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**PUBLIC POLICY MASTER THESIS**

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**Where One Wants to Belong: Class Aspirations, Status Anxiety, and the Far-Right Vote in France**

**The Political Implications of the Dissonance Between Subjective and Objective Class Positions**

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**Disclaimer on Language Assistance:** This thesis made use of AI softwares, such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, for the sole purpose of language improvement, correcting grammatical mistakes, enhancing clarity, and coherence.

# Table of Contents

|                                                                                                                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>List of Tables</b>                                                                                                           | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>List of Figures</b>                                                                                                          | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Main contribution</b>                                                                                                        | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                                                                             | <b>6</b>  |
| Definitions                                                                                                                     | 7         |
| France and the Rassemblement National as a Case Study                                                                           | 8         |
| The 2022 Presidential Elections                                                                                                 | 10        |
| The Other Half of the Equation: Electoral Concerns, the Political Offer, and the Media                                          | 10        |
| <b>I. Subjective Social Position and the Far-Right Vote</b>                                                                     | <b>12</b> |
| What is Subjective Social Status? A Contested Concept                                                                           | 13        |
| The Politics of Social Marginalisation and Lack of Recognition in the French Literature                                         | 16        |
| Subjective Class - A Better Measure of Self-Perceived Social Position                                                           | 17        |
| Subjective social class and electoral outcomes                                                                                  | 18        |
| Does Subjective Social Marginalisation Explain the Far-right Vote in France?                                                    | 19        |
| France as a case study                                                                                                          | 19        |
| Methodology                                                                                                                     | 20        |
| Analysis of the Results                                                                                                         | 21        |
| Conclusion                                                                                                                      | 23        |
| <b>II. The New Working-Class Vote? Objective Class as a Predictor of the Far-right Vote in France</b>                           | <b>24</b> |
| Socio-economic Explanations of the Far-right Vote                                                                               | 25        |
| The Main Findings of French Political Sociology on the “Working-class” Far-right Vote                                           | 26        |
| The Rise of Middle-class Society? Defining and Measuring Objective Class Structures and Socio-professional Categories over Time | 28        |
| Objective Class Position and the Far-right Vote in 2022                                                                         | 30        |
| Data and Methodology                                                                                                            | 31        |
| Analysis of the Results                                                                                                         | 34        |
| Limitations of an Objective Class-based Approach                                                                                | 34        |
| Conclusion                                                                                                                      | 35        |
| <b>III. Class Dissonance, Visions of the Social Order and the Far-Right Vote</b>                                                | <b>37</b> |
| Class Dissonance, Cognitive Dissonance?                                                                                         | 38        |
| From Relative Social Position to Visions of Social Conflict and Party Choice                                                    | 39        |
| Inflated Class Perception and Electoral Choices                                                                                 | 41        |
| Deflated Class Perceptions and Electoral Choices                                                                                | 43        |
| The Phenomenon of Class Dissonance in France                                                                                    | 44        |
| Class Dissonance Across Subjective and Objective Classes                                                                        | 44        |
| Class Dissonance Across Socio-Demographic Characteristics                                                                       | 49        |
| Class Dissonance and the Far-right Vote                                                                                         | 51        |

|                                            |           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Methodology                                | 51        |
| Analysis of the Results                    | 53        |
| Robustness Check                           | 54        |
| Discussion                                 | 54        |
| <b>Recommendations for Future Research</b> | <b>55</b> |
| Political Relevance and Implications       | 57        |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                          | <b>57</b> |
| <b>Appendix A</b>                          | <b>59</b> |
| <b>Appendix B</b>                          | <b>62</b> |
| <b>Appendix C</b>                          | <b>69</b> |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                        | <b>72</b> |
| <b>Abstract</b>                            | <b>87</b> |

## List of Tables

|                                                                                                                           |              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression analysis on the relationship between subjective class and electoral choice.....  | <i>p. 21</i> |
| Table 2.1 Time Trends in Objective Class, from 2001 to 2022, among the French working population.....                     | <i>p. 29</i> |
| Table 2.2 Objective Class as a Predictor of Far-Right Voting.....                                                         | <i>p. 32</i> |
| Table 3.1 - Class Dissonance Schema, inspired by Sosnaud et al. (2013).....                                               | <i>p. 45</i> |
| Table 3.2 Class Dissonance Schema Applied to Occupational Classes.....                                                    | <i>p. 48</i> |
| Table 3.3, Multinomial logistic regression on the socio-demographic determinants of class dissonance.....                 | <i>p. 49</i> |
| Table 3.4, Binary logistic regression models based on the relationship between class dissonance and far-right voting..... | <i>p. 52</i> |

## List of Figures

|                                                                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Figure 3.1, Michelat and Simon (1977, p. 151): Second Schema on Class Voting.....    | <i>p. 40</i> |
| Figure 3.2: The Social Mechanism of Class Inflation, or Status Anxiety.....          | <i>p. 41</i> |
| Figure 3.3: The Social Mechanism of Class Deflation, or Status Disavowal.....        | <i>p. 43</i> |
| Figure 3.4 Class Dissonance across Objective Class based on ELIPSS Data (2025).....  | <i>p. 46</i> |
| Figure 3.5 Class Dissonance across Subjective Class based on ELIPSS Data (2025)..... | <i>p. 46</i> |

## Main contribution

Despite the spectacular rise in the Rassemblement National's popularity in France over the past decades, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the specific social mechanisms driving its support among working-class voters. Building on and refining the dominant explanation for the surge of the far-right in political science (Gidron and Hall, 2017), I develop a more precise conceptualisation and measurement of subjective status anxiety and apply it to the French case.

I define status anxiety as arising from the *friction* between individuals' perceived position in the social hierarchy and their objective socio-economic class position. By studying the dissonance between subjective self-placement and occupational class belonging, I uncover systematic tendencies toward class inflation and deflation, whereby individuals situate themselves above or below their objective class position. There is a scarcity of studies applying the concept of class dissonance to electoral behaviour, and none, to my knowledge, has used it to account for the social mechanism underlying far-right populism. Addressing this research gap, I demonstrate that class inflation is a powerful and robust predictor of support for the Rassemblement National: class inflation, relative to concordance, raises the predicted probability of voting for the far right by approximately 12 percentage points.

Class inflation is especially pronounced (71,6%) among production and service workers, as well as office clerks in French society, highlighting the growing support for the far right within the popular classes despite their otherwise heterogeneous electoral preferences. In fact, inflating one's class position may indicate fragility in one's perceived social class position, rather than perceiving a relative inferiority to others. Moreover, my approach provides a plausible operationalisation of what ethnographic studies have described as "triangular social consciousness" (Schwartz, 2009), whereby the stigmatisation of the poor, welfare recipients, and immigrants—combined with a desire for social recognition—renders far-right rhetoric particularly resonant.

In addition, by analysing subjective perceptions alongside objective class positions, this research makes both conceptual and empirical contributions to the literature on class-based explanations of electoral outcomes. It sheds light on the importance of social dynamics rooted in individuals' relational self-understanding within the social hierarchy, and I argue that such subjective perceptions must complement objective socio-economic variables in the study of electoral behaviour.

By bridging French and international scholarship on far-right populism as well as the literatures on status and class-based explanations of electoral choices, this thesis is the first to apply the concept of class dissonance to explain populist, far-right support. In doing so, it offers a timely analysis of the transformation of France's social structure and political landscape at a moment when the far-right stands on the brink of winning the 2027 presidential elections.

# Introduction

French workers, the working people or the working class, “*fâchés pas fachos*”, the people who work hard but cannot live with dignity, politicians from left and right of the political spectrum try to appeal to the particularly divided working classes in France, while not quite understanding who they are talking to, exactly. Heated debates surround not only their identities and day-to-day experiences, but also their subjective worldviews, values, and visions of society. What is certain, however, is that more and more feel represented by the far-right, which, for the first time in history, gained more than 10 million votes in the 2024 legislative elections (Franceinfo, 2024). How is it possible that in a society with a rich history of egalitarianism and republican values, a radical right-wing party is on the verge of gaining power? What social mechanisms may explain their sweeping success?

To answer these questions, this thesis comprises three main parts, with each part’s hypothesis logically following from the previous ones. Firstly, I examine the principal explanation for the rise of populist right-wing parties proposed in the seminal study by Gidron and Hall (2017), which argues that low levels of subjective status - particularly among low-educated men - drive support for such parties. However, subsequent studies adopting their approach yielded ambiguous results, raising concerns about the robustness of their methodology. Recently, Anderson (2025) conducted a psychometric evaluation of the Topbot measure employed in their analysis, highlighting serious limitations in its applicability to capture one’s perceived socioeconomic status. In addition, their framework conceptually conflates perceived social recognition with self-placement within the social hierarchy - two notions that, while related, are analytically distinct.

Therefore, the first part of my thesis investigates whether social marginalisation, indicated by low levels of subjective social class identification, predicts far-right voting in France (H1). To do so, I replicate their regression analysis using a subjective class measure on the second round of the 2022 presidential elections in France, in which a populist far-right candidate faced a mainstream right-wing opponent. The results show that, once socioeconomic controls, including occupational class, are added, the relationship between subjective class and the far-right vote is no longer statistically significant. However, when these controls are removed, significant effects emerge among respondents who identify as working- or lower-middle class.

This finding suggests that objective class positions may attenuate the effect of subjective class perceptions on electoral outcomes. Accordingly, the second part of my thesis examines the role of socioeconomic class in explaining far-right voting in France (H2). I begin by reviewing contemporary French literature on class voting and draw from a post-industrial, occupation-based class schema developed by Daniel Oesch, which I argue is best suited to both my analytical framework and the structure of French society. The results indicate that objective socioeconomic class is itself a significant predictor of far-right support, particularly among production, service workers and office clerks. Nonetheless, I contend that class-based explanations alone are insufficient and demand further inquiry into the underlying social mechanisms driving these outcomes.

In my third and final part, I turn to the concept of class dissonance, drawing from the work of Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013), which I conceptualise as the discrepancy between subjective and objective class positions. I develop a 3x6 class dissonance matrix and apply it to the French occupational structure, highlighting the prevalence of both inflationary and deflationary tendencies. Based on a literature review, I hypothesise that those who have inflated class perceptions, where their subjective class position is higher than the objective, are more likely to vote for the far-right (H3). Controlling for the usual socio-demographic covariates, I find that there is a 12 percentage point increase in the predicted probability of voting for the far-right when one inflates their class position relative to having concordant class identities. I conclude by outlining avenues and recommendations for future research and discussing the broader political implications of these findings.

### Definitions

In this section, I will provide the definitions of several concepts I will utilise in my research. Most of them are subject to fierce academic debate, but I argue that taking my proposed definitions could serve my analytical interest in exploring the electoral implications of misplaced class perceptions.

My main research puzzle rests on the dissonance between subjective class perceptions and objective class positions. The concept of objective class, which I will be using, draws from a class schema that has been acknowledged to suit post-industrial societies. I will be inspired by Oesch's (2006) class stratification measure, which I will use to reorganise the most detailed assessment of socio-professional categories in my surveys. Oesch's class stratification rests on both vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal dimensions. The horizontal dimension, based on work logics, is one of his main contributions to class stratification research, since it better accounts for the heterogeneity of day-to-day tasks and roles performed by workers who would be classified in similar categories solely on the basis of their wages or education levels. He distinguishes between technical, socio-cultural, interpersonal, and independent work logics, which, for instance, capture differences among industrial operatives, clerical employees, and service workers at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. Indeed, these groups work in drastically different professional environments, which could also drive different electoral choices (Oesch, 2008). Moreover, this differentiation departs from former asset-based class definitions, which are less useful for distinguishing among segments of low-skilled workers (Oesch, 2006, p. 266). On the other hand, Oesch also differentiates between hierarchical positions based on marketable skills, which successfully capture their earnings and promotion prospects (2006) and is particularly pertinent to the analysis of social structures undergoing massive educational upgrading (Centre d'observation de la société, 2026), deindustrialisation, and the disappearance of manual jobs (Chapman, 2025).

Throughout my thesis, I may refer to 'objective' or 'occupational' class, depending on which dimension of my class schema I would like to stress. At times when I cite other authors, I may refer to 'working' or 'middle' class categories that differ from my own Oesch-based definition, but these expressions will be kept for analytical purposes, or the differences in our definitions will be highlighted.



