that it reflects a distinctive working-class attitude that valorizes work and considers unemployment and the receipt of social benefits to be morally degrading. Given working-class distaste for idleness and dependence, compensatory redistribution offers an inadequate response to working-class labor market disadvantage. Greater government responsiveness to working-class preferences would lead to a large policy shift in favor of protective policies and only a relatively minor shift toward increased compensatory spending.

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Across the advanced capitalist world, working-class citizens have been disadvantaged by the transformation of the employment structure and wage distribution that has taken place over the last half-century. A large body of scholarship has asked why governments in advanced democracies have not responded to these economic changes by increasing the amount of redistributive social spending they engage in (e.g., [Gilens 2012](#); [Erikson 2015](#); [Burgoon et al. 2022](#); [Lupu and Pontusson 2023](#); [Elsässer and Schäfer 2023](#); [Rosset et al. 2025](#)). Many of these scholars have concluded that the answer lies in governments' disproportionate responsiveness to the demands of higher-class citizens. This inequality in responsiveness is believed to lead governments to offer less compensatory redistribution than they would if they took full consideration of the policy demands of the working class.

The literature on class inequality in responsiveness proceeds from the assumption that working-class citizens respond to the labor market disadvantages they face by demanding redistributive social spending. Higher-class citizens, who hold a more privileged position in the labor market and enjoy greater political influence, are expected to oppose such measures. Yet there is actually relatively little class-based disagreement over compensatory redistribution in advanced democracies, as shown in this paper. There is a much greater class divide over what I call *protective* policies: policies that aim to protect workers' existing jobs and to shore up the employment opportunities they possess on the basis of their existing skills. These include subsidies for firms in declining industries, job guarantees, limits on imports, and immigration restrictions. *Compensatory* policies, by contrast, try to make up for the cost of lost jobs and employment opportunities through transfer payments, possibly financed by progressive taxation. Compensatory policies are the ones that scholars typically have in mind when they talk about 'redistribution,' since redistribution is measured through taxes and transfer payments. Both protective and compensatory policies can be contrasted against *social investment* policies, which aim at up-skilling through education ([Häusermann et al. 2022](#); [Busemeyer et al. 2023](#); [McCall and Kenworthy 2009](#)). Though protective, com-

pensatory, and social investment policies all involve state intervention, it is over protective policies that we observe the greatest class divide, as will be shown below.

What explains the distinctively sharp class divide over protective policies? This paper develops and tests a theory that proposes that working-class citizens and their more privileged counterparts have different moral attitudes regarding the importance of work and correspondingly different views regarding the moral degradation associated with unemployment. Following ethnographic scholarship by [Lamont \(2000\)](#) and theoretical work on endogenous belief formation by [Bénabou and Tirole \(2016\)](#), I propose that members of the working class assign distinctively high moral value to work because they and the people around them are disproportionately likely to be engaged in stereotypically ‘hard’ physical labor and because they are deprived of other sources of self-respect, such as cultural sophistication or academic credentials. Given the distinctive value that working-class citizens ascribe to work, I argue that they are more inclined to believe that unemployment morally degrades people by promoting idleness and dependence. This distinctive orientation toward work explains why working-class citizens may be disproportionately supportive of protective measures, which are aimed at securing workers’ jobs and reducing the need for compensatory social benefits.

The distinction drawn in this paper between protective, compensatory, and social investment policies is related to recent scholarship in American politics that distinguishes between “predistributive” and “redistributive” policy interventions, the former referring to interventions that try to alter the market distribution of income instead of modifying it after the fact ([Hacker 2011](#); [Vogel 2024](#); [CWCP 2025](#); [Kuziemko et al. 2026](#)). But the “predistribution” concept lumps together *protective* and *social investment* strategies, both of which try to alter the market distribution of income but are likely to have quite different bases of political support and different distributive effects. Conceptual issues aside, this paper extends beyond the predistribution literature by documenting class divides in policy preferences across the advanced capitalist world and by developing and testing a theory of an underling class divide in moral attitudes toward work that drives the policy demands of working-class voters.

In treating trade and immigration restrictions as ‘protective’ policy measures, this paper diverges from much existing scholarship that characterizes international integration and immigration as ‘cultural’ issues. Yet as I show in what follows, the class divide over policies that deal with protection against foreign competition closely tracks the class divide over protective policies that are more unambiguously economic and have little direct relation to attitudes toward foreigners, such as industrial subsidies and job guarantees. Although most people’s preferences toward immigration and trade do not reflect immediate personal losses or gains from foreign competition (e.g., [Malhotra et al. 2013](#); [Hainmueller et al. 2015](#); [Rho and Tomz 2017](#)), the same is true of preferences toward compensatory and social investment policies. For example, the vast majority of voters who support higher spending on tertiary education will be net losers from such spending if we restrict our focus to pocketbook effects, since they will pay for such spending in taxes but will never reap any direct personal gain, given that they are already adults. Scholarship on mass support for compensatory redistribution suggests a similarly limited role for calculations of personal gain, as noted *inter alia* by [O’Grady \(2019\)](#), [Margalit \(2019\)](#), and [Trump \(2021\)](#).

It is more plausible to say that citizens’ support for protective, compensatory, and social investment policies reflects their beliefs about how these policies will affect the well-being of people like them. This view is consistent with conclusions that scholars have reached about the centrality of other-regarding economic concerns for immigration preferences in particular ([Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014](#); [2015](#)). Working-class voters may support protective measures despite their putatively higher efficiency costs because they believe that these policies will better serve people like them than will compensatory or social investment policies. Such beliefs cannot be unequivocally dismissed as misguided: even on immigration, recent work indicates that working-class natives may indeed suffer ([Brücker et al. 2014](#); [Dustmann et al. 2017](#); [Gould 2019](#); [Monras 2020](#); [Albert 2021](#); [Piyapromdee 2021](#); [Ortega and Verdugo 2022](#); [Edo and Özgüzel 2023](#); [Borjas and Edo 2024](#); [Amior and Manning 2026](#)).

This paper’s empirical investigation draws on data from several rounds of the International Social Survey Programme’s Role of Government module (1996, 2006, 2016; [Philips et al. 2023](#)) and National Identity module (1995, 2003, 2013; [Kelley et al. 2020](#)), which include sixteen advanced capitalist countries: France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Canada, and the United States. I supplement these surveys with data from the European Social Survey’s (ESS) 2016 round ([ESS ERIC 2023](#)), which includes nine of these countries, along with data from the European Values Survey (EVS) rounds of 1999, 2008, and 2017 ([Gedeshi et al. 2022](#)), which include ten of the countries on the ISSP, and data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) rounds of 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 from the United States ([Kuriwaki 2025](#); [Dagonel 2021](#)). I also make limited use of the ISSP’s Work Orientations module (1997, 2005, 2015; [Bacher et al. 2024](#)) and its Social Networks module (2017; [Muckenhuber et al. 2019](#)).

The analysis shows that the class divide over compensatory policies in advanced democracies is quite muted: working-class citizens are only mildly more supportive of such policies than are members of higher classes. When it comes to social investment policies, there is an even smaller class divide, with higher-class citizens registering somewhat higher support. There is, by contrast, a sharp and consistent class divide over ‘protective’ measures. This remains the case whether class is operationalized in terms of occupation or in terms of educational attainment. These results are robust to the inclusion of controls for individual-level risks including occupational unemployment, skill specificity, routine task intensity, and offshorability, indicating that differences in *personal* risk exposure do not drive the class divide, though the fact that members of the working class *in general* are disproportionately exposed to all of these risks is highly relevant, as discussed below. This conclusion is reinforced by the finding that we observe a similar class divide among retirees, who face no personal exposure to labor market risks. Working-class men and women are both more supportive of protective measures than their higher-class counterparts, as are ethnic minority members of

the working class. Unionized and non-unionized members of the working class are similarly supportive of the protective measures studied here.

To examine the moral basis for the class divide over protective policies, I draw on ISSP, ESS, and EVS data to study attitudes toward work and the moral effects of dependence on public benefits. I show that working-class voters are much more likely than their higher-class counterparts to say that work is the most important part of life, that it is humiliating to receive money without having worked for it, and that unemployment and dependence on public benefits makes people lazy. This challenges recent work by [Pelc \(2025\)](#), who argues *contra* Lamont that members of the working class do not ascribe distinctive value to work. This paper provides clear evidence for the existence of a distinctive working-class outlook on work and dependence that has important implications for working-class policy preferences.

This paper's findings indicate that existing scholarship may be misguided in focusing on the lack of compensatory redistribution as the main problem that class inequality in representation is supposed to explain. Clearer evidence of unequal representation can be found in the declining industrial employment, increasing import penetration, and growing immigrant shares that we have observed across the advanced capitalist world over the last forty years. Scholars have asked why governments have not responded to these changes with increased redistribution, but the more fundamental question is why governments allowed these changes to take place at all. These trends plausibly reflect governments' disproportionate responsiveness to higher-class voters, who tend to strongly disfavor the protective measures demanded by working-class voters. Given the extent of the class gap in support for different kinds of policies, we would expect a counterfactual scenario of an equally responsive democracy to yield little change in social investment policies, a relatively minor policy shift in the extent of compensatory policies, and a large shift in favor of protective policies. This would lead to economies that are more oriented toward the defense of jobs and industries threatened by structural change, more committed to providing jobs for native workers, and less open to goods and people from abroad than they have been in recent decades. Arguably this