In contrast, subjective class position refers to the class categories people identify with in survey questionnaires, reflecting their perceived position in the social hierarchy (Oesch & Vigna, 2023, p. 2). I use the subjective class measure to nuance the notion of subjective social status, which is frequently invoked in research on populism. Notably, Gidron and Hall used this concept to explain far-right voting among low-skilled workers, attributing such behaviour to low levels of perceived social status. They define subjective status both in terms of a Weberian understanding rooted in social recognition and as a self-perceived position in the social hierarchy, which I keep analytically separate. In my conceptual framework, status anxiety arises when an individual's perceived social position does not align with their objective class position, not only due to the latter's associated socio-economic insecurity, but also because of its low social recognition (Ganzeboom et al., 1992; Oesch, 2025; Song and Xie, 2025). It is important to distinguish between these two dimensions: subjective class is *self-perceived*, whereas recognition is *socially perceived* (Ridgeway, 2014) and is constructed and attached to specific occupational groups. When individuals assess their own social position, their responses are shaped by social biases and stigma; by contrast, the social recognition they receive is tied to their objective, observable class position.

Status anxiety emerges when the social recognition associated with one's objective class falls short of one's subjective—or aspired—position. I call this class 'inflation', when an individual's subjective social class is higher than their objective class position, and class 'deflation' when their subjective class is lower than their objective class position. When subjective and objective class positions misalign in such ways, individuals exhibit class dissonance (Sosnaud et al., 2013), which creates *friction* between where people think they belong and their objectively held socio-economic class positions. In Part III., I will show the social mechanisms by which class deflation or inflation is created and the political implications they may have. I will specifically focus on how the populist, right-wing vote may be explained by status anxiety that arises from class inflation.

### France and the Rassemblement National as a Case Study

France has been chosen as a case study due to both methodological and theoretical reasons. In my first part, I will critically evaluate the thesis of Gidron and Hall (2017, 2020), which has been widely accepted in the political science literature as a principal explanation for the recent rise of the far-right. France is an ideal case study, as all the underlying mechanisms cited by Gidron and Hall have been present over the past two decades, including growing income inequality (Observatoire des Inégalités, 2024, 2025), occupational upgrading (Centre Observation de la Société, 2025), and the cultural marginalisation of blue-collar workers (Ivaldi, 2022b). Moreover, since the 2017 presidential elections, the French electorate has had two ideologically opposing populist options available, with the emergence of the far-left France Insoumise, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, along with the growing popularity of the populist, far-right Rassemblement National. Therefore, it is valuable to link the international literature on populism to the French case, as the former often overlooks ideological divisions between parties or identifies similar voting patterns among the same socio-economic groups despite their support for ideologically opposing options. Moreover, it is also appropriate to

examine the post-industrial recompositions of the far-right's social base, since most of France's deindustrialisation occurred before the turn of the second millennium (Chapman, 2025). Methodologically, France is well-suited for the study of class dissonance, as questions on subjective class have been asked since 2001 in the Crédoc survey on the 'Living Conditions and Aspirations of the French Population'. This survey crucially distinguishes between lower-middle and upper-middle classes and presents a clear social hierarchical order among classes. Furthermore, a recent ELIPSS survey has asked questions about both subjective and objective class positions as well as electoral choices in the 2022 presidential elections, which will be used to examine class positions' relation to the far-right vote. Using the ELIPSS survey is also more reliable, as international surveys are notorious for underestimating far-right voting patterns (Hooghe & Reeskens, 2007). These decisions will limit the external validity of my results; nonetheless, they allow for a more in-depth understanding of a specific case, which could inspire more comparative future research.

As my dependent variable, I focus on the populist, far-right vote in France, specifically, the electoral dynamics underlying the rise of the Rassemblement National (RN). The RN is a typical right-wing populist party characterised by nativism and authoritarianism (Ivaldi, 2025). It is populist, as its ideology stands for representing the "pure" people against the "corrupt" elite (Mudde, 2007), and it is a right-wing form, since it adds a second antagonism between the 'culturally homogenous' people and minorities, typically immigrants (Greven, 2016). The RN has also embraced 'social populism', comprising social protection and economic nationalism (Ivaldi, 2023a), which makes it an interesting case to study socio-economic anxieties.

I restrict my analysis to this party alone, as it employs right-wing populist rhetoric that I distinguish from mere right-wing extremism; accordingly, I exclude the more radical Reconquête vote from my dependent variable. As a consequence, whenever I refer to the "far-right" or "populist right", I imply the Front National or the Rassemblement National, which I argue analytically must be distinguished due to its 'catch-all party' appeal (Gaxie, 2017) and explicit efforts to create a more "normalised" public image despite its extremist history (Ivaldi, 2022a). The FN/RN is one of the oldest and most popular populist radical-right parties in Europe, which has received the support of more than 10% of the French electorate since 1984 (Collovald et al., 2025), and its vote share has almost doubled since Marine Le Pen took over the party. It is, indeed, the first among politically active blue-collar workers since 1995 (Mayer, 2002), reflecting a gradual political realignment turning right-wing workers to the far-right, without *directly* drawing them away from progressive parties<sup>1</sup> - although, it might just be a question of a time lag (Gougou, 2012, p. 248) or generational renewal (Tiberj, 2024). Its popular appeal and clear populist, ethnocentrist ideology make it an ideal case study to explore the social mechanism driving the far-right vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the post-electoral survey of Ipsos, that ask about electoral choices from previous elections, respondents shifting directly from left-wing parties to the far-right deindustrialisation deindustrialisation remain relatively low millennium millennium,, In.

## The 2022 Presidential Elections

In my analysis, I will focus on the 2022 presidential elections, since the ELIPSS (2025) dataset includes questions about electoral choices in these elections as well as subjective class belonging. The 2022 presidential elections in France must be seen as the culmination and consolidation of the political dynamics of the past decade, especially the realignment of the 2017 elections, which saw the rise of two populist, extreme blocks and the fall of mainstream parties. The populist left party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, La France Insoumise, got 21.9% of the votes cast in the first round, while Marine Le Pen, the leader of the Rassemblement National, qualified for the second round with 23.1% of the vote. Although both are operating on the antagonism between the people and the elites, they hold diametrically opposing stances on economic liberalism and immigration, with the far-right having a limited, nativist angle on redistributive matters. Moreover, the RN/FN got into the second round and reached historic heights with over 40% of the support of the French electorate, that is, 26% of service workers/clerks (“employé·e·s”), and 24% of blue-collar workers (“ouvrier·ère·s”)<sup>2</sup> (Ipsos, 2022). In total, she received more than twice as many votes as her father in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, amounting to 13 288 686 votes. These elections also saw the tripolarisation of the political space among the liberals, national-conservatives, and social-ecologists (Gougou & Persico, 2017), marking the end of the principal competition between mainstream parties on the left and the right. Nonetheless, it is also marked by persistent systematic abstentionism (Algava & Bloch, 2022; Durovic, 2023), which blurs sociological conclusions drawn solely from the voting population. Lastly, the second round of the election pitted a populist right-wing candidate against a mainstream right-wing candidate, providing an ideal case to test Gidron and Hall’s theory (2017, 2020), which seeks to explain why voters opt for populist parties over mainstream alternatives.

## The Other Half of the Equation: Electoral Concerns, the Political Offer, and the Media

Although my thesis will examine the demand side of electoral politics, voting decisions result from the interplay between demand and supply. The prevalence of socio-economic issues in the 2022 elections makes it a particularly interesting case study, due to the theorised interrelation between cultural and economic concerns driving the far-right vote (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Following the Covid-19 crisis, rising inflation and energy prices led to the highest share of people experiencing material and social deprivation since 2013, particularly in the ability to heat one’s home (Albouy et al., 2023). In this context, marked by the high salience of material issues, a priori, could have benefited the left-wing parties that mobilised on these topics (Grossmann & Guinandeau, 2024, p. 109). Nonetheless, over 30% of Le Pen’s programme (exceeding all other parties) was dedicated to work and social issues (Grossmann & Guinandeau, 2024, p. 110), along with energy and rising prices (Ivaldi, 2023b) which could have appealed more to workers facing socio-economic constraints, whereas parties on the left were more focused on civil rights and discrimination or on state administration. Notably, Le Pen’s promises included the decrease of the value-added taxes on energy products, making public transportation free for 18-25 year olds in rush hours, setting up

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<sup>2</sup> recalculated with abstention rates considered result from

advantageous loans for “young French families”, creating more student and social housing and revalorising the salaries of careworkers and teachers, among others (Grossmann & Guinandeanu, 2024). Although these measures are restricted to the “French”, they may have raised the appeal of the far-right at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This comes as no surprise, since the past 5 years of Macron’s presidency saw the introduction of several austerity measures, the devastating Covid pandemic or the Yellow Vest movement - all of which placed a significant strain on the French social model, making “purchasing power” the highest priority among the French electorate, which nonetheless, almost half of the population thought was not addressed in the campaign (Ipsos, 2022). This fits into broader trends in party behaviour in Western democracies, where far-right parties are taking more interventionist economic positions (Betz & Meret, 2013; Lefkofridi & Michel, 2017), while left-wing parties emphasise more identity-based issues (Inglehart & Norris, 2019).

At the same time, the media coverage of the RN became increasingly favourable with the ascendance of an (even more) radical right-wing party led by Éric Zemmour, the Reconquête, allowing the Rassemblement National to adopt a more discreet tone while still reaping the benefits of the politicisation of immigration. According to the dominant ideology thesis on electoral sociology (Abercombie & S. Turner, 1978), media coverage may influence electoral outcomes by putting issues favourable to specific parties into the limelight. Indeed, French election results must be understood in the context of an increasingly concentrated media landscape in the hands of a few billionaires friendly to the far-right, often pursuing “de-demonisation” strategies to improve the public image of the Rassemblement National (Ivaldi, 2016). A party’s media presence, the messages and impressions it gets across to its potential electors, are possibly even more important than its programmatic promises, which are often deliberately contradictory to sustain its “catch large party” appeal (Gaxie, 2017, p. 59).

## I. Subjective Social Position and the Far-Right Vote

Political science has been eager to find an independent explanation for why populist right-wing parties have enjoyed such success in the past decade. The consensus view suggests that the subjective social status of workers without tertiary education declined relative to national averages due to both economic and cultural marginalisation (Gidron and Hall, 2017), making them more inclined to support the far-right. This would marry two competing arguments, that of cultural backlash (Inglehart & Norris, 2008; Oesch, 2008; Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012) and the “losers of globalisation” thesis (Kriesi et al., 2008; Guiso et al., 2017). Some authors hypothesise that actual status anxiety may predict populist right voting among low-educated, white, “working-class” men relative to more skilled workers (Gidron and Hall, 2017, 2020; Oesch & Vigna, 2022; Nolan & Weisstanner, 2022) or to their parents (Kurer, 2020), while others argue that it’s about the threat of expected status loss (Mutz, 2018; Kurer, 2020; Engler & Weisstanner, 2021; Im et al, 2023; Parker & Lavine, 2024). There is also a debate on “whose” status anxiety increased the popularity of the populist right - those who explain the phenomenon with actual status loss refer to the low-skilled workers without tertiary education (Mayer, 2015b; Gidron & Hall, 2017, 2020), while the studies defending that it is actually about the threat or expectation of status decline identify individuals with lower-middle incomes (Engler & Weisstanner, 2020; Im et al., 2023) at risk of automation (Im et al., 2019; Kurer, 2020). It is suggested that the radical right’s nationalist, anti-immigrant stances may “restore” the sense of status of those who feel they have lost—or are at risk of losing—their social standing, thus giving cultural answers to insecurities that are, at their root, economic (Engler and Weisstanner, 2021). The idea is not new; Habermas posited the end of material class-based politics based on socio-economic cleavages by claiming that in advanced democracies, “new conflicts arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation. [...] The issue is not primarily one of compensation that the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of social life” (1987, p. 392). Later, bearing even closer resemblance to Gidron and Hall’s argument, Minkenberg claimed that “patterns of the new radical right in the era of post-modernity should be interpreted as ‘modernisation losers’ in a subjective sense” (2000, p. 182) and characterised populist right-wing party voters as “the second-to-last fifth of postmodern society, a stratum which is rather secure but objectively can still lose something” (2000, p.187).<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, upon further examination, this argument has yielded ambiguous results (Oesch & Vigna, 2022) and fierce criticism of its methodological rigour (Anderson, 2025). In this section, I will explain whether a sense of social marginalisation could explain the popularity of the far-right in France, as a fitting case study for the theory and mechanisms of Gidron and Hall (2017, 2020). First, I will criticise their concept and measure of subjective social status, arguing that they don’t differentiate between subjective position in the social hierarchy and lack of recognition. Then, I will review the findings of the literature which also use their measure or other, more precise measures of subjective social status, both internationally and

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<sup>3</sup> if needed another citation: As Lipset and Raab (1978) argued, “If there has been one constant [in American history], it is that rightist movements have risen in reaction against the displacement of power and status accompanying social change” (p. xvii).

in France. Furthermore, I will propose that subjective class positioning is a more precise and reliable estimate of perceived position in the social hierarchy, and I will review the literature linking this measure to political outcomes. Finally, I will test Gidron and Hall's main hypothesis on the second round of the presidential elections in France in 2022, using the following hypothesis:

*H1: People who feel socially marginalised and position themselves among the inferior, working class or the bottom of the middle class were more likely to vote for the far-right in the second round of the presidential elections in 2022, irrespective of their objective socio-economic characteristics.*

In the end, I will conclude that their theory is only partially confirmed using the subjective class measure, and that it shows no independent effect of subjective class positioning from objective socio-economic variables on the far-right vote. My results suggest that subjective self-positioning within the social hierarchy must be understood in light of individuals' objective location within it, which I will explore independently in Part II, as well as the interaction between subjective and objective class positions in Part III.

### What is Subjective Social Status? A Contested Concept

In the literature on populism, there is ambiguity about how to define subjective status exactly. Some refer merely to "subjective social position" (Lindemann and Saar 2014) in the social hierarchy; others go further, claiming that it is the "level of social respect or esteem people believe is accorded them within the social order" (Gidron and Hall, 2017, p. S61). The latter would refer to a Weberian, recognition-based understanding of social status, emphasising "social estimation ... based on prestige" (Weber (1921), 2019, p. 455) that must be understood relative to others and according to popular beliefs about the "type" of social groups treated with high esteem, or, on the contrary, disdain (Ridgeway, 2014).

Gidron and Hall, in fact, intertwine these two notions: they refer to subjective status as a relational variable, noting where an individual stands in the social hierarchy, which they tie to the sentiment of being a "fully recognised member of society" (2017, p. S61). Nonetheless, in the footnote, they remark that not all other studies treat recognition as a reflection of subjective social ranking (Gidron and Hall, 2017). I argue that although the two ideas are related, they are fundamentally different - social recognition is *collectively perceived* (Ridgeway, 2014) and constructed, whereas subjective social position is *self-perceived*.

Notably, there is an associational preference bias at play when people are asked to subjectively define their rank in society, creating "systematic incentives for actors to associate with higher status others" (Ridgeway, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, higher levels of subjective self-ranking could indicate aspirations or ideological beliefs (Michelat & Simon, 1977) rather than social recognition, which is more closely tied to widely accepted social and cultural beliefs about the worthiness or competence of specific social groups, often defined based on their occupations (Ganzeboom, De Graaf & Treiman, 1992). One may believe they

have a high rank in the social hierarchy but still don't receive the recognition and respect they believe they deserve (as is often the case with far-right voters; see Zollinger and Häusermann, 2024), which underscores the need to distinguish conceptually between social recognition and subjective social position. In fact, recognition and relative self-placement are two different aspects of one's relational self-understanding; thus, they should not be confounded. Therefore, when testing my first hypothesis in Part I., I will examine only the influence of relative self-positioning within the social hierarchy, which I will call a sense of social marginalisation when people place themselves at the lower end.

The inherent problem of what is meant by 'subjective status' becomes even more pronounced when the "Top-Bottom Self-Placement" ("Topbot") measure, used by Gidron and Hall (2017) to estimate subjective social status and by most of the studies they inspired, is scrutinised. In the International Survey Programme (ISSP) (Smith, 1986), the Topbot question simply presents respondents with a vertical scale from 1 to 10, asking them:

*In our society, there are groups which tend to be towards the top and groups which tend to be towards the bottom. Below is a scale which runs from top to bottom. Where would you put yourself on this scale?*

As early as 1995, Kelley and Evans suggested the unreliability of such social status measures, noting that "rich and poor, well-educated and poorly educated, high-status and low-status, all see themselves near the middle of the subjective status ranking" (p. 166), which questions the importance researchers assign to choosing 4 or 6 on such a scale. Recently, Anderson (2025, p. 608) pointed out that it has been confused in several studies, including Gidron and Hall's (2017, 2020), with the much more widely used McArthur Scale (introduced by Adler et al., 2000) that differs in one key respect. Notably, it defines what is meant by being at the "top", that is, having "the most money, the most education and the best jobs" (Adler et al., 2000, p. 587). In contrast, the ambivalence of the Topbot question becomes more apparent when conducting cognitive interviews to explore its psychometric qualities, as interviewees' responses vary widely, with most interviewees spontaneously citing "ambiguity" (26 out of 36) when asked to interpret the question. This gives rise to various understandings that may be biased by the topical focus of the ISSP questionnaire, which changes each year, or by the tendency to place oneself in the middle as a "safe" choice (Anderson, 2025, p. 619). Most respondents, when asked, said they interpreted the scale as measuring "income, standard of living" (23 out of 36), while only 8 understood it as a measure of "respect, status, standing, how viewed by others" or, for that matter, as "happiness" or "intelligence" (Anderson, 2025, p. 620). One could argue that self-placement within *a* subjective understanding of *a* social hierarchy could still serve as *a proxy* for the societal esteem people perceive themselves to have, but that claim is yet to be validated.

It should be noted, however, that the interviews were conducted in the UK with a non-representative but somewhat socio-demographically diverse sample, as this is a commonly accepted practice in such research to allow "problems to emerge" (Anderson, 2025, p. 615, based on Willis, 2005). Nonetheless, the measure tends to have relatively high

non-response rates when the “Don’t know” option is explicitly presented (in contrast to the ISSP, which has no “Don’t know” or “No answer” option). Moreover, these are correlated with common demographics: Anderson (2025) finds that “being female, younger, working class, and less educated are all substantially associated with a greater likelihood of non-response” (p. 610), which implies the irrelevance of the question for a socio-economically salient part of the population. It’s also important to consider its test-retest reliability, which estimates “the degree to which the same testing instrument produces similar results when administered to the same individual in as similar a manner as possible over a period of time” (Salkind, 2010, p. 1689), with a coefficient between 0 and 1, 1 indicating full consistency. The Topbot measure scores repeatedly below 0.5 (except for the British Election Study Internet Panel, in which the 34.2% who answered “Don’t know” were excluded), while the same score is around 0.70 for subjective social class (Anderson, 2025, p. 612). Overall, the serious concerns raised by both quantitative and qualitative evaluations lead me to conclude that the Topbot measure is not a reliable indicator of subjective social status and is at best suggestive of self-placement on an imagined income ladder, but such claims must be tested.

Then, it comes as no surprise that the studies that followed Gidron and Hall, using the same Topbot scale, find rather ambivalent results. Kurer (2020) explored how the ‘subjective status’ of routine and non-routine workers changed over time in the UK, Germany, and Switzerland, showing that it declined only marginally for routine workers while increasing substantially for non-routine ones in the past thirty years. Moreover, Oesch and Vigna (2022) also tested the theory over time, with a specific focus on the working class, and found no evidence of significant absolute or relative decline. Later, Vigna tested the theory in deindustrialised, economically peripheral regions in Germany and in France—areas where it would theoretically be most likely to hold—but found no evidence of negative trends. When Nolan and Weisstanner (2022) study the same process in the US and in Germany, focusing on relative decline, they find significant results only in relative terms (compared to the intermediate classes and the salariat) in Germany. Moreover, when Zollinger and Hausermann use several different measures of status grievance based on an original dataset from France, Germany, Switzerland and the UK, they find that the perception that respondents’ sense that they don’t get the recognition they deserve, and especially, a feeling of relative deprivation, set far-right voters part from center-right of populist left voters, not subjective social status based on the Topbot measure (2024, p.17). They show that in relation to others in society, low-educated, rural voters who strongly identify with the nation and as down-to-earth, hard-working people, believe that it is “always others who can benefit from all kinds of advantages in society” (Zollinger and Hausermann, 2024, p. 20). Lastly, when Gidron and Hall (2020) explore their original analysis with a focus on social integration, several issues emerge when we look into the details: their dependent variable is voting for a populist party against mainstream parties, their reference values are socio-cultural professionals, who are among the least likely to vote for the radical right, and their populist party list is not exhaustive - for instance, they don’t have La France Insoumise among populist left parties in France. This could explain why they had similarly strong results for both populist left and right parties, whose electorates may seem similar on paper, but are



ideologically different. We may draw two main conclusions from these research findings: first, using the Topbot measure to explain electoral outcomes does not yield consistent results; and second, there is a need for a more specific concept and estimate of social marginalisation that captures the social dynamics underlying the far-right vote.

### The Politics of Social Marginalisation and Lack of Recognition in the French Literature

Remarkably, in the French literature, following the proliferation of works on the political impact of downward social mobility or “déclassement” of the upper service class (Peugny, 2006), different subjective status measures, including the Topbot scale, were used to evaluate how perceptions of social marginalisation or a lack of recognition may predict the far-right vote. Similarly to Kurer, who used a European dataset (2020), Baudour (2023) showed that pessimism about the current state of the economy or perception of intergenerational status decline is a good predictor of the far-right vote (in contrast to that of the populist left), while the same people believe in the contradictory claim that the unemployed are able to find a job if they really want” (Baudour, 2023, p. 115). These results are especially strong for men whose fathers had manual jobs, and especially for young and craft workers (Baudour, 2023, p. 107). Nonetheless, the operationalisation of ‘subjective downward mobility’ as a measure of social status is still reliant on the Topbot scale.

An earlier study on intergenerational status decline (Mayer, 2015b), also using the Topbot measure, found that perceived downward mobility (operationalised as the difference between subjective self-positioning of the individual and their father) is highest among the self-employed, shopkeepers, artisans, and farmers (34%), as well as among manual workers (32%) (Mayer, 2015b, p. 90), and it has the highest electoral impact on Le Pen’s vote among blue-collar and routine non-manual workers. The interpretation of the Topbot scale could have been influenced by the study’s subject, which was on the links between precariousness and voting. Contrary to Gidron and Hall, however, she didn’t find that her relative Topbot measure would have a significant impact on electoral outcomes when socio-demographic variables were controlled for, except when the dependent variable was an indicator of proximity to the far-right (Mayer, 2015b, p. 92). Later, Rouban (2026) also found that those on the very bottom of the Topbot scale vote for RN and show a decreasing trend as we move up, while an inverse tendency characterises Macron’s vote, and the Nouveau Front Populaire of parties on the left does not show differences in subjective self-positioning (Rouban, 2026).

Nonetheless, measures of “lack of recognition” are also used to explain the recent popularity of the far-right. In a recent analysis, Luc Rouban stressed that “subjective social failure” (in French, “l’échec sociale”) could be the new “invisible cleavage” dividing the French electorate (2025).<sup>4</sup> Creating a three-index measure of “social failure”, he assessed social respect, living conditions, and relative living situation to those of the parents to examine how these sentiments may manifest in electoral terms. The indicator on perceived social respect, more precisely, whether the respondent feels that “people like me receive the respect they deserve”, is the closest to a Weberian sense of social status than what all of the

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<sup>4</sup> Although the phrasing of “social failure” implies a normative dimension of culpability and blame, it may also reflect the status anxiety generated by a false meritocratic competition for the status symbols of a stable job, higher education, or homeownership. Nonetheless, I will continue to use his phrase so as to remain consistent.

aforementioned studies used (Rouban, 2025, p. 3). “Social failure” is the highest among the “popular” classes (defined as the “ouvrier·ère” and “employé·e” categories, which could broadly translate to my production, service worker and clerk categories) and the inactive. It is also relatively high among those without a high school diploma (Bac), although it is only 4 percentage points lower among those with two years of higher education (Bac+2). When regressing it on political attitudes characterising the RN electorate, such as economic liberalism, ethnocentrism, and nostalgia for the past, “social failure” has a remarkably strong statistical influence and remains the most discriminating feature of Le Pen’s electors (besides non-voters). Moreover, when exploring potential explanatory mechanisms of cultural (il)liberalism, social failure exhibits even greater explanatory power than the Topbot scale or level of education. Nevertheless, these results must be understood with caution: the phrase “people like me” could be interpreted in a narrow, racialised sense by those who are already culturally illiberal. Nevertheless, these analyses suggest that one’s subjective downward mobility, coupled with a perceived failure within a supposedly meritocratic system, often goes hand in hand with the Le Pen vote in the French context.