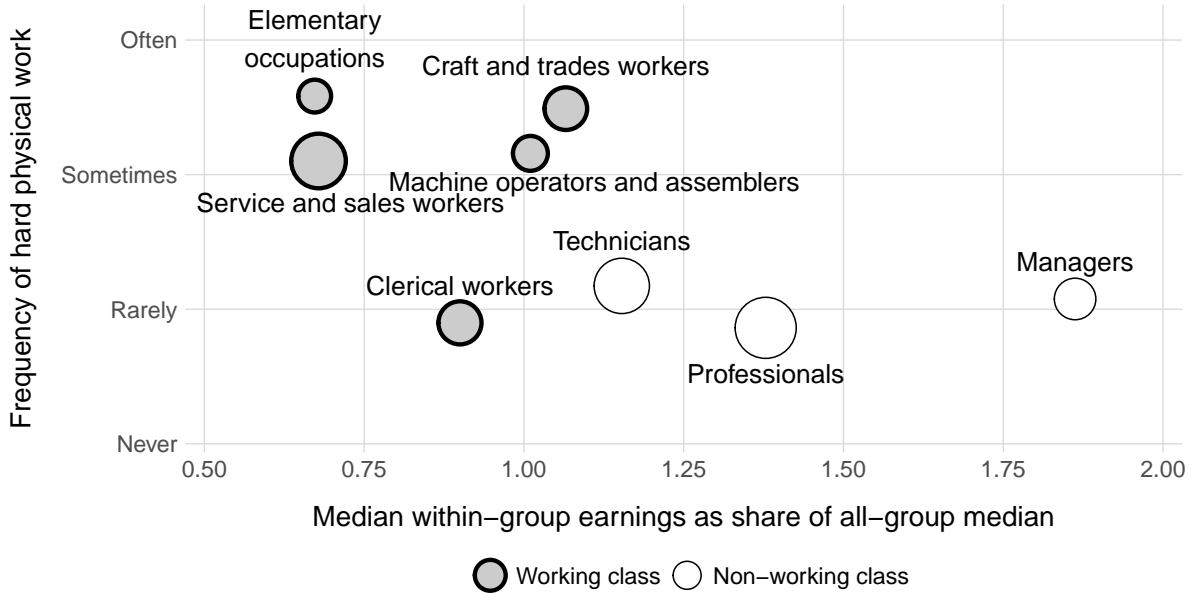
would amount to a return to postwar ‘embedded liberalism’ (Ruggie 1982), a regime that is often mistakenly construed as comprising ‘free markets plus compensation’ but which in fact entailed the use of a host of regulatory protections and exclusions to defend the economic prospects of native workers and thereby to preserve the legitimacy of democratic capitalism (Milward 1999; Goodman and Pepinsky 2021). Inasmuch as a ‘protective’ agenda of this sort strikes readers as undesirable, it is necessary to face difficult normative questions about the value of equal representation.

### 1. Class and labor market disadvantage

Before developing and testing a theory of the economic policies that working-class voters favor, it is necessary to define working-class membership and to summarize the labor market circumstances of members of the working class in advanced capitalist democracies. In this paper I follow existing scholarship in political science and sociology by adopting an occupational definition of class. While there are several multifaceted class schemas in circulation, there is broad agreement among proponents of these schemas and others that manual, clerical, and lower-level service-sector jobs are “working-class” occupational groups (Erikson and Goldthorpe 2002; Oesch 2023; Häusermann et al. 2022; Carnes and Lupu 2023). What unites workers in these occupations is their disproportionate exposure to various forms of labor market disadvantage. These disadvantages include working class individuals’ relatively low earnings, more demanding work conditions, and greater exposure to a range of labor market risks than their higher-class counterparts.

Two forms of disadvantage are summarized in **Figure 1**. Each 1-digit occupational group from the International Standard Classification of Occupations is plotted in a two-dimensional space, with the working-class occupational groups (ISCO groups 4-9) denoted in gray (Group 6, agricultural occupations, is omitted). The size of the circles reflects the size of each occupational group. Each dot’s position on the horizontal axis reflects the median earnings of workers in that occupational group as a share of the all-group median. Each dot’s position

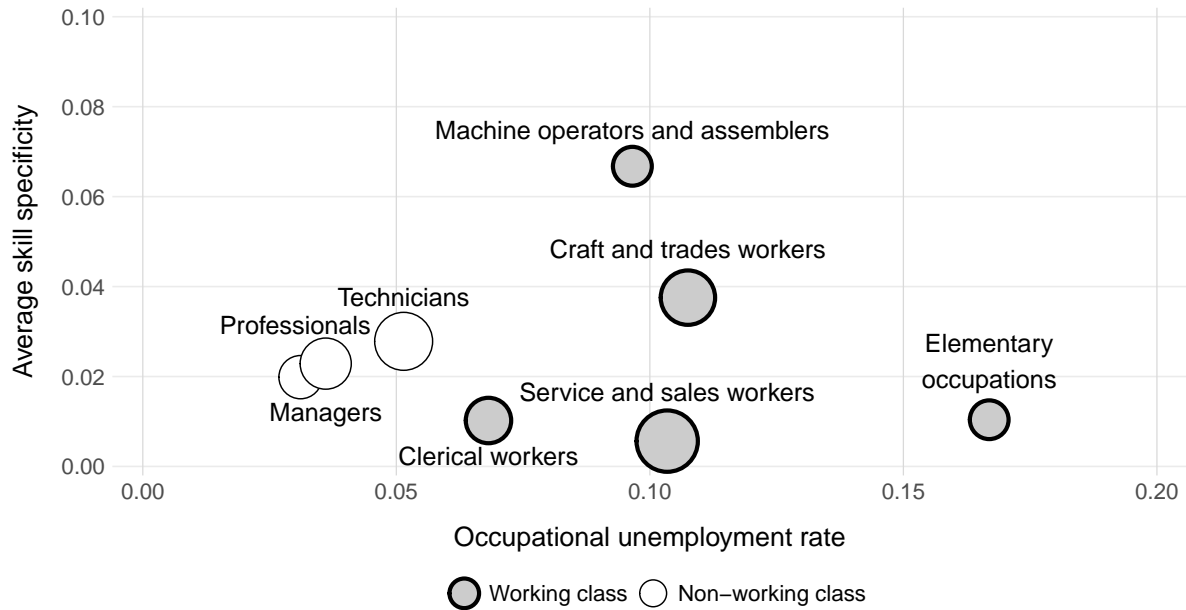
**Figure 1:** Earnings and work conditions by ISCO group, 2005 and 2015



on the vertical axis reflects the median response of workers in that occupational group to a survey question asking how frequently they perform hard physical work at their job. The survey data is from the ISSP’s Work Orientations module waves of 2005 and 2015 and the earnings data is from Eurostat’s 2006 and 2014 Structure of Earnings surveys (Eurostat 2017; Eurostat 2020). Nine European countries are included: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Ireland. Details are reported in Appendix A. As Figure 1 makes clear, every working-class occupational group earns less than every higher-class occupational group. With the exception of clerical workers, all working-class occupational groups face more physically demanding work conditions than do any of the higher-class groups.

Two further forms of labor market disadvantage are summarized in **Figure 2** below. Each 1-digit ISCO group is plotted in a two-dimensional space in which the value on the horizontal axis is the average unemployment rate for that occupational group. This measure was developed and made available by Rehm (2016). Here, I report average occupational

**Figure 2:** Unemployment and skill specificity by ISCO group, 1996-2016



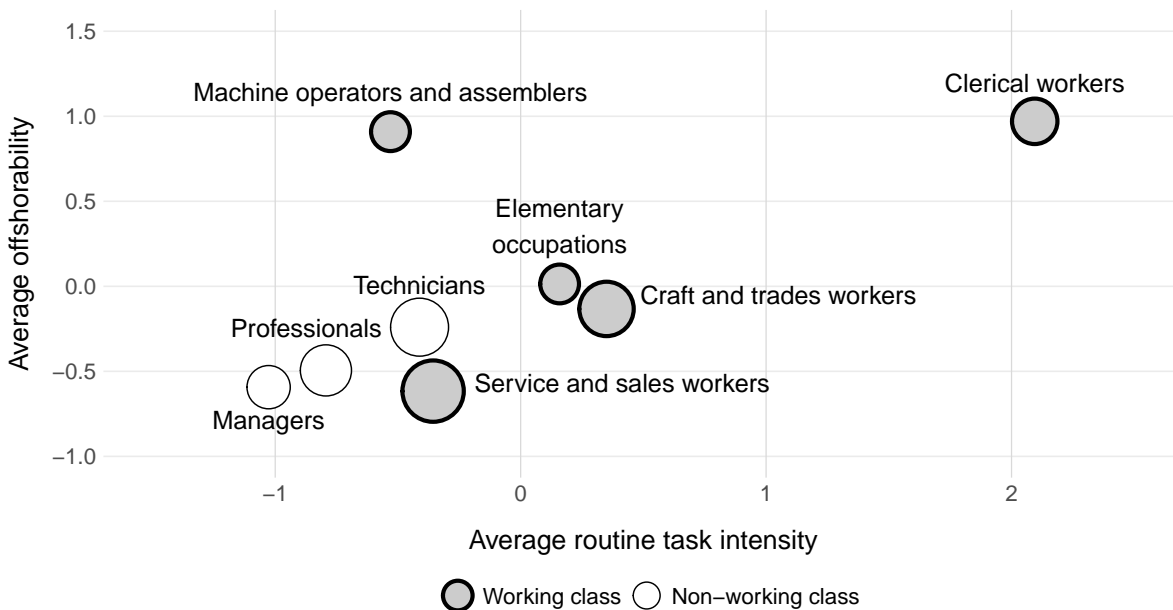
unemployment rates for 1996, 2006, and 2016, reflecting the years of the rounds of the ISSP Role of Government survey that will be analyzed below. The value on the vertical axis captures the average level of skill specificity within each occupational group. Skill specificity refers to the transferability or non-transferability of a worker’s skills across occupations. Workers with more specific skills are typically thought to face higher costs of job loss because they are less likely to be able to find new work at an equivalent pay if they lose their existing jobs. I draw on a measure of skill specificity made available by [Pardos-Prado and Xena \(2019\)](#), which is based on the method developed by [Iversen and Soskice \(2001\)](#). The countries included are the same nine listed above plus Switzerland. As is clear from Figure 2, individuals in working-class occupations face a much higher risk of becoming unemployed than do their higher-class counterparts: every working-class occupational group has a higher average unemployment rate than does every higher-class occupational group. When it comes to skill specificity, the distribution is somewhat more varied, but skill specificity is by far the highest in traditional ‘blue collar’ working-class occupations.

Two additional forms of labor market disadvantage are reported in **Figure 3**. The horizontal axis reports routine task intensity, which is the standard measure of the exposure of workers in a given occupation to displacement by automation (Autor and Dorn 2013). The vertical axis reports offshorability, which is a standard measure of ‘globalization risk’ and captures the extent to which the tasks performed by workers in a given occupation can be performed by workers in another country (Blinder and Krueger 2013; Dancygier and Walter 2015). Both are time- and country-invariant measures that I draw from Goos et al. (2014). As the figure shows, almost all working-class occupational groups face a higher risk of technological displacement than do higher-class occupational groups. The same is true of offshorability. The working-class group that is classified as the least routine-intensive (machine operators and assemblers) is particularly exposed to competition from abroad.

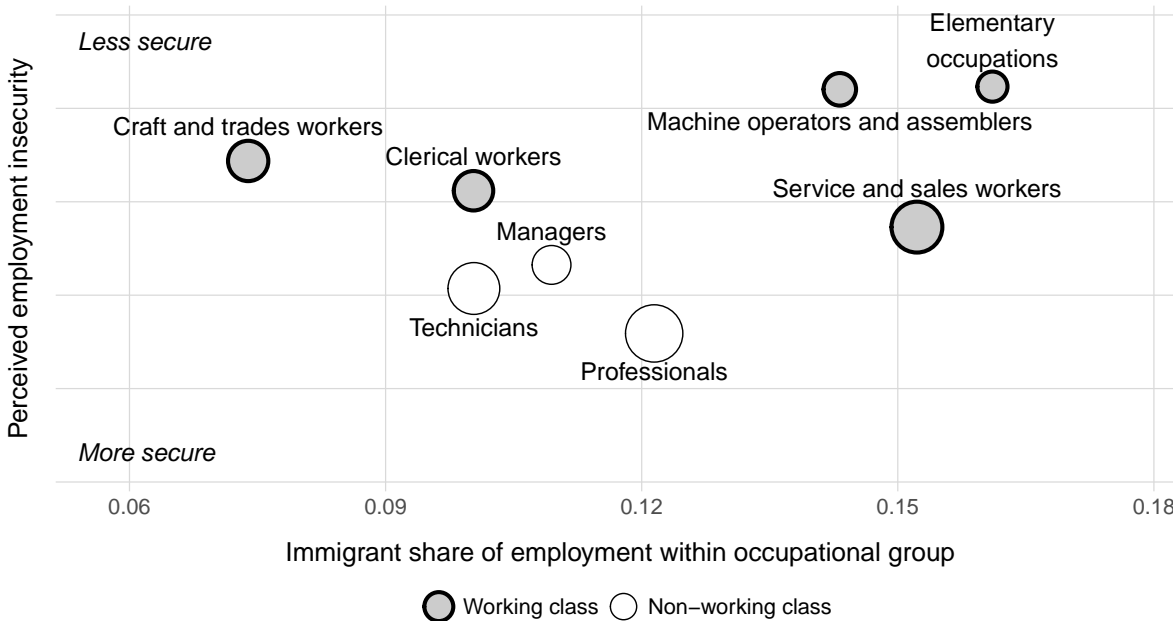
Finally, **Figure 4** reports the distribution of immigrants by occupational group on the horizontal axis and workers’ perceived employment insecurity on the vertical axis. The immigrant employment data is from Eurostat for the same nine countries listed above in 2011 plus Switzerland and perceived employment insecurity is based on the within-occupation average of responses to a survey question about employment security in the ISSP’s Work Orientations module rounds of 2005 and 2015 (see Appendix A). This figure shows that all of the occupational groups in which immigrants comprise a large share of total employment are working-class occupations. The plot also shows that respondents in every working-class occupational group perceive themselves to be at higher risk of job loss on average than do individuals in every higher-class occupational group. It is only in working-class occupations that we see a combination of high employment insecurity and high immigrant presence.

Taken together, these four figures make clear that members of the working class face a host of disadvantageous circumstances in the labor market ranging from low pay, strenuous work, and employment volatility to the risk of technological redundancy and competition from foreign workers at home and abroad. Indeed, these figures give the impression of a working class encircled and beset by cyclical and structural forces. These forces can compound one

**Figure 3:** Routine task intensity and offshorability by ISCO group



**Figure 4:** Immigrant employment and insecurity by ISCO group, 2005 and 2015



another in disadvantageous ways: for example, workers in routine occupations whose specific skills are made redundant through technological change crowd into the low-skill, non-routine jobs that remain (Braxton and Taska 2023), where they bid down wages for what are already low-paying jobs (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2022) and may come into direct competition with immigrant workers (Gould 2019). Even members of the working class who are not personally exposed to these risks – say, because they have an unusually high-paying or secure job or are retired – are likely to take into consideration the fact that many of the people they know and care about are exposed to these risks. This reflects the reality that working-class people tend to exist within working-class familial and social networks, as shown empirically in Appendix O. Even beyond personal networks, working-class citizens are likely to feel concern about how these risks affect people like them (i.e., fellow members of the working class or some subset thereof) and to take these other-regarding considerations into account when forming their policy preferences.

Yet the mere fact that working-class voters are disproportionately exposed to a range of labor market disadvantages has indeterminate implications for policy preferences. As noted in this paper’s introduction, there are several ways in which workers might respond to the disadvantages they and people like them face. The assumption in much canonical political economy research has been that workers respond to economic disadvantages by demanding compensatory redistribution in the form of social spending. For example, workers are expected to respond to an unfavorable position in the earnings distribution by demanding tax-financed transfer payments (Meltzer and Richard 1981; Rueda and Stegmueller 2019). Similarly, workers are expected to respond to the risk of unemployment, the risks associated with skill specificity, the risk of technological displacement, and the risks associated with globalization by demanding compensatory redistribution (Rehm 2016; Iversen and Soskice 2001; Thewissen and Rueda 2019; Serrano-Serrat 2026; Walter 2010). Scholars of responsiveness also typically proceed from the view that working-class voters will respond to their disadvantageous circumstances by demanding redistribution (e.g., Burgoon et al. 2022).

## 2. Protection as an alternative to compensation

The focus on compensatory redistribution in contemporary scholarship is understandable: after all, scholars have long focused on redistributive transfer payments as the main way in which governments in advanced democracies can assist workers disadvantaged by market forces. Canonical scholarship by [Esping-Andersen \(1990\)](#) and [Korpi and Palme \(1998\)](#) compared advanced economies on the basis of the generosity of the transfer payments they provided to citizens faced with unemployment, ill health, old age, and other risks. These scholars saw redistributive spending as a reflection of a “democratic class struggle” ([Korpi 1983](#)) according to which the working class demanded more and more tax-financed transfer payments and had their demands gratified by left parties in government. More recent scholarship has retained the idea that working-class voters are distinguished from their more privileged counterparts by their support for compensatory redistribution: according to the now-canonical framework proposed by [Beramendi et al. \(2015: 22\)](#), for example, working-class voters are distinctive primarily in terms of their support for “consumption” expenditures, by which the authors mean transfer payments or “passive income replacement” ([Häusermann and Kriesi 2015: 209](#); [Häusermann et al. 2022](#)). As noted above, scholarship on democratic responsiveness proceeds in a similar manner by assuming that a lack of redistribution is the main outcome that follows from governments’ inattentiveness to the demands of working-class voters.

This literature is at odds with another tradition in comparative political economy that stresses that compensatory transfer payments are not the only way of addressing the economic risks faced by members of the working class. Scholars like [Castles \(1994\)](#) criticized Esping-Andersen and others for assuming that transfer payments were the only relevant tool for addressing labor market disadvantage: as Castles had stressed in *The Working Class and Welfare* ([1985](#), 82-88), regulatory protections, import restrictions, and immigration controls were other tools that governments used to try to afford workers security of employment and decent incomes. Castles saw these measures as constituting a “wage-earners’ welfare state”

that focused on guaranteeing that workers could earn a decent living through work rather than using social benefits to compensate those who were out of work. Similarly, scholars like [Whiteside and Salais \(1998\)](#) highlighted the role of employment regulations and protections against foreign competition as substitutes for compensatory social spending. In a related vein, [Estévez-Abe \(2008\)](#) emphasized that employment guarantees and state support for economically threatened firms could take the place of compensatory policies.

Scholarship in international political economy has long recognized that trade protection and compensation policies are substitutes for one another ([Katzenstein 1985](#); [Rodrik 1998](#)). But this logic holds for the broader range of measures, including those not directly related to international competition. This is true, for example, of measures to restrict employers' control over dismissal, whether established by law or through union-imposed constraints on managerial prerogative ([Emmenegger and Marx 2021](#)). By providing protection *against* unemployment, such restrictions can partially replace workers' dependence on compensation *for* unemployment. Measures ranging from dismissal restrictions and employment guarantees to industrial subsidies, tariffs, and immigration restrictions can all be described as *protective* policies in the sense that they try to protect workers' existing jobs and employment opportunities. Even though protective measures like tariffs and immigration restrictions cannot address every employment risk, they may enhance the re-employment prospects of displaced workers by preserving jobs that would otherwise be destroyed through import competition and by reducing the competition that displaced workers might otherwise face from immigrants as they search for new work ([Gould 2019](#)).