### Subjective Class - A Better Measure of Self-Perceived Social Position

All in all, in the French academic literature on far-right populism, there is a scarcity of precise operationalisation of subjective status anxiety. In the end, the issue comes back to what we mean by and the specific social mechanism we would like to explore: is it the lack of perceived recognition, or rather how one sees oneself in the broader social hierarchy? As the latter hasn’t been explored in a reliable manner yet, I will take advantage of two datasets to explore how subjective class perception, that is, I will argue, a better measure of self-positioning in the social hierarchy and thus, sense of social marginalisation. The first, the Crédoc survey on living conditions and life aspirations of the French, asked a question on subjective class between 2001 and 2022 (with a gap between 2001 and 2011), to choose between 6 social categories (the privileged, the well-off, the upper-middle class, the lower-middle class, the popular class, the disadvantaged) or “Don’t know”, whose numbers are negligible (778 out of 58103 responses over the time period studied). As I will also explore how subjective social position relates to the far-right vote, I take advantage of a new ELIPSS (2025) survey on social stratification, which includes questions on both subjective class variables and a question on electoral choices in the 2022 presidential elections, in contrast to the Crédoc survey, which only accounts for left-right self-positioning and some questions on political attitudes. There are a few notable differences which could influence the comparability of these measures: in the Crédoc dataset, the question asked was “*Which category from the following do you feel like you belong to?*”, whereas in the ELIPSS survey, it was asked right after a free-response question about class appartenance, saying: “*In the previous question, we asked you to name your social class. Another way of addressing this subject is to propose you a choice between different options. If you had to choose your social class from the following list, which one would you choose?*” This probably incited people to respond more (non-response rate is very low, 22 out of 1658) and would indicate that the answers are not about a strong sense of belonging to a particular social class per se, but rather, how people perceive their standing in society. Moreover, the question in the ELIPSS

survey offers slightly different options to choose from, notably the inferior class, the working class, the bottom of the middle class, the middle of the middle class, the top of the middle class or the superior class. In particular, the difference between “working” and “popular” classes may influence respondents’ choices, necessitating robustness checks using the Crédoc survey.

Pre-coded questions not only provide an advantage in terms of comparability but also make respondents less likely to identify themselves with the middle class than in free-response questions (Hodge & Treiman, 1968). Moreover, the differentiation between the lower-middle class and the upper-middle class ensures that people may counteract their tendency to choose the middle class according to reference group theory, which stipulates that people evaluate their social position based on the individuals that surround them (Merton & Kitt, 1950), and provide a more precise understanding of their position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, from a methodological point of view, subjective class is superior to the Topbot measure: it has remarkably higher test-retest reliability (around 0.70; see Anderson, 2025) and is a more comprehensive measure than trying to gauge objective class stratification. To some extent, it is grounded in material reality — it predicts life chances remarkably well, suggesting that individuals are better judges of their own material situation than researchers (Oesch and Vigna, 2023). Yet, it is not reducible to just a more precise measure of objective class. Romero-Vidal (2021) shows that even when we account for a variety of objective socio-economic conditions, the variance explained in subjective class categorisation doesn’t exceed 0.2 in their OLS model (p. 11). This gap is theoretically significant: subjective class captures individuals’ perceived position in the social hierarchy that objective class measures cannot account for, in terms of how individuals view the social hierarchy and their position within it. The two dimensions are indeed analytically distinct but interrelated (Michelat & Simon, 1977), which is why there is a common pattern of class dissonance across occupational classes, but especially among production and service workers, as well as office clerks (Part III.).

#### *Subjective social class and electoral outcomes*

Those who proclaim the “death” of class as a major variable influencing electoral outcomes are particularly attuned to its subjective dimension (Stubager et al., 2026), stressing that class is not an important aspect of one’s identity. Indeed, in the ELIPSS survey, when asked whether respondents felt a sense of class belonging, only 635 of 1652 chose yes. In spite of this, I argue that when people are asked to place themselves in the social hierarchy, their subjective position may reflect a sense of social marginalisation that matters for electoral choices. Even if individuals don’t identify strongly with certain social class categories, their responses to questions about subjective class belonging may have symbolic and sociological significance (Michelat & Simon, 1977).

In fact, studies using subjective class belonging as an independent variable attest to its importance in shaping political attitudes. A study in the US found that, even when controlling for socioeconomic variables, middle-class identifiers exhibit higher levels of political involvement than working-class identifiers (Walsh et al., 2004). Exploring subjective class identification and objective class markers, Romero-Vidal showed how, in Catalonia, higher levels of class identification are more associated with right-wing votes and values, while the

impact of occupation, income, and education disappears once subjective class is controlled for (2021).

In France, exploring the influence of subjective and objective class appartenance on political outcomes reached its heyday after the postwar decades of class compromise (in France, notably thanks to Michelat & Simon, 1977); but there are only a few recent studies that include such variables. This could be explained by the fact that there are relatively few surveys that ask about both subjective class identification, which distinguishes between lower and upper-middle class, as well as electoral choices, thus the relation between the two remains underexplored. Of late, a Drees (Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques) study found that subjective class appartenance is an important predictor of social policy preferences, beyond the influence of wage levels, socio-professional category or education (Pirus, 2024). The study showed a gap between those identifying with the lower and upper middle classes, with 22% of the former in favour of more state intervention, compared with 14% of the latter. The self-proclaimed lower middle classes are also less likely to think that their situation is better than that of their parents and more pessimistic about the future of their children, which are patterns of thinking commonly found among the RN electorate (Rouban, 2025).

Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of studies exploring the relationship between subjective class identification and contemporary electoral outcomes, and most of the studies that do don't distinguish between the lower and upper middle classes or don't present a clear, hierarchical order among the class categories. Therefore, taking advantage of the Crédoc and ELIPSS datasets, which both include such features, subjective class positioning will be used to evaluate the main thesis of Gidron and Hall in France: to what extent subjective social marginalisation could explain electoral outcomes in the 2022 presidential elections.

### Does Subjective Social Marginalisation Explain the Far-right Vote in France?

#### *France as a case study*

France is a compelling case study for the underlying mechanisms of Gidron and Hall's theory. Precarity at work and income inequality have been steadily rising since 1990 (Observatoire des Inégalités, 2024, 2025), which could have strengthened a sense of "positional deprivation" (Burgoon et al., 2019). The electoral consequences of job polarisation and the risk of automation have been widely documented: it is those who 'just get by' or even live comfortably on their wages, but are threatened by downward mobility due to automation, who are turning to the far-right (Im et al., 2019). Moreover, skill-biased technological change may heighten perceptions of relative status decline among those without diplomas as we see the "second boom" in tertiary education since 2010 (Centre Observation de la Société, 2025). Although tolerance towards immigrants and minorities has been growing in France (Tiberj, 2024), Ivaldi found that a sense of cultural marginalisation is especially strong among those who find it very difficult to make ends meet (2022b). Moreover, 70% of their whole sample felt that they "no longer recognize themselves in the

values of French society, 65% think that “there are too many immigrants in France” and only 28% of them believe that “we have gone too far in defending the rights of people belonging to visible minorities” (Ivaldi, 2022b, p.11), showing that the thesis on ‘cultural backlash’ may manifest in different ways depending on the local context. Given the strong presence of their main driving mechanisms in France, using a better measure of subjective social position would yield more reliable findings that could confirm one dimension of subjective status anxiety, that is, social marginalisation (and not lack of recognition).

### *Methodology*

When describing their regression in their second, more elaborate study on subjective status anxiety, Gidron and Hall write that they “use estimations based on linear probability models, where the dependent variable indicates whether the respondent voted for the relevant radical party instead of a mainstream party in the last national election (excluding those who did not vote)” (2020, p. 1045). I find this problematic on several grounds. Firstly, this setup doesn’t include the full set of choices available to the electorate, which could be especially important in multiparty systems. Moreover, it assumes that a similar mechanism drives people to the far-right or the far-left, even if they are ideologically different. Lastly, and most importantly, they exclude non-voters (both in their 2017 and 2020 study on subjective status) - which is a critical mistake, considering that a large part of the far-right’s electorate came from former non-voters (Perrineau, 2024) as well as taking into account the size of such a phenomenon, especially among people without tertiary degree, who are theoretically the most interesting for Gidron and Hall.

Owing to these reasons, I will take advantage of the second round of the presidential elections in France, which could be a natural experiment for their theory: it was a competition between Le Pen, the far-right populist, and Macron, the centre-right mainstream candidate. I will run a multinomial logistic model, with three choices: (1) Le Pen, (2) Macron or (3) abstention, blank ballot or spoiled ballot, with the same controls that Gidron and Hall used (with the exception of being foreign born, which is missing from my dataset), namely: occupation, gender, age, unemployment, education, household disposable income, agglomeration size and union membership (2020). Following Gidron and Hall, the purpose of this regression is to show the independent effect of subjective class positioning, even after controlling for all the socio-economic determinants that may influence subjective class perception. The predictive value shown is the difference relative to someone who identifies with the middle of the middle of the middle class (not upper nor lower middle), which is used as the reference value. Following the hypothesis of Gidron and Hall, that those experiencing subjective status anxiety are more likely to vote for the far-right, I will test a hypothesis of my own, using the subjective class measure, which I have shown to be a more reliable and precise estimate of social position:

*H1: People who feel socially marginalised and position themselves among the inferior, working class or the bottom of the middle class were more likely to vote for the far-right in the second round of the presidential elections in 2022, irrespective of their objective socio-economic characteristics.*

### *Analysis of the Results*

When I examine the predictive margins for subjective class membership, I obtain very different results from those reported by Gidron and Hall (Table 1, Model 1). Indeed, those who are in the “inferior” class are 28 percentage points less likely to vote for Macron and 23 percentage points more likely not to vote at all. Those who claim to belong to the upper-middle class or upper classes are 13 percentage points and 27 percentage points less likely not to vote, respectively, than those in the middle of the middle class. Notably, I don’t get any significant results for the Le Pen vote, except for a 10-percentage-point increase in the marginal effect among the upper-middle classes relative to the middle of the middle classes. This goes directly against my H1 and the theory of Gidron and Hall. These results suggest that explicitly modelling social self-positioning alongside a full choice set — including abstention — reveals patterns that a binary far-right vs. mainstream specification would obscure, for instance, the strong relationship between inferior class identification and electoral exit rather than the far-right vote. My findings are corroborated by robustness checks (Appendix A, Table A.1) showing that coding the dependent variable as far-right vs mainstream parties for the first round yields high statistical significance for the inferior and working subjective class variables’ effect on the far-right vote, which disappears when the regression is on voting for the far-right vs all other party choices or abstention.

*Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression analysis on the relationship between subjective class and electoral choice*

| Subjective Class<br><i>ref: middle of the middle class</i> | Average Marginal Effects<br><i>with controls</i><br>(1) | Average Marginal Effects<br><i>without controls</i><br>(2) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Inferior class</i></b>                               |                                                         |                                                            |
| Macron                                                     | -0.28*** (0.108)                                        | -0.377*** (0.095)                                          |
| Le Pen                                                     | 0.049 (0.074)                                           | 0.170 (0.121)                                              |
| Abstention/ blank/ spoiled vote                            | 0.23** (0.122)                                          | 0.203 (0.129)                                              |
| <b><i>Working class</i></b>                                |                                                         |                                                            |
| Macron                                                     | -0.052 (0.068)                                          | -0.213*** (0.616)                                          |
| Le Pen                                                     | 0.0167 (0.041)                                          | 0.141** (0.052)                                            |
| Abstention/ blank/ spoiled vote                            | 0.035 (0.063)                                           | 0.072 (0.061)                                              |
| <b><i>Lower-middle class</i></b>                           |                                                         |                                                            |
| Macron                                                     | -0.067 (0.049)                                          | -0.12* (0.047)                                             |
| Le Pen                                                     | 0.018 (0.033)                                           | 0.08* (0.038)                                              |

|                                                                               |                   |                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abstention/ blank/ spoiled vote                                               | 0.048 (0.047)     | 0.04 (0.045)                                                                  |
| <b><i>Upper-middle</i></b>                                                    |                   |                                                                               |
| Macron                                                                        | 0.03 (0.052)      | 0.17*** (0.045)                                                               |
| Le Pen                                                                        | 0.1** (0.048)     | -0.019 (0.033)                                                                |
| Abstention/ blank/ spoiled vote                                               | -0.13*** (0.041)  | -0.151*** (0.039)                                                             |
| <b><i>Upper class</i></b>                                                     |                   |                                                                               |
| Macron                                                                        | 0.1 (0.153)       | 0.287*** (0.085)                                                              |
| Le Pen                                                                        | 0.172 (0.136)     | -0.013 (0.081)                                                                |
| Abstention/ blank/ spoiled vote                                               | -0.270*** (0.034) | -0.274***                                                                     |
| (1)<br>Number of observations: 1422<br>F(68, 1354) = 2.61<br>Prob > F = 0.000 |                   | (2)<br>Number of observations: 1517<br>F(60, 1385) = 7.41<br>Prob > F = 0.000 |

Linearised Standard Errors in Parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1<sup>5</sup>

Source: ELIPSS (2025) (Silva et al., 2026), Author's calculations

*Note: Average marginal effects from a multinomial logistic regression with survey-weighted linearised standard errors. dy/dx for factor levels (1) and (2) represents the discrete change in the predicted probability relative to the reference category, which is the middle of the middle class.*

I run an additional model to examine whether subjective class identification, on its own, has predictive power for the far-right vote in the second round (Table 1, Model 2), excluding all socio-economic controls. In contrast to Model 1, Model 2 with subjective class in isolation is much more predictive of the Le Pen vote, thus my hypothesis is partially confirmed: indeed, people who feel socially marginalised and position themselves among the working class or the bottom of the middle class were more likely to vote for the far-right in the second round of the presidential elections in 2022 than those in the middle of the social hierarchy, by 14 and 8 percentage points respectively, but not irrespective of their objective socio-economic characteristics.

Overall, my models show that the effect of subjective class on electoral outcomes does not exist in a vacuum, independent of objective socio-economic characteristics, including occupation. As objective class likely shapes which subjective class people feel like they belong to, these objective socio-economic variables attenuate the relationship between subjective class and vote choice. To untangle this, I will explore the relationship between objective class membership and the far-right vote in Part II.

<sup>5</sup> The results for covariates that were not statistically significant, such as region, agglomeration size are not shown in consideration for space constraints.

## Conclusion

In this section, I have established that to test Gidron and Hall's theory, both their concept and measure of subjective social status must be reevaluated. Firstly, their conception of subjective social status doesn't distinguish between perceived position in the social hierarchy and a sense of lack of recognition. Furthermore, the Topbot measure that they are using is not a reliable measure of subjective social status, due to the lack of a clear description of what it measures when the question is asked in surveys, the relatively high non-response rates, and its relatively low test-retest reliability score. Therefore, the literature on populism using the Topbot measure yields inconsistent results and should be treated with caution. Using a more precise and reliable measure of self-positioning in the social hierarchy with the subjective social class measure and a more robust regression design on the second round of the presidential elections in 2022 with all electoral choices considered, I have shown that social marginalisation, that is, perceiving oneself as belonging to the inferior, working, or lower-middle class, only predicts the far-right vote in isolation, without the inclusion of objective socio-economic controls. Similar conclusions were drawn by Mayer (2015b) when exploring a subjective social mobility, who said that her subjective mobility variable has an electoral impact only when it is considered "in interaction with class variables" (p. 92). My results motivate both the examination of occupational class in Part II and the question of whether the *dissonance* between subjective and objective class carries independent political meaning for the far-right vote in Part III.



## II. The New Working-Class Vote? Objective Class as a Predictor of the Far-right Vote in France

What remains of class-based voting? This question has been asked repeatedly since parties on the left lost their popular base in the 1980s (Mayer, 2007; Peugny & Tiberj, 2024), and (some) traditional voting dynamics have eroded with the emergence of populist parties. The literature arguing for the persistence of class voting makes two strong claims about contemporary voting behaviour: that the most precarious tend to abstain (Durovic et. al, 2025) and those with high incomes systematically vote for the centre-right (Piketty & Cagé, 2023). As for the antagonistic electoral choices of production, service workers and office clerks between the two opposing sides of the political spectrum, the populist left and right, the explanations become less robust. Within-group differences suggest that there remains ambiguity about which cleavages within occupational categories may explain electoral choices. Indeed, as Tiberj put it, “It would therefore seem that some occupational logics of voting are fading, while others persist. This is all the more remarkable given that the rise of the Front National alone is not sufficient to explain either their changes or their continuities.” (2012, p. 71).

Under these dynamics, one must consider the drastic transformation of the society in France in the past four decades - deindustrialisation and the growth of the service sector, increasing female employment, rising levels of education, the automatised production processes and increasing polarisation of the labour market resulted in an ever more fragmented social structure without the political socialisation once provided by broad union membership. As a result, the industrial working class has largely declined, while service-sector employment has expanded for both low- and high-skilled workers. Some welcomed the emergence of a “middle class society” (Mendras & Dubois Fresney, 1988), with a general rise in living standards, social security, and mass consumption, thereby making socio-economic concerns no longer a salient cleavage. Nonetheless, this thesis was notably questioned by Robert Castel, drawing attention to the “destabilisation of the stables” due to the flexibilisation of work and welfare state retrenchment (1995), or Louis Chauvel, who argued that as qualified jobs don’t rise as fast as education levels, we bear witness to a generational social decline (1998). Focusing on occupational changes, Tranchant showed that even as industrial workers’ jobs decrease, they are being replaced by low-level service jobs, such as cleaners and waste treatment workers, cooks, drivers, gardeners, and logistics workers in warehouses (2019). Others pointed to the polarisation of the labour market, which increased inequalities in social security, working and employment conditions, and remuneration (Emmenegger et al., 2012).

In Part I, I have shown that subjective self-placement in the social hierarchy doesn’t explain the far-right vote once we control for socio-economic variables, including one’s occupation. Therefore, there is ample ground to believe that objective class attenuates the effect of one’s subjective class belonging, warranting further investigation. In this section, I will show how the recent successes of the far-right in France can be partially explained by individuals’ objective class, independent of their subjective class position. I will first summarise the main findings from the literature on the relationship between socio-economic class structures and electoral outcomes in France. Then, I will demonstrate the transformation of the French

occupational structure using Crédoc data and analyse electoral outcomes in terms of objective class categories from the ELIPSS data for the 2022 presidential elections. In the end, I will detail the limitations of relying solely on objective class markers to capture “popular” far-right voters in France. I argue that even if objective class explains far-right voting on its own, its influence may also be understood in interaction with the subjective class measure (Part III), which reveals a social mechanism underlying the decision of thousands of cleaners, administrative officials, and logistics workers to support the Rassemblement National.

### Socio-economic Explanations of the Far-right Vote

Over the past three decades, the RN/FN's growing electoral dominance among industrial workers has drawn sustained attention from political scientists and sociologists in France. Indeed, this phenomenon challenges traditional class-cleavage theories based on the structural “heavy” variables of class and religion identified by Clark and Lipset—frameworks that the authors themselves called into question in 1991, proclaiming the ‘death’ of class voting. In order to go beyond a simple class-based model explaining electoral outcomes, scholars have generally chosen two ways of linking socio-economic conditions to the populist right-wing vote: the first would be to consider specific labour market experiences or risks, such as automation, unemployment, or different understandings of work or employment precarity, or, they attempt to examine more fine-grained, comprehensive objective class dynamics to explain diverging electoral choices, based on differences between sectors, employment status, work logics, or local labour market dynamics. Although their main explanatory variables of interest are connected - low-skilled workers in declining professional sectors are more likely to experience employment precarity or budget constraints - the mechanisms studied are different. The first approach’s difficulty stems from the ambiguity of linking economic grievances to the populist vote, as the literature yields contradictory results (Berman, 2021). The second approach, on the other hand, is burdened by the choice of drawing different demarcation lines in the social space in the search for social homogeneity based on specific metrics, practices, mentalities, and behaviour, which some call “subculture” (Michelat & Simon, 1977, p. 140), that are usually debatable. Lastly, and most importantly, socio-professional categories often fail to capture the internal heterogeneity of the broad groups of employees or industrial workers, both sociologically (Siblot et al, 2015) and in their approach to politics (Gougou & Martin, 2014, Peugny, 2015), their analysis is too focused on the micro-level, capturing class fractions instead of socio-economic classes (Bradley, 2014), or they fail to highlight the *mechanism* why certain classes vote in specific ways.

Overall, they paint a particularly fragmented picture of the French electoral landscape, with unclear conclusions on who specifically decides to vote for the populist right or left and what social dynamics explain these diverging outcomes. In a recent study on work and electoral behaviour, the authors also acknowledge that, even though there are some marked differences, especially considering the cleavage between mainstream and populist parties, variations, even based on fine-grained class conceptions, are strikingly small - prompting them to ask “How then can we explain that identical configurations of working and employment conditions are associated with voting patterns known to be particularly antagonistic in terms of political attitudes, including economic values ?” (Haute et al., 2025, p. 508). In Part III, I will argue that these accounts miss subjective perceptions of one’s

position in the social hierarchy, which may better explain the social dynamics that lead the popular classes to the far right, rather than focusing on granular socio-economic groups and conditions.

*The Main Findings of French Political Sociology on the “Working-class” Far-right Vote*

Taking a more fine-grained account of the socio-professional categories, multiple works have shown the tendency of small business owners and independent artisans to vote for right-wing parties (Mayer, 1986), as well as for those working in the private sector (Boy & Mayer, 1997), but more recent works have attested to the right-wing shift among civil servants (Mayer, 2016; Rouban, 2024). In the 2022 presidential elections, Haute and Peugny (2024) examined the role of sectoral differences in electoral outcomes, showing that Le Pen received the highest support among the public, commercial, and service sectors (around 20%), in contrast to administrative workers, among whom the party was less popular. When the authors examine the political choices of those on precarious contracts, they find that 16,9% supported Le Pen, while 20,3% voted for Mélenchon, similarly to dynamics observed in other European countries (Rovny & Rovny, 2017). Nonetheless, service and commercial employees also experienced relatively high abstention rates, which have to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Adopting a Bourdieusian approach that combines the influence of social, cultural, and economic capital, Nonna Mayer explored how different levels of precarity may explain electoral choices in France several times over the past two decades (Mayer, 2015a; Mayer, 2019; Durovic et al., 2025; Mayer, 2026). Using the Épices score, notably asking about a wide range of markers, such as financial difficulties, ability to count on someone for financial support, or engagement in sportive activities, she and others showed that the most precarious demonstrate the highest degrees of abstention or vote for the RN, (36% for the most disadvantaged, rising to 57% in the second round of presidential elections) in 2022 (Mayer, 2026), while in the legislative elections of 2024, the probability of voting for the left or the radical right doesn't change depending on the level of precarity (Durovic et al., 2025). With regard to the 2017 presidential election, she distinguished between “connected” precariousness among younger, highly educated individuals with strong social networks but little job security—who tend to vote left—and “social” precariousness among older, more isolated, and less-educated voters—who tend to vote right—showing how different forms of precarity can produce opposing political socialisation along the left–right axis (Mayer, 2019). In addition, by analysing the 2024 elections, they explored cleavages across occupational classes, showing that the most precarious were very likely to vote for the far-right, while those in the 4th quintile of the Épices precarity scale were also significantly likely to vote for the united left (Durovic et al., 2025). As for the distinction between service and clerical workers (employé·e·s) and production workers (ouvrier·ère·s), the predicted probabilities were only significant for the far-right vote with socio-demographic controls (Durovic et al., 2025). While production worker coefficients for the United Left became significant after incorporating attitudes into the model and insignificant for the RN (2), this approach risks tautological reasoning, as it is expected that they would attract voters who already share their political views (Rouban, 2025).

Using a more inductive latent class analysis, Alexandre, Gonthier, and Guerra (2017) created distinct social class categories based on the Épices score to examine the outcomes of the 2017 presidential elections, the first time each of the two populist ends of the ideological spectrum garnered around 20% of the vote. Using regression analysis, they show that the precariat—characterised by high social isolation and economic vulnerability—the retired working classes with greater social capital, and the working poor, who typically face higher job insecurity and arduous working conditions (the three lowest categories identified by the LCA), all exhibit particularly high predicted probabilities of abstaining or voting for the far right. However, the probability of voting for LFI is only marginally lower — by a few percentage points — among the precariat and the working poor; otherwise, it is similar across groups.