To be sure, protective policies are typically thought to be accompanied by distinctively high efficiency costs. The argument of this paper, however, is that protective policies may appeal to citizens *despite* the associated efficiency costs to the extent that citizens ascribe value to work as a site of moral formation. This would be the case inasmuch as citizens believe that work creates the opportunity for the development and exercise of certain traits or 'virtues' – endurance and dedication in the performance of unpleasant tasks, for example

– that are intrinsically good for human beings to possess and which dignify the people who possess them. Insofar as individuals ascribe this kind of value to work, they will see compensatory benefits as inadequate substitutes for employment, precisely because these benefits ‘degrade’ individuals in the sense of failing to afford their recipients with opportunities to develop and exercise the aforementioned virtues. Individuals who ascribe moral value to work can be expected to tolerate higher efficiency costs in order to afford work opportunities to the people they care about. To say that some people ascribe moral value to work does not mean that there is no conceivable compensatory offer for which they would be willing to tolerate a lower level of employment. But if we assume the existence of some practical constraints on the generosity of the compensation that governments can offer, we can easily make sense of a citizen’s belief that compensatory benefits (even if incrementally increased) are inadequate substitutes for protective measures.

The same is true of social investment policies, which do little to assist workers who have already entered the labor market. This is most clearly true of policies that expand access to secondary and tertiary education, since these policies are aimed at future generations of young people. But the same can be said of retraining programs for adult workers, which have a poor record of success across the advanced capitalist world. In the words of Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman (1999: 89), it is a “dangerous myth” to believe that adult workers can easily be retrained for new occupations, a finding supported by more recent research: Crépon and van den Berg (2016: 541) concluded in a review that the overall track record for such policies in advanced democracies has been “rather grim.” Voters who ascribe value to work as a site of moral formation and who therefore want to ensure that people like them have good employment opportunities are unlikely to see social investment policies as a viable substitute for protective measures.

### 3. Why working-class voters may favor protective policies

There are good reasons to think that working-class citizens ascribe greater moral significance to work than do their higher-class counterparts. Even if we assume that higher-class citizens work as much and as hard as working-class citizens do, the subordinate social position of the working class means that its members have less access to alternative sources of dignity or worth, such as academic qualifications, scientific knowledge, cultural sophistication, political influence, and so on. As argued by [Lamont \(2000\)](#), this leads members of the working class to place relatively high moral weight on the possession of traits associated with hard work and to discount other possible sources of dignity or worth. Lamont observes of working-class American men that

[t]he very conditions in which these men work reinforce the importance they attach to being hardworking: their labor is often painful and time-consuming, yet underpaid, physically demanding, or psychologically challenging because repetitive. Being able to stick to it demands emotional energy and moral fortitude. Workers know this from their own experience and, again, often express admiration for others who can show persistence ([Lamont 2000: 26](#)).

She reached similar conclusions in her observations of French workers: like their American counterparts, French workers “equate a strong work ethic with moral character” and believe that “hard work allows [a person] to demonstrate [his] worth” even if he lacks other sources of dignity, such as academic credentials ([Lamont 2000, 162](#)). These workers valorize grit and endurance because these are traits that they possess and because they lack other possible sources of respect. The fact that members of the working class are disproportionately engaged in physically demanding work is non-incidental: such work is unambiguously ‘hard,’ whereas the difficulty of mental labor is typically conveyed by way of analogy to physical work, such as in the case of the expressions ‘having one’s nose to the grindstone’ or ‘working one’s fingers to the bone.’ Even if a given member of the working class is not engaged in hard physical work, he or she is likely to be in a familial and social network that includes people who are engaged in such work, shaping his or her conception of the virtues that ‘hard’ or ‘real’ work

requires and inculcates. As Lamont argues, workers reaffirm the value and importance of hard work in part because they recognize that their own economic future depends on their commitment to hard work: continual reaffirmation of the value of hard work is a way of motivating oneself to continue to supply the effort upon which one's family depends.

Given their 'comparative advantage' in the performance of hard work, we would expect members of the working class to ascribe especially high value to the virtues associated with hard work. This follows Lamont's account and is consistent with [Bénabou and Tirole's](#) (2016: 159-160) theory of endogenous belief formation, whereby people assign value to the traits or "identity-relevant capital" that they possess in order to avoid mental distress, to be more confident about the future, and to motivate themselves to act in a certain way. Consciously or not, working-class citizens valorize hard work because this makes them feel better about themselves and their future and because it encourages them to continue to work hard and to avoid the temptation to slack off.

If working-class citizens ascribe especially high value to the traits associated with hard work, we would expect them to be distinctively concerned with the non-monetary losses associated with unemployment. Unemployment deprives individuals of the opportunity to exercise virtues that working-class citizens may see as distinctively valuable or important. It follows that a working-class person would see the condition of unemployment as distinctively degrading. It is reasonable to expect that working-class citizens would not only seek to protect themselves against the degradation associated with unemployment, but also to afford similar protection to others they care about. We would therefore expect working-class citizens to place a relatively high premium on the protection of jobs, even at the cost of efficiency losses. By contrast, higher-class citizens who assign relatively little value to work as a site of moral formation have no reason to think of unemployment as degrading, so long as a person's material needs are met. We would therefore expect them to be unwilling to pay a higher 'price' in the form of efficiency costs to secure workers' jobs.

These considerations lead us to expect a relatively narrow class divide over compensatory policies. Members of the working class can be expected to support compensatory policies because they and people like them are disproportionately exposed to labor market disadvantages, as shown above. Thus, even if working-class citizens prefer protective policies, they are likely to see compensatory policies as a necessary backstop in an uncertain world. Given higher-class citizens' lower exposure to labor market risks, we would expect them to be less supportive of compensatory policies than are working-class citizens ([Rehm 2016](#)). But the class gap in support for compensation should be smaller than the class gap over protective policies, since higher-class citizens are likely to see compensatory policies as a relatively efficient and non-degrading way of meeting the needs of at-risk workers.

What about support for social investment policies? One might reasonably expect little by way of a class gap in support for investment in tertiary education, the key 'social investment' policy. This is often characterized as a valence issue around which there is broad agreement ([Diessner et al. 2025](#)). On the other hand, following [Bénabou and Tirole \(2016\)](#), one might expect social investment policies to be especially attractive to higher-class citizens because such policies imply an affirmation of the value of "identity-relevant capital" that they possess – namely, academic credentials. Similar ideas can be found in [Beramendi et al. \(2015\)](#). Working-class citizens may be less enthusiastic about social investment for the same reason, i.e., because it affirms the value of an asset they do not possess. We might also expect working-class citizens to have a keener sense of the practical inadequacies of retraining programs, given their greater familiarity with unemployment. For both reasons, we expect greater support for social investment among higher-class citizens, as proposed by [Beramendi et al. \(2015\)](#), [Häusermann et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Busemeyer et al. \(2023\)](#).

To summarize, three predictions arise from the preceding discussion. The first concerns the direction of the class divide over the three aforementioned policy areas: compared to higher-class citizens, working-class citizens are expected to be more supportive of protective and compensatory policies and less supportive of social investment policies. The second

concerns the magnitude of the class divide: the class gap in support for protective policies is expected to be greater than the class gap in support for compensatory or social investment policies. The third prediction concerns the source of the class divide in support for protective policies: compared to higher-class citizens, working-class citizens are expected to be more likely to see hard work as an important criterion of worth and more likely to believe that unemployment and public benefits degrade people by undermining their work ethic.

If the class divide reflects moral differences, the class gap in policy attitudes should remain when controlling for individual-level risks such as occupational unemployment, skill specificity, routine task intensity, and offshorability. The theory developed in this paper argues that working-class policy demands are driven less by individual pocketbook calculations and more by working-class voters' beliefs about the kinds of policies that will be good for people like them. The fact that members of the working class are, *in general*, exposed to these risks (as we saw in Section 1) is highly relevant for workers' views about the kinds of policies that will help people like them. But this is not expected to be reducible to individual-level variation in risk exposure. For the same reason, we expect to see a similar class divide when restricting the analysis to retirees: if pocketbook considerations are the central determinant of preferences, retirees across the class divide should reject protective measures because of their adverse effect on the price of the goods and services they consume. If moral differences play a central role, the class divide over protective measures should persist in retirement (see [Jeannet 2018](#)). Likewise, if class differences in policy preferences are driven by moral differences that emerge from working-class subordination in capitalist economies, we should observe a broadly similar class divide across the advanced capitalist world.

Three potential sources of heterogeneity among members of the working class are worth considering. The first concerns the possibility of gender differences in support for protective measures. On one hand, it is widely believed that working-class men are distinctively attached to 'hard work' for reasons related to masculinity. This is suggested by [Lamont's \(2000\)](#) focus on *working men*, although she does not conduct a comparison with working-class

women. On the other hand, even if the capacity for ‘hard work’ is seen as a masculine virtue, working-class women may also place great weight on the possession of this virtue (e.g., in male partners and male children). They, too, may see unemployment as morally degrading (or even as emasculating). It is clearly wrong to presume that men are the only ones with strong views about masculinity. Moreover, it is not clear that capacity for ‘hard work’ is a distinctively masculine virtue: in contemporary economies, working-class women perform many of the most physically demanding and dirty jobs in cleaning, hospitality, food service, health care, and so on. I remain theoretically agnostic about the extent of gender differences in support for protective measures: these differences will be investigated empirically below.

Similar ambiguity arises with respect to the possibility of differences within the working class by race. Some would argue that working-class views on work and idleness are shaped by racial prejudice. This is, indeed, part of Lamont’s argument about working-class attitudes in the United States and France (especially [Lamont 2000: 172-178](#); see also [Gilens 1999](#)). On the other hand, there is good reason to think that minority and majority members of the working class *both* affirm the value of hard work, since both are deprived of the alternative sources of dignity or worth that higher-class individuals enjoy. Lamont herself identifies important similarities in attitudes toward work among white and black American workers (e.g., 28-29, 51). She also finds that many North African immigrants in France affirm the importance of hard work, in part “to demonstrate that they personally conform to what they perceive to be moral criteria highly valued by the host society” (202). The extent of racial differences is therefore theoretically uncertain.