Nonetheless, when the Épices precarity score is disaggregated, it shows that social isolation and material precarity weigh the most, not cultural or sportive activities (Haute & Peugny, 2024). Indeed, measures accounting for not having someone to count on for financial support or for experiencing financial difficulties raise the probability of voting for the Rassemblement National by 10 and 11 pp, respectively (Haute & Peugny, 2024, p. 64), indicating the persisting influence of socio-economic variables.

Because examining the sociology of electoral choices at the voting-district level offers higher precision than post-electoral surveys that are too small to account for sector-level differences (Haute, 2022), much of the literature uses electoral geography to show the socio-economic determinants of electoral outcomes. Notably, Piketty and Cagé demonstrated that the left is much more popular in the poorest communes than the far-right (2023), but the difference becomes less pronounced once socio-demographic controls are removed (Ramaux, 2023). More recently, Souidi and Vonderscher (2026) went down to the level of voting districts, showing that the left, not the RN, is more popular in the lowest decile of living standards, but the percentages are strikingly similar across other, relatively poor districts (p. 196). Although these studies provide a more refined picture of voting behaviour at a certain territorial scale, they fail to answer the age-old question: “Who votes for whom, and why?” (Mayer, 2023). That question may be better answered by more in-depth studies of a few localities - for instance, Collectif Focale (2022) found evidence that similar socio-economic insecurities may lead to the support of different parties depending on the local labour market context.

These studies generally make the case that the populist left still enjoys the majority support of some segments of poor workers. Such numbers are often used to justify the claim that socio-economic insecurity leads more people to the left than to the right, but these explanations must be nuanced by considering racial dynamics and acknowledging that the percentage differences among the politically active voting for Le Pen or Mélenchon remain relatively small. Overall, the preceding findings suggest that, with other socio-economic factors held constant, civil servants, production workers, and service workers are generally more inclined to support the far-right. This tendency is particularly pronounced among the most precarious individuals within these groups, especially those who are older or socially isolated.

## The Rise of Middle-class Society? Defining and Measuring Objective Class Structures and Socio-professional Categories over Time

In the following section, I examine the evolution of objective class categories in the French occupational structure, using Oesch's occupational class scheme as a guiding framework. I begin by outlining Oesch's analytical framework and explaining its relevance for understanding contemporary patterns of class voting in France. Then, I apply this framework to the French societal structure and conclude with its political implications.

To explore the transformation of the social structure of the French population over the past 20 years and how that may relate to electoral outcomes, a class categorisation scheme drawing from Daniel Oesch will be employed, as it best serves my analytical purposes. The specific class structures used for analysis are the subject of heated debate in the sociology literature. Studies on class-voting usually refer to the class scheme developed by Robert Erikson, John H. Goldthorpe, and Lucienne Portocarero (EGP), which is often complemented by disaggregated measures on a more fine-grained level to account for within-class heterogeneity. The theory behind the construction of social stratification may also vary - Wright (2005) stresses the centrality of exploitation, Savage and Mouncey (2016) combine cultural and social factors, while Oesch (2006) bases it on occupational hierarchies with differentiated work logics. The Oesch class scheme offers many advantages from an analytical standpoint: it accounts for occupational changes following the postindustrial transformation, including the growth of the service sector and educational upgrading. Indeed, low-skilled, low-paid jobs are no longer typically those of factory workers, at least in contemporary France, but rather those of sales assistants, logistics workers, or call centre clerks. Although his schema doesn't include income as a key factor, there is evidence that occupation may better predict one's permanent income than current income (Hauser & Warren, 1997). Moreover, occupation-based measures are expected to be more stable over time and account for income, working conditions, career prospects and lifetime expected earnings (Goldthorpe & McKnight, 2006; Romero-Vidal, 2021). Lastly, occupational stratification measures are considered to capture an individual's social recognition, since it is "highly associated with one's ability, characteristics, and training, and from which others can infer one's social prestige" (Song & Xie, 2025, p. 356).

The occupation-based class stratification structure of Oesch hinges on two key dimensions: work logic (horizontal) and marketable skills (vertical). The horizontal dimension - its main differentiation from the EGP class schema - is conceptually distinct from a metric rooted in economic or educational assets (Oesch, 2006, p. 266), which struggles to capture differences between production and service workers, focusing rather on technical, organisational, interpersonal, and independent work logics based on the day-to-day tasks performed in specific occupations. As for its vertical dimension, this is structured by workers' skill levels, which reflect both their productive resources and bargaining power in the labour market, thereby giving rise to an occupational hierarchy. This dimension will become especially important when I explore its relation to one's subjective position in the social hierarchy (Part III).

Originally, Oesch constructed a 17-category class schema (2006), but for practical purposes, these will be collapsed into 10, following what is suggested by Oesch (2008) and what my

data allows, using the most detailed socio-professional categorisation of INSEE in the surveys utilised. Although I must omit some occupational differences because the INSEE categories are not granular enough, I check the ISCO-88 codes for all listed categories and recode them to the corresponding Oesch class categories (for specific coding choices for each survey, see Appendix B, Table B.1, Table B.2). Due to data limitations and the specificity of the French socio-professional categorisation, the following deviations were made in the ELIPSS data: there is no differentiation by marketable skills within the self-employed/employers category, nor between unskilled and skilled production and service workers. Moreover, the distinction between “intérmédiaire” and “cadre” was preserved and captured by the distinction between “top” and “middle” managers in the organisational work logic. In the Crédoc data, a more fine-grained class categorisation could be preserved (10 categories), but respondents who “used to” exercise certain professions were excluded, as their categorisation didn’t match the level of detail. Moreover, as the INSEE’s socio-professional categories (29 or 24 groups for the ELIPSS and Crédoc data, respectively) were translated into Oesch categories rather than the more precise ISCO codes generally used for this purpose, some categories may have been lost in the process. For example, the category of “Employé·e·s de la fonction publique”, that is, civil servants, was coded as “office clerks” because they mainly comprise administrative workers in the public sector, but may also include nurses, school personnel, or ambulance staff (INSEE, 2026).

*Table 2.1 Time Trends in Objective Class, from 2001 to 2022, among the French working population*

| <i>Objective Class</i>            | <i>Year</i> |       |       |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                   | 2001        | 2011  | 2015  | 2022  |
| Low-skilled production workers    | 10.36       | 8.25  | 6.50  | 4.77  |
| Skilled production workers        | 16.6        | 17.46 | 15.81 | 12.75 |
| Service Workers                   | 15.11       | 15.61 | 10.60 | 12.86 |
| Office Clerks                     | 16.06       | 14.82 | 19.67 | 18.36 |
| Technicians                       | 3.45        | 4.47  | 5.68  | 3.43  |
| Middle Managers                   | 8.46        | 7.28  | 8.20  | 6.63  |
| Socio-cultural semi-professionals | 9.59        | 11.32 | 10.60 | 11.90 |
| Socio-cultural professionals      | 5.53        | 5.44  | 5.68  | 6.57  |
| Top Managers                      | 6.30        | 8.16  | 11.53 | 17.29 |
| Petite Bourgeoisie                | 8.55        | 7.19  | 5.74  | 5.45  |

Source: Crédoc, Living conditions and aspirations of the French

In this table, we see the transformation of the French societal structure over the past 20 years using Crédoc data, on the Living conditions and aspirations of the French population, which collects data on socio-professional categories based on 29 groupings that were recoded based

on Oesch's categories (2006), as well as subjective class belonging, my main variable of interest. Since objective class transformations will be contrasted with subjective class, for which the question was asked only in 2001, and after 2011, the time frame of analysis was restricted to 2001-2022. The biggest observable changes concern notable decreases among service, low-skilled, and skilled production workers, which fell by 5.59, 3.85, and 2.25 percentage points, respectively (Table 2.1). At the same time, the proportion of top managers drastically increased from 6.3% to 17.3%, and there are some minor increases among socio-cultural professionals and office clerks. Taking a step back, we see that despite the relative growth of better occupations, around half (48,74%) of the French working population is still at the "bottom" of the occupational hierarchy, working as cleaning personnel, sales assistants, or administrative clerks, similar to postindustrial trends in Western European countries (Moawad & Oesch, 2025). This data aligns with other studies on changes in the French occupational structure, showing that the proportion of middle- and high-level occupations has increased, while the proportion of manual occupations has decreased over the past decades (Goux & Maurin, 2019).

As workers' relative position in the occupational hierarchy declined—resulting in reduced bargaining power and weakening trade union organisations—their political representation on the left also eroded in parallel (Piketty, 2018). Moawad and Oesch (2025) argue that these dynamics underpin growing income inequalities, as earnings among those at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy have stagnated. With a shrinking share of income and a growing sense of political underrepresentation—exacerbated by austerity policies and a shift in focus to civil rights rhetoric on the left—these workers may have become more susceptible to populist appeals.

### Objective Class Position and the Far-right Vote in 2022

Exploring whether the objective class is a good predictor of far-right voting substantiates my argument in two important respects. One of the key mechanisms of Gidron and Hall's theory on subjective status anxiety driving the far-right vote is that of occupational upgrading. They argue that as tertiary education and high-level occupations rise, and "the social value attached to the possession of skills" (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. S78) also grows, thereby lowering the subjective social status of low-skilled workers<sup>6</sup>. However, when considering proportional changes across occupational groups, perceived social position declined only among the objectively defined middle and upper classes, while it remained relatively stable for production, service, and clerical workers over the past two decades. This suggests that, in the French case, status anxiety among lower-skilled groups—if present—does not appear to stem solely from a decline in their self-perceived social position. First, I will explore whether such occupational groups, likely to be affected by status anxiety according to the theory of Gidron and Hall, are more likely to vote for the far-right (Part II). Then, in my final part, I will refine their concept of status anxiety and apply it to the French case (Part III).

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<sup>6</sup> The low-skilled workers Gidron and Hall refer to are defined as the people "Oesch (2006) classifies as clerks, routine workers and workers in low-skilled services" and those with "less than 13 years of education" (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. S79). In the datasets used, therefore, the focus will be on production, service, and clerical workers.

In addition, despite many analytical insights into which specific socio-economic groups may vote for populist parties, the predicted probabilities or odds ratios vary remarkably little at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the French academic literature. In order to verify to what extent objective socio-economic class belonging may influence one's electoral choices in the last presidential elections (2022), the class stratification scheme developed by Oesch (2006) will be used to demonstrate the current state of class-based understanding of electoral outcomes for the first round of the 2022 presidential elections. Previously, Oesch found a particular tendency for service workers to vote for the far right (2008, similar results for "employé·e·s" in Gougou, 2007), and later showed a similar tendency among both production and service workers (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). However, in this study, only aggregated results across nine Western European countries with sizable radical right parties are available. Based on the literature specific to France, it is expected to find that all those belonging to the "ouvrier" or "employé" categories, that is, production and service workers, as well as office clerks, in my sample, are more likely to vote for the far-right than for any other party.

*H2: Those objectively at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, that is, clerks, production and service workers, are more likely to vote for the far-right in France.*

#### *Data and Methodology*

This analysis will be based on the dataset titled "Social class: widening the social stratification toolkit (ELIPSS 2025)", which has data collected based on 29 socio-professional categories and asked multiple questions about different perceptions of social conflict. The sample size is relatively small (1572 respondents who are in the working population, out of which 88 didn't reply), especially when considering production and service workers, notably 229, out of which 116 are service workers, which could make it difficult to get significant results for such groups. In consideration of cell sizes, the distinction among the petite bourgeoisie (52), employers (36), and self-employed (41) workers was not kept, and they will be considered together in the "Owners/Self-employed category". This is common practice within more restrictive socio-professional schemas at INSEE, despite their internal heterogeneity.

This dataset was collected through stratified random sampling conducted online, and to ensure the representativeness of the sample population, sample weights were provided based on age, gender, agglomeration size, region, and level of diploma. Nonetheless, when observing the proportion of different occupational groups and comparing them to that of the Crédoc or INSEE data, there is a clear underrepresentation of production, service and office clerks, who comprise merely 27% of the dataset, which is 13 percentage points less than what could be expected based on the Crédoc. Moreover, it was administered in the summer of 2025, which posits one of the main limitations of the dataset: 3 years passed since the last presidential elections and politically sensitive questions were asked one year after Macron dissolved the National Assembly and in the middle of heated budget negotiations, which could have all influenced the responses given (or not given) by the individuals asked. Moreover, respondents may underreport voting for a far-right party, although the RN's public image has been attenuated by several electoral victories and favourable media coverage (Ivaldi, 2016).