Finally, it is important to consider the possibility of variation within the working class by union membership. Unions are widely believed to shape their members’ attitudes toward policy issues as well as more fundamental moral orientations ([Ahlquist and Levi 2013](#); [Mosimann and Pontusson 2017](#); [Kim and Margalit 2017](#); [Macdonald 2021](#)). Lamont herself suggests that some of the views she documents among American workers may reflect the decline of unions ([Lamont 2000: 21](#)). Existing research shows that union members are

more supportive of compensatory redistribution than are non-union members (Mosimann and Pontusson 2017). Yet even if unions encourage their members to support compensatory redistribution more than their members might otherwise, they might also vigorously affirm the importance of protective measures, precisely because they may believe that compensatory benefits are an inadequate substitute for employment. The extent of attitudinal differences by union membership is to be investigated in what follows.

#### **4. Measuring the class gap in policy support**

##### *4.1 Measurement and estimation strategy*

This section assesses the class gap in support for protective, compensatory, and social investment policies, drawing on data from the ISSP and ESS. Most of the questions are drawn from the ISSP’s Role of Government (RG) module, which provides a total of 50,215 respondents with complete covariate profiles from the sixteen advanced capitalist democracies listed in the introduction over three rounds from 1996, 2006, and 2016. I do not include the earlier Role of Government rounds of 1985 and 1990 because these surveys do not consistently measure respondents’ occupations, which is necessary to construct the class variable. I also draw questions from the ISSP’s National Identity module, which provides 40,242 respondents with complete covariate profiles from the same sixteen countries over three rounds in 1995, 2003, and 2013. Finally, I draw on the European Social Survey’s 2016 wave, which reached 16,756 respondents with complete covariate profiles in nine of the countries included on the ISSP. Appendix B reports summary statistics for these data sources.

In the analyses that follow, the explanatory variable of interest is the respondent’s class position. I use two methods to identify respondents as ‘working class.’ The first is an occupation-based approach, which was already introduced in Section 1 above. I count respondents as working class if their 1-digit ISCO code is in categories 4-9, which contains the following groups: “clerical support workers,” “service and sales workers,” “skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers,” “craft and related trades workers,” “plant and machine operators and assemblers,” and “elementary occupations.” The variable takes a 1 if the re-

spondent’s occupation is in one of these groups and a 0 if his or her occupation falls in one of the other ISCO groups, which include “managers,” “professionals,” and “technicians and associate professionals.” Retirees are assigned on the basis of their prior occupation. Individuals who do not report an occupation are assigned on the basis of their spouse’s occupation (if they have one) and are otherwise not included in the analysis. The second method uses education as a proxy for class, counting respondents without a university degree as working-class. The variable takes a 1 if the respondent does not have a university degree and a 0 if he or she does.

These occupation- and education-based measures of working-class membership are consistent with existing scholarship on class-based determinants of policy preferences and government responsiveness. Many scholars use occupation as the basis for a binary definition of class, including in work by Häusermann et al. (2022), Carnes and Lupu (2023), and Evans and Tilley (2017). While there are several multifaceted class schemas available, it is common for the creators of these schemas and others to collapse them into binary working-class/non-working-class categories. Erikson and Goldthorpe (2002), Oesch (2023), Häusermann et al. (2022), and Carnes and Lupu (2023) all classify manual, clerical, and lower-level service-sector jobs as “working-class” occupations, which is consistent with the classification of ISCO codes followed here. It is also common to use education as a proxy for class, especially among scholars of American politics (e.g., Kuziemko et al. 2026), in part because American surveys less often collect occupational data (e.g., Carnes and Lupu 2021). Lamont (2000) also defines working-class membership by the lack of a university degree. Although some scholars think of class in terms of income, income is generally recognized to be a poor measure of class because a person’s income may change radically over the life-course (e.g., Oesch 2023; Carnes and Lupu 2023). At a practical level, the ISSP surveys used here do not collect consistent and comparable information on income.

As shown in Appendix Table C1, the occupation- and education-based measures of working-class membership perform similarly as predictors of subjective working-class iden-

tification. In keeping with scholarship on class bias in democratic representation, the two measures of working-class membership predict feelings of political under-representation to a similar degree, as shown in Appendix Table C2. As we will see below, occupation- and education-based definitions of working-class membership perform very similarly as predictors of policy attitudes.

The outcome variables examined in what follows are measured on a 1-5 or 1-4 scale of agreement to disagreement. All of these outcomes are rescaled to run from 0 to 1 with 1 indicating strong agreement. I analyze class-based differences in support for four protective policies. The first asks respondents whether they think that the government should “support declining industries to protect jobs” (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The second asks whether it should be the government’s responsibility to “provide a job for everyone who wants one” (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The third asks respondents whether they agree that their country “should limit the import of foreign products in order to protect its national economy” (NI 1995, 2003, 2013). The fourth asks respondents whether they agree that “the number of immigrants to my country nowadays should be [reduced]” (NI 1995, 2003, 2013).

I use three questions to gauge support for compensatory policies. The first asks respondents whether they would like to see more government spending on unemployment benefits (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The second asks respondents whether it should be the government’s responsibility to “provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed” (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The third asks respondents whether they believe that taxes are too low, about right, or too high for “those with high incomes” (RG 1996, 2006, 2016), which I rescale so that “1” indicates the belief that they are “too low.” Although the revenue raised through progressive tax increases could in principal be spent on any kind of policy (including e.g., industrial subsidies), I classify progressive tax increases as a compensatory measure because most existing scholarship on “compensatory redistribution” sees progressive taxation and compensatory spending as two sides of the same coin (e.g., [Lupu and Pontusson 2023](#)). An additional advantage of these questions is that, taken together, they capture compensatory measures that

could be described as “redistribution from” (i.e., taking from the rich) and “redistribution to” (i.e., giving to the disadvantaged), in the terms of [Cavallé and Trump’s \(2015\)](#) theory. We can thus assess whether such distinctions are important for the class divide in support for compensatory redistribution.

To measure support for social investment policies, I use three questions. The first asks whether respondents believe that the government should spend more money on education (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The second asks whether they believe that it is the government’s responsibility to “give financial help to university students from low-income families” (RG 1996, 2006, 2016). The third asks respondents whether they would support “government spending more on education and training programs for the unemployed at the cost of reducing unemployment benefit” (ESS 2016). Summary statistics for all outcomes are presented in Appendix B. Though the baseline specifications reported below measure the outcomes as continuous variables scaled from 0 to 1, Appendix Tables D5-D7 report the results of analyses with the outcomes coded as binary indicators of support.

The models estimated below include country and year fixed effects. They are estimated with ordinary least squares regressions and include heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered by country. I include a standard set of individual-level control variables: gender, age (measured in 7 categories), public sector employment, and self-employment. I also include three dummy variables for employment status, indicating whether the respondent is employed, unemployed, or retired (meaning that the reference category is comprised of working-age people who are not in the labor force and thus neither employed nor unemployed). Appendix B reports the demographic characteristics of respondents in each survey. Some readers might raise questions about the inclusion of self-employed respondents. But in the surveys used here, fully half of the respondents who identify as self-employed are in working-class occupations. The most common working-class occupations for self-employed respondents outside of agriculture are “shop sales assistants,” “carpenters and joiners,” “hair-dressers/beauticians,” “painters,” “bricklayers,” “heavy truck and bus drivers.” It seems

misguided to exclude these workers or to reclassify them as “higher-class” simply because they report that they work for themselves. Prominent class theorists like [Oesch \(2023\)](#) agree that self-employed workers of these kinds fall within the working class. Given that the ISSP surveys do not ask about race or ethnicity, I cannot include a control for race; attitudinal heterogeneity by racial groups is investigated using a separate survey in the following section. I omit controls for union membership and partisan affiliation in the baseline estimates because both are potentially endogenous to respondents’ political attitudes. But Appendix G replicates the main results with controls for union membership and partisan affiliation.

#### *4.2 Results*

**Figure 5** summarizes the results from separate models using the occupation-based and education-based definitions of working-class status: full regression tables can be found in Appendix Tables D1-D3. These results reveal three key findings. First, working-class respondents are more supportive of protective and compensatory policies and slightly less supportive of social investment policies than are their higher-class counterparts. Second, the class gap in support for protective policies is considerably greater than the class gap in support for compensatory policies. This holds true whether class is operationalized by occupation or by education and is consistent across all of the policy domains studied. Inasmuch as there can be said to be a “democratic class struggle” over economic policies ([Korpi 1983](#)), the struggle is over protective policies, since this is where the sharpest class-based disagreement is found. Appendix Table D4 uses difference-in-estimates z-tests to more formally demonstrate the significance of the difference in the magnitude of the class gap over protective and compensatory measures. These findings are consistent with the theoretical discussion in the preceding section. If anything, there is a weaker and less consistent class divide over social investment policies than expected. Third, we observe that the extent of the class gap over protective policies that deal with foreigners or foreign competition (imports and immigration) is very similar to the class gap over protective policies that do not have

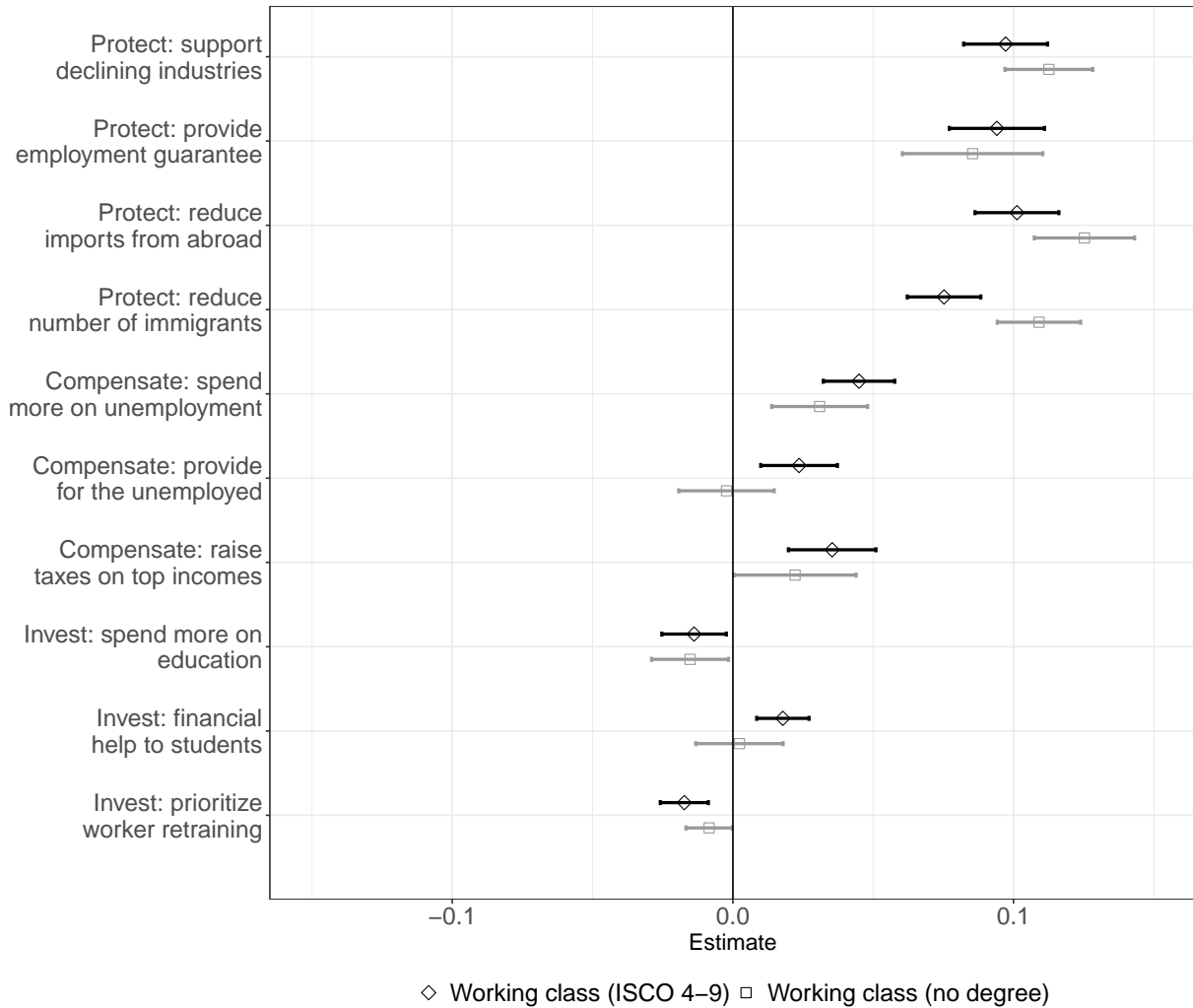
an explicit international dimension, i.e., support for declining industries and support for an employment guarantee.

The results in Table 5 are robust to alternative specifications. Appendix Tables D5-D7 report similar findings with binary outcomes. Appendix E shows that the results do not meaningfully change with the inclusion of controls for occupational unemployment rates, skill specificity, offshorability, and routine task intensity. Appendix F shows that we observe a similar class divide among retirees, further corroborating the conclusion that the class divide is not driven by pocketbook considerations related to individual labor market risks. Appendix G shows that inclusion of controls for union membership and partisan affiliation do not change the findings.

Next, I investigate whether the extent of the class divide over protective, compensatory, and social investment policies varies substantially across the advanced democratic world. To do so, I divide the countries in the ISSP into four groups, broadly following the categorization of welfare state regimes in [Esping-Andersen \(1990\)](#). I place the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland in an “Anglophone” group. Germany, Switzerland, France, and Spain fall in a “Continental” category, while Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland are placed in a “Nordic” group. I place Japan and South Korea in an “East Asian” group. **Figure 6** below reports the results of analyses conducted for each of these groups separately. The coefficient plots report the results of models using the occupational definition of working-class membership. The models include the full set of individual-level controls along with year and country fixed effects. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust and clustered by country, except in the case of the East Asian group, where standard errors are left unclustered because clustering becomes problematic with only two countries. The full regression tables can be found in Appendix H.

**Figure 6** shows that there is a greater class divide over protective policies than over compensatory or social investment policies in all four groups of countries. The pattern is clearest in the Anglophone and Continental countries. In the Nordic countries, the class divide over

**Figure 5:** The class divide in support for protective, compensatory, and social investment policies in 16 advanced democracies, 1995-2016



*The figure reports estimates and 95% confidence intervals with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered by country. All models include country and year fixed effects and individual controls.*

protective measures is equivalent in magnitude to the divide observed in the Anglophone and Continental countries. But the class divide over compensatory measures is somewhat greater in the Nordic countries than in the Anglophone and Continental countries, so the *difference* in the extent of the class divide over protective and compensatory measures is smaller. The East Asian countries show a relatively limited class divide over protective measures but an even smaller class divide over compensatory measures. Appendix Table H5 conducts difference-in-estimates z-tests for the significance of the difference in the magnitude of the

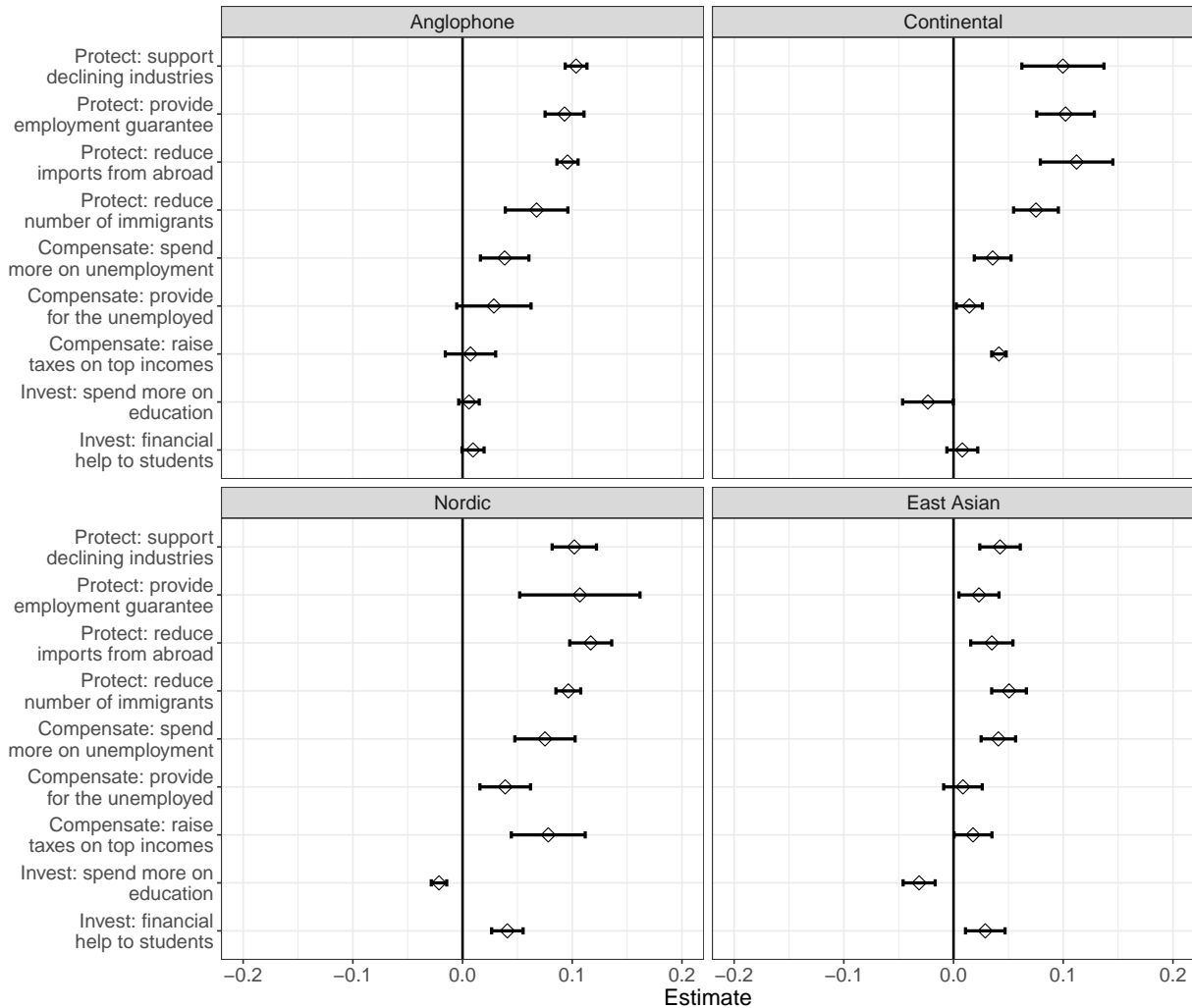
class divide over protective and compensatory policies in each of the four country groups. The difference in magnitudes is significant in the Anglophone and Continental countries, as suggested by the results reported in the figure, but falls short of statistical significance in the Nordic and East Asian groups. Regional variation notwithstanding, we observe a fairly clear pattern across the country groups. There is generally a greater class divide over protective measures than there is over compensatory policies, though the significance of this difference varies across country groups.

## 5. Investigating heterogeneity by gender and race

As discussed in Section 3, the extent of variation in working-class attitudes by gender, race, and union membership is theoretically uncertain. This section investigates the extent of these differences. To investigate gender differences, I estimate models that take higher-class males as the reference group and estimate coefficients for higher-class females, working-class females, and working-class males. I adopt an equivalent approach for union membership and race. In all of these models, the reported coefficients tell us the extent to which the attitudes of the group in question differ from the reference group.

Given the question of interest, this empirical approach is superior to interaction models. An interaction model (e.g., interacting working-class status and an indicator variable for female respondents) would tell us whether the extent of the class gap is greater or smaller among women than it is among men. A negative interaction term would indicate that the extent of the class gap among women is smaller than the extent of the class gap among men, but this could be true even if working-class women were *more* supportive of protective measures than working-class men. The empirical approach adopted here offers a more direct answer to the question at stake in this section of this paper: how the attitudes of working-class women differ from those of higher-class men, higher-class women, and working-class men (and equivalently for union members and racial minorities).