A binary logistic regression analysis using the provided sample weights was conducted on the vote for the Rassemblement National, with 0 indicating all people who chose otherwise, including non-voters. All estimates are produced using the svy prefix in Stata, which applies Taylor series linearisation while producing robust standard errors and automatically accounts for potential heteroskedasticity. The regression analysis is conducted controlling for region, agglomeration size, religion, union membership, gender, education, and employment sector (public or private). Contract type was not included in the controls due to the high number of invalid responses (864). The methodological design of the OLS follows a recent study published by Durovic, Mayer, and Piolat (2025), performing a regression analysis on the far-right vote, using the same reference values (such as top managers for occupations instead of socio-cultural professionals used by Gidron and Hall, 2020), but I include more socio-economic control variables. To account for multicollinearity among covariates, a VIF analysis was conducted, which indicated that all predictors fell below the commonly accepted threshold of 5 (mean VIF = 2.91).

*Table 2.2, Objective Class as a Predictor of Far-Right Voting*

| Socio-economic Predictors of Far-Right Voting                       |                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| VARIABLES                                                           | (1)<br>RN Vote     |
| <i>Objective class – ref: top managers</i>                          |                    |
| Production Workers                                                  | 0.11*<br>(0.055)   |
| Service Workers                                                     | 0.20***<br>(0.062) |
| Clerks                                                              | 0.22***<br>(0.05)  |
| Technical Professionals                                             | 0.047<br>(0.04)    |
| Socio-cultural Professionals                                        | 0.06<br>(0.043)    |
| Middle managers                                                     | 0.025<br>(0.031)   |
| Owners/Self-employed                                                | 0.09<br>(0.056)    |
| <i>Subjective Class Belonging – ref: middle of the middle class</i> |                    |
| Inferior Class                                                      | 0.06<br>(0.09)     |
| Working class                                                       | -0.022<br>(0.045)  |
| Lower-middle class                                                  | -0.035<br>(0.034)  |
| Upper-middle class                                                  | 0.025              |

| VARIABLES                                                    | (1)<br>RN Vote      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                                              | (0.049)             |
| Upper class                                                  | 0.107<br>(0.12)     |
| <i>Household income – ref: between 1900-2000€</i>            |                     |
| Low – under 1400€                                            | -0.038<br>(0.044)   |
| Lower-middle – between 1400 - 1900€                          | 0.012<br>(0.04)     |
| Upper-middle – between 2200 - 2500€                          | 0.047<br>(0.055)    |
| High – over 2500€                                            | 0.039<br>(0.045)    |
| <i>Gender – ref: women</i>                                   |                     |
| Men                                                          | 0.058*<br>(0.03)    |
| <i>Education – ref: Bac</i>                                  |                     |
| Without diploma                                              | 0.086*<br>(0.05)    |
| CAP or BEP                                                   | 0.074<br>(0.05)     |
| Bac+2                                                        | -0.017<br>(0.04)    |
| Bac+5                                                        | -0.12***<br>(0.044) |
| <i>Religious practice – ref: non-religious</i>               |                     |
| Religious                                                    | 0.063**<br>(0.027)  |
| <i>Past or Present Union membership – ref: no membership</i> |                     |
| Union membership                                             | -0.066*<br>(0.031)  |
| <i>Public vs Private employment – ref: public</i>            |                     |
| Private employment                                           | 0.013<br>(0.03)     |
| Observations                                                 | 1411                |
| F(41, 1370)                                                  | 2.79                |

Linearised standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Source: ELIPSS (2025) (Silva et al., 2026), Author's calculations

*Note: Average marginal effects from a binary logistic regression with survey-weighted linearised standard errors.  $dy/dx$  for factor levels (Model 1, RN vote) represents the discrete change in the predicted probability relative to the reference category for each covariate.*

### *Analysis of the Results*

In the 2022 French presidential election, occupational class significantly predicted the RN vote: compared to the reference group of top managers, production workers, service workers, and office clerks were, respectively, 11, 20, and 22 percentage points more likely to vote for RN, on average, holding education, income, and subjective class identification constant. This provides a more nuanced picture of voting behaviour by occupational category, as other recent studies didn't find significant results for the "employé·e·s" category and the RN vote (Durovic et al., 2025). This is unlikely to be caused by the specific ways Oesch categories were coded, as I find significant results for both office clerks and service workers (which would include some subcategories of the "employé·e·s"). Therefore, the explanation may lie in methodological choices: the way the data samples were collected, the specificity of the 2022 presidential elections, or the control variables included. For instance, in their analysis of the 2024 legislative elections, Mayer, Durovic, and Piolat (2025) don't include variables on regions and household disposable income as control variables, but they do include the Épices score, which could attenuate the role of other socio-economic variables, such as occupation.

As previous studies showed little difference between the LFI and the RN vote, I ran the same binary regression on the LFI vote (Appendix B, Table B.3). Here, occupational class belonging doesn't significantly predict the populist left vote, except for socio-cultural professionals (0.13\*\*). On the other hand, those earning under 1400 and between 1400 and 1900 are both 12 percentage points more likely to vote for the populist left than the reference category earning between 1900 and 2200, which shows that in the same occupations, those earning relatively less are more likely to vote for the populist left, while income was not a significant predictor of the far-right vote. This suggests that support for the RN cuts across income levels of occupational categories, rather than being concentrated among the poorest, which is the case with the populist left vote. However, these results should be treated with caution, as declared household disposable incomes are notoriously unreliable, due to reporting bias, especially when the question asks about household income (Davern et al., 2005; Micklewright & Schnepf, 2010).

### Limitations of an Objective Class-based Approach

In France, due to the presence of both left and right-wing populism and markedly higher abstention rates among clerks, service and production workers, the literature usually nuances the mediatic representation of workers swinging to the far-right, by emphasizing relatively high abstention rates among them (Peugny, 2015) or the popularity of the populist left among the poorest (most recently, see Souidi & Vonderscher, 2026). This thesis will not discuss the social dynamics of abstention among the popular classes; that said, all political outcomes linked to socio-economic conditions must be understood with an awareness of this tendency, especially among those with temporary contracts (Peugny, 2015). This limitation prevents us

from making generalised conclusions about the ideological leanings of specific socio-economic classes, focusing on the *motivations* of the politically active may be more demonstrative of the link between socio-economic situations, perceptions and electoral outcomes.

Moreover, even after establishing that certain objective class categories tend to vote more for the far-right holding other socio-economic characteristics constant, one should refrain from essentialising political behaviour for occupational groups. Indeed, once we look at postelectoral surveys, we see that the broad categories of “employé·e·s” and “ouvrier·ère·s” (understood in my specification as production workers, service workers and office clerks) exhibit very fragmented voting behaviours. In the 2022 presidential elections, 15% of production workers voted for LFI, while 24%<sup>7</sup> voted for RN in the first round, according to the Ipsos survey assembling 4000 respondents (2022). In addition, analysing a sample that is representative of the French population may not be representative of the electorates of specific political parties due to sample size limitations. For instance, in the smaller ELIPSS sample with 1660 respondents, only 9% of production workers voted for LFI, while 22% voted for RN. Although it may be more representative of popular voters of the far-right, it largely underestimates that of the populist left. Therefore, when studying political behaviour, one must highlight potential sampling biases regarding specific electorates and socio-economic groups.

When conducting regression analysis to explain voting behaviour, I isolate the impact of an occupational position from that of one’s gender, education, income, religious practice, or union membership. This, however, doesn’t reflect the real-life socio-economic positions of voters, for whom the interaction of all of these variables results in unique electoral choices. In addition, isolating the effect of a single variable fails to shed light on the social mechanisms that underlie electoral outcomes. Therefore, in Part III, I will study how the interaction between one’s objective class position and subjective class identification influences electoral choices, which, by bringing together self-perception and material conditions, may reveal a specific social mechanism at play that leads people to vote for the far-right.

## Conclusion

Adopting a micro-level analytical framework that intersects several socio-economic variables, such as gender, generation, occupational class, or working conditions, can illuminate internal class divisions and identify which specific groups far-right parties attract. By disaggregating broad class categories into consistent parts across different local contexts with specific labour market experiences, we may pinpoint that male, white, manual workers living in former industrial regions in the North of France, in poor but not the poorest communes, are likely to vote for the Rassemblement National. In my analysis, I have shown that occupational class belonging matters in the explanation of the far-right vote in France, as production and service workers, as well as office clerks, were significantly more likely to

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<sup>7</sup>All the percentages are recalculated based on abstention rates.

vote for the RN in the first round of the last presidential elections, even when controlling for subjective class belonging and other socio-economic variables.

While this analytical precision is undeniably valuable, it assigns individuals socio-economic positions without considering how they *perceive* their own position in the social hierarchy. It is precisely these subjective feelings - of 'being left behind' or experiencing a disjuncture between their aspirations and objective socio-economic conditions - which may highlight a broader social mechanism that translates socio-economic class position to the far-right vote. This is also important from a strategic standpoint, since politicians construct discourses in which people recognise themselves, which indeed may not reflect the realities captured and constructed by objective variables in surveys. Nonetheless, the decision on where to place oneself in the social hierarchy may reflect different social mechanisms depending on the individual's objective socio-economic conditions. Therefore, in the next section, I will explore how the dissonance between subjective and objective class positions may influence far-right voting in France.

### III. Class Dissonance, Visions of the Social Order and the Far-Right Vote

#### *The Political Implications of Dissonance Between Subjective and Objective Class Position*

Class dissonance has been a neglected subject in the study of class voting, which usually restricts itself to some version of objective class categorisation (Part II.). Nonetheless, I argue that subjective perceptions of one's place in the social hierarchy are particularly pertinent to exploring how objective class positions translate into electoral outcomes. In fact, what subjective class people choose to identify with cannot be considered in isolation from their objective class position when exploring electoral choices (Part I); therefore, I explore the two together and the implications of when the subjective and the objective coincide or diverge. I will principally draw on the class dissonance schema of Sonaud, Brady and Frenk (2013) as well as the causal mechanism constructed by Michelat and Simon (1977) on how subjective class positions may attenuate the electoral choices emanating from one's objective class membership. My class dissonance measure is based on an objective class categorisation inspired by Oesch (Part I) and a subjective class categorisation that distinguishes between lower-, middle, and upper-middle classes and presents a clear hierarchical order. Then I will explore how this schema may predict far-right voting in France. This analysis shows that the *friction* between occupational class positions and self-perceived positions in the social hierarchy is a core mechanism behind electoral outcomes.

To my knowledge, only three studies have explored class dissonance as a key independent variable that may influence contemporary political behaviour or attitudes. Sonaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013) applied a class dissonance schema to understand electoral choices in the US, Haddon and Wu (2022) explored how it may attenuate visions of class conflict, and lastly, D'Hooge, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2018), the only ones to focus on the European context, showed how it may influence political attitudes on the left-right scale, and its cultural, and economic dimensions. There is a scarcity of studies on how the interaction between perceived and real class positions may influence populist electoral outcomes, and my thesis serves to fill that important gap.

France, as a case study of class dissonance, is particularly relevant given its relatively early deindustrialisation, long history of class mobilisation, entrenched egalitarian norms, and highly conflictual political space, with strong populist left-wing and right-wing parties. Moreover, since studies based solely on objective class stratification measures have shown that the far-right gained popularity among certain segments of the popular classes, whose definitions are up for debate (see part II.), my thesis may also shed new light on class voting by integrating both subjective and objective dimensions. In fact, I argue that inflated class positions, when one's subjective class perception is higher than their objective class position, may explain the popularity of the far-right.

## Class Dissonance, Cognitive Dissonance?

### *The sociological reasons behind class dissonance*

Despite the rise in socio-economic inequalities, fewer and fewer people consider “class” part of their social identity, and if they have to choose, they tend to place themselves in the middle. The phenomenon of ‘class dis-identification’, where class membership and subjective identification do not correspond, has been of academic interest, especially in the UK and the US (Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Hout, 2008; Curtis, 2013, 2016; Evans & Kelley, 2004; Haddon & Wu, 2022). There is a clear tendency to categorise oneself in the middle class (and less so in the working class), but there are different social mechanisms at play depending on one’s objective class position. In this part, I will explore what makes people inflate, that is, choose a higher class position than their actual class membership, or, on the contrary, deflate their class position, when they choose a lower class category than their objective class.