**Figure 6:** The class divide in support for protective, compensatory, and social investment policies in four groups of advanced democracies, 1995-2016



*The figure reports the results of analyses using the occupational definition of working-class membership (ISCO 4-9). The figure reports estimates and 95% confidence intervals with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. All models include country and year fixed effects and individual controls.*

An important constraint is that the ISSP surveys do not collect data on respondents' race or ethnicity. The analysis of ISSP data reported in **Table 1** below therefore focuses on differences in support for protective measures by gender and union membership. The analysis employs the occupational definition of the working class and includes country and year fixed effects and the individual controls discussed in the preceding section. The coefficients on the control variables are omitted for the sake of space and clarity, but the full tables can be

found in Appendix J. The results in Panel A show that working-class women and men are *both* much more supportive of protective measures than are higher-class men (the reference group). Indeed, working-class women are the most supportive of three of these protective measures. Appendix K estimates interaction models that show that the class gap among women is smaller than the class gap among men, but this reflects the fact that women are generally *more* supportive of protective policies than men are. The key point for our purposes is that working-class men and women are both more supportive of these policies than are their higher-class counterparts. Panel B of Table 1 shows that union and non-union members of the working class are both much more supportive of all protective measures than are higher-class non-union members (the reference group). Working-class union members are at least as supportive of all four protective measures as are non-union members of the working class. Higher-class union members have attitudes much more like their higher-class non-union counterparts.

The next question is whether the distinctively high level of working-class support for protective measures is driven solely by working-class citizens who are members of the dominant racial group. Given that the ISSP surveys do not consistently gauge respondents' ethnicity or race, I draw on data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES), a long-running American survey. In 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, the CES asked respondents whether they support tariffs on imports of goods from China. In these four years, it also asked respondents whether they support tariffs on steel and aluminum. In 2018, 2019, and 2020, the CES also asked respondents whether they support a 50% reduction in legal immigration. All of these questions required binary responses. Since the CES does not collect detailed occupational information, I use the educational definition of class in the analysis that follows. Appendix L contains summary statistics for the CES.

The first part of the CES analysis reported in panel A of **Table 2** below conducts a gender-based analysis equivalent to the one conducted above. All of the models include a standard set of control variables similar to those used above (omitted from the table for the

**Table 1:** Attitudes toward protective measures by class, gender, and union membership (ISSP 1995–2016)

	<i>Dependent variable</i>			
	Declining industries	Employment guarantee	Reduce imports	Reduce immigration
<b>Panel A: Gender and class</b>				
<i>Reference category: Higher-class male</i>				
Higher-class female	0.105*** (0.005)	0.068*** (0.008)	0.086*** (0.006)	0.011 (0.007)
Working-class female	0.174*** (0.011)	0.146*** (0.013)	0.159*** (0.009)	0.080*** (0.006)
Working-class male	0.126*** (0.008)	0.110*** (0.010)	0.129*** (0.009)	0.082*** (0.005)
Observations	48,279	49,493	39,889	39,953
<b>Panel B: Union membership and class</b>				
<i>Reference category: Higher-class non-union</i>				
Higher-class union	0.016* (0.007)	0.030** (0.011)	0.009 (0.007)	−0.016* (0.007)
Working-class union	0.107*** (0.011)	0.115*** (0.015)	0.109*** (0.010)	0.079*** (0.009)
Working-class non-union	0.102*** (0.010)	0.100*** (0.009)	0.101*** (0.009)	0.068*** (0.007)
Observations	45,214	46,376	38,507	38,560

All models include individual controls and year and country fixed effects.

<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.1$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

sake of clarity) and cluster standard errors by state. We see that working-class men and women are much more supportive of all three protective measures than are higher-class men and women. Unlike in the ISSP analysis above, however, working-class American men are even more supportive of protective measures than are working-class women. Panel B analyzes differences in support for protective measures by class and racial group, based on four categories of respondent: higher-class white (the reference group), higher-class non-white, working-class non-white, and working-class white. Although white members of the working class are the strongest supporters of all three protective measures, non-white members of the working class are also much more supportive of protective measures, including immigration

restrictions, than are white higher-class respondents. Panel C conducts an analysis by union membership. Here, too, we see that union and non-union members of the working class are similarly supportive of all three protective measures. Interestingly, higher-class union members are the group *most* committed to the free movement of goods and people across borders. This suggests that working-class union members have much more in common with non-union workers than with unionized members of the higher classes, at least on the issues studied here. The regression table with coefficients for all covariates can be found in Appendix L.

In summary, this section has shown that male and female members of the working class are both strong supporters of protective policies, as are union and non-union members of the working class. Further evidence from the United States has reinforced these findings and shown that working-class demand for protective measures is not driven solely by white members of the working class.

## **6. Explaining the class gap in policy support**

Why are working-class citizens so much more supportive of protective policies than are their higher-class counterparts? In Section 3, it was proposed that working-class citizens favor protective policies for addressing the economic disadvantages that people like them face because they ascribe value to employment as a site of moral formation in which certain virtues – particularly the capacity for hard work – are inculcated and exercised. Given the importance they ascribe to work, working-class citizens can be expected to see the receipt of compensatory benefits as degrading precisely because of its association with idleness.

To study class-based differences in attitudes toward work and idleness, I draw on evidence from the International Social Survey Programme’s Work Orientations (WO) and Social Networks (SN) modules along with evidence from the European Social Survey’s 2016 round and several rounds of the European Values Survey (EVS). In all of these surveys, I only include respondents from countries that also participated in the ISSP modules studied in the preceding sections. The number of respondents with complete covariate profiles in the relevant

**Table 2:** American attitudes toward protective measures by class, gender, race, and union membership (Cooperative Election Study 2018–2021)

	<i>Dependent variable</i>		
	China tariffs	Steel tariffs	Reduce immigration
<b>Panel A: Gender and class</b>			
Higher-class female	0.002 (0.004)	0.051*** (0.004)	−0.069*** (0.004)
Working-class female	0.095*** (0.004)	0.148*** (0.004)	0.090*** (0.004)
Working-class male	0.141*** (0.004)	0.153*** (0.004)	0.142*** (0.004)
Observations	162,831	151,838	137,004
<b>Panel B: Race and class</b>			
Higher-class nonwhite	0.044*** (0.005)	0.052*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.005)
Working-class nonwhite	0.076*** (0.004)	0.112*** (0.004)	0.084*** (0.004)
Working-class white	0.146*** (0.003)	0.145*** (0.003)	0.183*** (0.003)
Observations	162,831	151,838	137,004
<b>Panel C: Union membership and class</b>			
Upper-class union	−0.052*** (0.005)	−0.029*** (0.005)	−0.067*** (0.005)
Working-class union	0.106*** (0.004)	0.119*** (0.004)	0.113*** (0.005)
Working-class non-union	0.105*** (0.003)	0.116*** (0.003)	0.144*** (0.003)
Observations	162,660	151,683	136,866

All models include individual controls and year fixed effects.

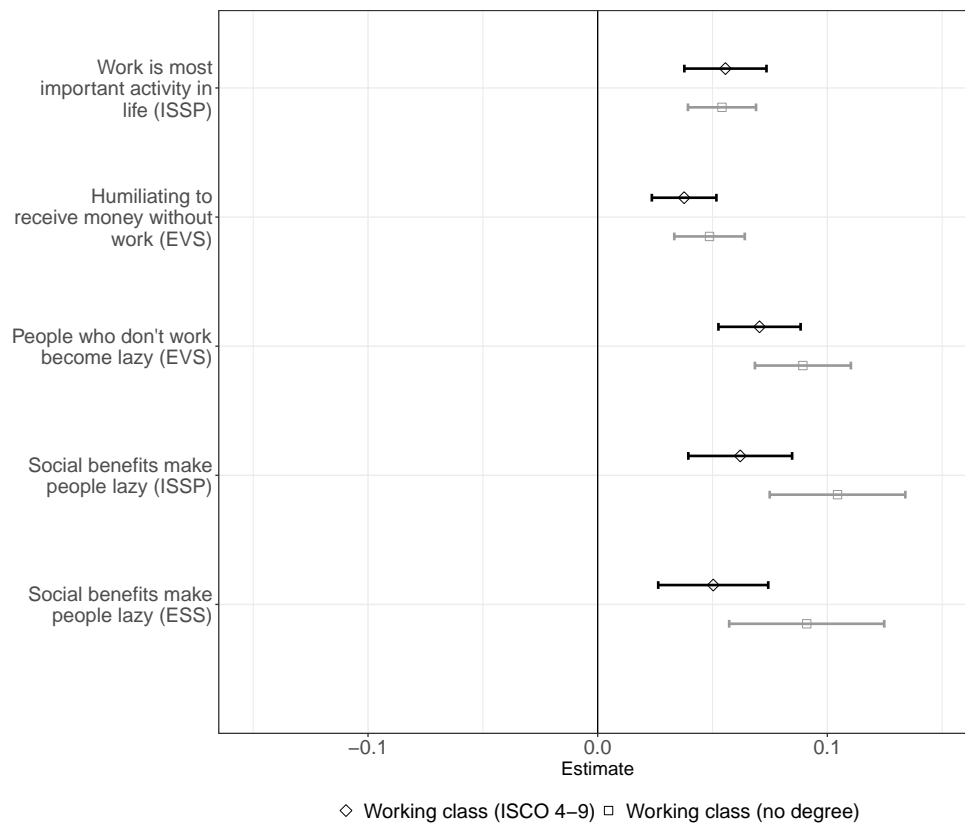
<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.1$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

survey rounds are 8,619 (ISSP WO 1997), 14,226 (ISSP SN 2017), 34,316 (EVS 1999, 2008, 2017), and 15,387 (ESS 2016). The distribution of respondents by country and summary statistics on respondent demographics are shown in Appendix B.

To test the claims of the theory developed above, I use four survey questions. The first asks respondents whether they agree or disagree that work is the most important activity in life (ISSP WO 1997). The second question asks respondents whether they think it is

humiliating to receive money without having worked for it (EVS 1999, 2008, 2017). The third question asks respondents whether they think that people who do not work become lazy (EVS 1999, 2008, 2017). The fourth asks respondents whether they believe that social benefits make people lazy (ISSP SN 2017). The same question is asked on the 2016 round of the ESS, so I analyze responses to this question as well. All outcomes are rescaled from 0 to 1. The explanatory variables and controls are the same as the those used in the analyses in the preceding sections with the exception of the control for public sector employment, which is omitted because it does not consistently appear on the surveys used here. Descriptive statistics for these surveys are reported in Appendix B.

**Figure 7:** The class divide in beliefs about work and effort, ISSP, EVS, and ESS.



*The figure reports estimates and 95% confidence intervals with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered by country. All models include country fixed effects (and year fixed effects for multi-year surveys) and individual controls.*

The results in **Figure 7** provide strong support for the account of working-class attitudes developed above. Compared to their higher-class counterparts, working-class respondents are

significantly more likely to say that work is the most important activity in life, a finding that plausibly reflects the distinctive value that members of the working class assign to employment. We also observe that working-class respondents are significantly more likely than their higher-class counterparts to say that it is humiliating to receive money without having worked for it and that people who don't work become lazy. Finally, we see that working-class respondents are much more likely than their higher-class counterparts to believe that social benefits make people lazy. The analyses of ISSP and ESS data yield similar results. The full regression tables for these analyses are reported in Appendix M.

To study the possibility of attitudinal variation by gender, race, and union membership, I use the EVS. Since the EVS does not collect data on race, I focus on migration background. Respondents are classified as having a migrant background if they or at least one of their parents was not born in the country in which they resided at the time of the survey. The analyses reported in **Table 3** use the occupational definition of class and include the full set of controls included in the analyses above, which are omitted from the table for the sake of clarity but can be found in Appendix N. Panel A shows that in comparison to higher-class men, working-class women and men in western Europe are both significantly more likely to endorse the belief that it is humiliating to receive money without work and that people become lazy without work. Working-class men are especially supportive of the notion that people become lazy without work. When it comes to variation by migration background, we see that working-class individuals with a migration background are *even more* supportive of the idea that it is humiliating to receive money without work and that people become lazy without work than are natives. In Panel C, we see that both union and non-union members of the working class are significantly more critical of idleness and dependence than are non-union members of higher classes, though unionized workers are somewhat less likely to agree with both statements than are non-union workers. This might help explain why unionized workers are more supportive of compensatory redistribution than are non-union workers, as shown by [Mosimann and Pontusson \(2017\)](#) and in Appendix G.

Even so, unionized workers remain robust supporters of protective measures, as we saw in the preceding section. This suggests that unions do not lead their members to see compensation as an adequate substitute for protection, even if they encourage their members to support compensatory measures. Non-random selection into union membership must also be borne in mind when interpreting these results.

Unfortunately, since the survey modules that gauge respondents' underlying beliefs about work are not the same as the surveys that ask about respondents' support for protective policies, it is not possible to quantitatively assess the extent to which the class divide in policy attitudes is mediated by respondents' moral beliefs about work and unemployment. But it does not require especially heroic assumptions to think that the widespread working-class belief that social benefits make people lazy suppresses support for compensatory benefits and increases the relative appeal of protective measures. Using the ESS, I am able to show that respondents who believe that social benefits make people lazy are much less supportive of compensatory benefits, as one might expect (Appendix P). This is consistent with the view that working-class respondents would be more supportive of compensatory spending if not for their disproportionate tendency to believe that social benefits make people lazy.

The findings presented in this section provide strong support for the argument that members of the working class have distinctive beliefs about the moral importance of work and about the negative effects of unemployment and dependence on public benefits. Given these beliefs, it is unsurprising that members of the working class are more willing than their higher-class counterparts to tolerate high efficiency costs in order to maintain or create employment opportunities for people like them through the use of protective policies.

**Table 3:** Attitudes toward welfare and work by gender, migration background, and union membership (EVS 1999, 2008, 2017)

	<i>Dependent variable</i>	
	Money humiliating	Lazy without work
<b>Panel A: Gender and class</b>		
<i>Reference category: Upper-class male</i>		
Higher-class female	-0.017*** (0.005)	-0.062*** (0.005)
Working-class female	0.028*** (0.005)	0.018*** (0.005)
Working-class male	0.030*** (0.005)	0.060*** (0.005)
Observations	34,316	34,335
<b>Panel B: Migration background and class</b>		
<i>Reference category: Upper-class, native background</i>		
Higher class, migration background	0.024*** (0.007)	0.010 (0.007)
Working class, migration background	0.069*** (0.007)	0.100*** (0.006)
Working class, native background	0.042*** (0.004)	0.074*** (0.004)
Observations	27,873	27,891
<b>Panel C: Union membership and class</b>		
<i>Reference category: Upper-class non-union</i>		
Upper-class union	-0.055*** (0.006)	-0.055*** (0.006)
Working-class union	0.016* (0.006)	0.043*** (0.006)
Working-class non-union	0.026*** (0.004)	0.061*** (0.004)
Observations	34,286	34,306

All models include individual controls and country and year fixed effects.

<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.1$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## 7. Implications for unequal representation

As discussed in this paper’s introduction, scholarship on unequal representation in advanced democracies has focused largely on compensatory redistribution: the ostensible failure of compensatory social spending to increase with rising inequality over the past several decades is the key ‘problem’ that the political under-representation of the working class is supposed to explain. As highlighted in this paper, however, scholars may be misguided in focusing on compensatory social spending as the key outcome for adjudicating claims about the under-representation of the working class in advanced democracies. The class divide over support for compensatory social policies is, in relative terms, quite muted. A much greater class divide exists over protective policies, which aim to protect workers’ jobs rather than compensating them for job loss after the fact. These policies include subsidies for firms in declining industries, employment guarantees, protection against imports, and immigration restrictions. Working-class citizens are much more supportive of all of these policies than are their higher-class counterparts.

The trends observed in advanced democracies over the last forty years provide strong *prima facie* evidence of biased responsiveness toward the preferences of higher-class voters. As shown in Appendix Q, advanced democracies have experienced a steep decline in the industrial employment share along with a surge in imports from the developing world and a doubling of the foreign-born share of the population between 1980 and 2016. The findings presented in this paper indicate that these developments are much more consistent with the preferences of higher-class citizens than with those of working-class citizens. Naturally, there is a debate about the extent to which these outcomes were within the control of policymakers in advanced democracies. This is perhaps most obvious when it comes to the decline of the industrial employment share, given the key role played by labor-saving technological change. Yet the putative inevitability of this outcome is itself up for debate, not only because trade liberalization has been a major contributor to deindustrialization (e.g., [Autor et al. 2015](#); [Acemoglu et al. 2016](#); [Pierce and Schott 2016](#)) but also because

the rapid spread of labor-saving technologies was in part a result of the political decision to expose domestic firms to international competition (Acemoglu 2002; Bloom et al. 2016; Fort et al. 2016) and to heavily tax labor while subsidizing investment in labor-saving machinery (Acemoglu et al. 2020). Even if labor-saving technological change is treated as exogenous, workers thereby displaced may have faced worse re-employment prospects because similar jobs had been eliminated through offshoring and import competition and because immigrants occupied the low-skill jobs that might have otherwise remained available to them (Gould 2019). Trubowitz and Burgoon (2023) have shown that mainstream parties in government pursued hyper-globalization from the 1990s onward to an extent that was at odds with their long-run interests, since the pursuit of international integration has fueled domestic backlash and the haemorrhaging of electoral support in favor of radical alternatives to the mainstream (Colantone and Stanig 2019; Baccini and Weymouth 2021). The findings presented above suggest that this behavior by mainstream parties, which seems *ex post* to have been irrational, may have reflected governments' disproportionate responsiveness to the preferences of higher-class voters in the 1990s and 2000s. This may have led policymakers to mistakenly conclude that compensation would make up for declining working-class employment opportunities.

If existing policy outcomes reflect an over-representation of higher-class preferences, what would economic policy look like in a democracy that was equally responsive to the demands of all citizens? This paper's findings suggest that equal responsiveness would yield a modest shift in favor of greater compensatory spending and a relatively large increase in protective policies. Equally responsive democracies would devote more effort to the preservation of jobs in threatened firms and industries and would expend more resources to create employment opportunities for workers given their existing skill endowments, rather than simply trying to compensate these workers for missing opportunities or trying to transform these workers' skills through investments in education and government-sponsored retraining programs. Likewise, equally responsive democracies would be less open to goods and people from abroad, reflecting the view that imports and immigration reduce the employment op-

portunities of relatively disadvantaged members of society. Given the associated efficiency costs, this bundle of policies may indeed shrink the size of the economic pie, but working-class citizens might come out with a considerably larger share of what remains – and perhaps a larger share in absolute terms – than what they receive under the status quo.

This paper’s findings raise difficult normative questions about the value of equal representation. Existing scholarship on the subject has avoided some of these difficult questions by focusing on the failure of compensatory redistribution to keep up with rising inequality. Such research implies that the main outcome that would follow from the establishment of equal representation is an increase in compensatory redistribution which, as we have seen, is actually a domain of relatively weak disagreement between classes. Given the much larger class divide over protective measures relative to compensatory measures, the establishment of equal representation is likely to induce a greater shift in protective policies. If working-class demands for protection reflect deep-seated moral views, as this paper’s findings suggest, then it would seem that workers cannot easily be disabused of their preference for protection and taught to favor compensatory measures. Citizens of advanced democracies who find protective measures distasteful may therefore face a difficult conflict between their commitment to equal democracy and their policy preferences.

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