The ‘middling tendency’ can be explained by egalitarian norms that prevent people from placing themselves either on the top or on the bottom (Adair, 2001), especially among middle classes with working class histories or among upper-middle class university students (Stuber, 2006). On the other hand, D’Hooge, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2017) has shown that the downwardly mobile are likely to inflate their class position to the middle class, even if objectively they don’t belong there anymore. Moreover, the environment and local social structures may also promote (mis)identification with the middle classes - people who are well off are more likely to engage in elite networks, while the poor may be more susceptible to meeting people who are worse off, therefore their relative, perceived class position may be deflated, or inflated to the middle, respectively (Evans & Kelley, 2004). In fact, in relation to their immediate networks, people tend to see themselves as being in the middle, as they are less confronted with inequalities within the social hierarchy. In France, Mayer and Michelat (1981) found that small shopkeepers and artisans identify more with the middle and upper classes when they live in a district with a high percentage of production workers, whereas they are more likely to identify with the “working class” when there are not. Overall, one’s self-perceived social position depends on the reference groups in their immediate communities, which today could have changed due to the spread of social media networks.

People may also choose to inflate their class positions, thus distancing themselves from the inferior or working classes, due to the stigmatisation of the poor (Centre d’analyse stratégique, 2007), a tendency that often characterises the far-right’s electorate (Schwartz, 2009). The stigma targeted at the poor, welfare beneficiaries, or immigrants can arise from residential pressures for more stable middle classes (Faury, 2024; 2025) or local labour market tensions for the less well-off (Coquard, 2019). Faury has also shown (2024) that this stigma has an important racial dimension, which my data doesn’t allow me to explore. Similarly, Lamont (2000) has found that in the US, white, working-class men associate poor people with being a person of colour, while African Americans are more likely to assume working-class identities to distance themselves from the perceived egocentrism of middle-class, white people.

As for class deflation, sociological works have shown that identifying with the working classes when one is in a more advantaged position can be a way to distance oneself from

elitism, downplay one's privilege, and express pride in working-class histories (Friedman et al., 2021) or to see oneself as 'ordinary' (Savage, 2001). Others argue that the categories of "lower" and "working" classes carry politically charged meanings (Kelley & Evans, 1995), which may prompt some to identify with them, even if they don't match their objective situation.

Besides attitudinal explanations, Hout (2008) posits that the mismatch is rather a result of the specific objective class stratifications used. Discrepancies may be explained by imperfect correlations among socio-economic variables, such as income, occupation, and education, suggesting that when deflation or inflation occurs within an occupation-based class schema, this may result from other socio-economic characteristics. In fact, D'Hooze, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2018) found that those with higher educational attainment or income than their occupation would suggest are more likely to inflate, whereas the inverse tendency is observed for those in middle- or high-class occupations with lower incomes or education. Therefore, class dissonance is closely related to the concept of status inconsistency, when the misalignment between socio-economic status characteristics evokes uncertainty and frustration among individuals (van der Brake, 2020).

Overall, as subjective class identity results from the confluence of both environmental and attitudinal factors (Michelat & Simon, 1977), I maintain that patterns of dissonance and concordance may carry both sociological or political significance.

## From Relative Social Position to Visions of Social Conflict and Party Choice

### *The political implications of class dissonance*

Nevertheless, much less of the academic literature explores the political consequences of the interaction between subjective class identification and objective class position. Class dis-identification is often treated as "a 'deficit' view of identity" (Savage et al., 2010, p. 138)<sup>8</sup> due to individualisation and globalisation (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 1998) or economic development (Curtis, 2016) rather than as an important mechanism shaping electoral outcomes. As a matter of fact, this tendency is viewed as a process by which individuals' vision of social (class) conflict is depoliticised (Kelley & Evans, 1995, p. 157). This view probably stems from Calhoun (1982), who argued that material, objective class positions can only influence political behaviour if one identifies with such class positions.

On the other hand, I believe that this view holds only if we understand class voting through an orthodox, left-wing lens that examines whether "working class" people vote for left-wing parties that mobilise on the class conflict between the rich and the poor. I argue that when we consider subjective class as the perception of one's position in the social hierarchy, rather than as a strong identification with a respective class category, it may inspire political attitudes that are not rooted in an explicit class-conflict narrative, but in their own, subjective visions of social conflict. Therefore, parties focused on class conflict per se may not be able to politicise these anxieties, whereas parties that narrativise social conflicts with higher

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<sup>8</sup> [https://oro.open.ac.uk/21486/3/SYM\\_Ch\\_05\\_Savage\\_Silva\\_Warde%5B1%5D.pdf](https://oro.open.ac.uk/21486/3/SYM_Ch_05_Savage_Silva_Warde%5B1%5D.pdf)



political salience (such as anxieties about immigrants or welfare beneficiaries) may be better able to elicit a sentiment of ‘being heard’.

Therefore, subjective-objective class dissonance or concordance, understood in terms of self-placement in the social hierarchy and occupational class position, is crucial for understanding electoral outcomes. Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013) contend that the distance between subjective and objective class positions stems from the confluence of attitudes and environmental contexts, as well as one’s perception of social inequality, which is highly pertinent to political behaviour. Similarly, Michelat and Simon insist that subjective class results from “lived experience of economic and social realities and the competition of ideologies to which individuals are also exposed to, and selectively receptive to, depending on their situation and their biography” (1977, p. 147). Their book on the effects of the “heavy variables” of religion and class is focused on the complex relationship between objective and subjective class belonging and electoral choices. Departing from a Marxist understanding emphasising the necessity of “class consciousness” based on economic interests, understood in terms of class conflict, for the subjective variable, they similarly use a more rudimentary understanding of subjective class, simply based on how people perceive their own class affiliation (Michelat & Simon, 1977, p. 146).

*Figure 3.1, Michelat and Simon (1977, p. 151): Second Schema on Class Voting*



Their model, which implies that objective class may affect political choices independently of subjective class belonging, aligns with my principal arguments: objective class belonging may independently affect electoral outcomes (part II.), but understanding their interaction may also influence vote choices (part III.). It is important to note, however, that their analysis is fundamentally different from mine in several respects - they conduct their research in the 1960s when objective class structures and political dynamics were uncomparable to today, they examine the cumulative effects of working class attributes (based on individuals’ current and first occupation, that of their father’s, and their partner’s) and their subjective class categorisation has 12 different choices, that cannot be necessarily placed in a hierarchical order. Nevertheless, they demonstrate how both subjective perception of the individuals’ position in the social hierarchy and their occupational class matter in terms of explaining their electoral choices. Indeed, these are “both interrelated variables, which have an independent effect from one another” (Michelat & Simon, 1977, p. 245) on electoral outcomes.

As for the dissonance between the objective and the subjective, they hypothesise that “subjective class belonging is all the more ideological the more objectively distant one is from the working class” (Michelat & Simon, 1977, p. 246). Therefore, in the study of political attitudes, one must examine individuals’ perceived social position relative to their objective class belonging. Mayer and Perrineau also (1992, p. 83) argue that heavy variables, such as class, only increase the probability of a certain political behaviour through “the prism

of subjective identification with a reference group or class”, referring to the importance Michelat and Simon (1977) assigned to “symbolic systems” underlying objective class belonging, that are, values and political attitudes. In 1988, Mayer and Michelat found that small shopkeepers and artisans who identify themselves as middle class are closer to right-wing parties, while those identifying with the working class are closer to left-wing parties (p. 77). Their work is little applicable to the occupational hierarchies and political narratives of today, but it is indicative of how self-perceived social position may shape political attitudes.

The interrelations between subjective and objective class belonging, and their combined influence, however, haven’t been explored in contemporary French literature. Therefore, in the next section, I will explore potential hypotheses on the political consequences of inflation or deflation.

### *Inflated Class Perception and Electoral Choices*

People's perceptions of their social positions may reflect a sense of marginalisation when they place themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy. As I argued in Part I, this perceived inferiority relative to others can, in principle, shape political attitudes independently, but I didn’t find significant effects once standard socio-economic controls were introduced in the models of the far-right vote. In contrast, when the impact objective socio-economic class was examined on its own, I found significant positive effects for production, service workers, and office clerks (Part II.). However, when we take these two variables together and understand one’s subjective social position relative to their objective class belonging, a more nuanced picture of social anxiety emerges.

This relational perspective sheds light on a potential source of tension: some individuals may feel insufficiently recognised given their occupation and income, so to resolve this anxiety, they may overestimate their social position. Such frustrations may make right-wing narratives more appealing, as they offer explanations that symbolically elevate individuals’ perceived social position relative to others, even if in reality, they face substantial socio-economic challenges linked to their occupational class. In this sense, my argument refines Gidron and Hall’s definition of status anxiety. Whereas they consider social recognition and subjective social position *together* in a single subjective status measure, I argue that status anxiety arises precisely from the *friction* between where people think they belong (subjective social position or class) and what socio-economic occupations they objectively have (objective class).

Figure 3.2: The Social Mechanism of Class Inflation, or Status Anxiety



*Note: Author's own illustration*

Occupational status scales confirm my theory. In my definition of the “popular classes,” those in occupations such as production, service, and office clerical work score relatively low on a scale of occupational earnings potentials and earn relatively less social recognition. This scale was created by Oesch et al. to express “the median earnings of occupations in percentiles of the entire earnings distribution” (2025, p. 3) and to provide a more precise and up-to-date alternative to the ISEI (International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status) scale. By focusing on earnings and the hierarchical dimension of the occupational structure, it can be considered as an approximation of “how individuals are valued socially and economically” (Goldin, 2014, p. 1093). As a result, those who “inflate” their class identities may do so to express their aspirations to be perceived as higher status based on an associational preference bias (Ridgeway, 2014), even if the material foundations of their social position are fragile and occupations or income provide limited social recognition.

Moreover, those service workers who inflate their class identity and perceive themselves as part of the middle class may do so to distance themselves from a stigmatising category of the poor. In France, much ethnographic evidence has shown that a form of “triangular social consciousness” (Schwartz, 2009) is taking shape among both low-income workers (Coquard, 2019) and the petite bourgeoisie (Faury, 2024), who situate themselves between pressures from the top and the bottom of the social hierarchy. The Rassemblement National, with its ethnocentrist rhetoric that culpibilises welfare beneficiaries, may be particularly effective in speaking to the inflators’ status anxiety. Essentially, it creates a strong sentiment of injustice, closely related to a sense of lack of recognition, often expressed by the claim that they “have to pay for everyone” (Faury, 2025). By reinforcing the symbolic boundaries between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” such discourse allows these individuals to assert a more valued and recognised position in the social order, despite their objective circumstances.

Based on this reasoning, I have constructed my third and final hypothesis exploring the far-right vote:

*H3: Those individuals whose subjective class identity is inflated relative to their objective class position are more likely to vote for the far-right in France.*

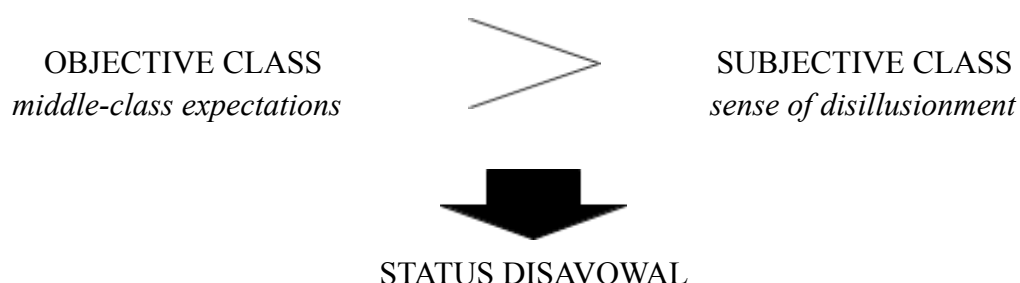
The studies on the political implications of class dissonance somewhat confirm this hypothesis, although none of them focused specifically on the far-right vote or on the dynamics of the triangular social consciousness. Haddon and Wu (2022) show, across a large sample of respondents, that those who deflate their class position are more likely to perceive class conflict between the top and bottom, whereas those who inflate their class position are less likely to do so (p. 9). One might argue that, at its simplest form, class conflict between the rich and the poor is difficult to map neatly onto different political parties. In France, for instance, while left-wing parties advocate for wealth taxation, the Rassemblement National also deploys discourses targeting “establishment” or “financial” elites. Nonetheless, this finding may suggest that since those with inflated class positions are less receptive to an orthodox understanding of class conflict between the rich and the poor (Hertel and Schöneck, 2020), which might imply that they are more likely to turn to those politicising social

conflicts at the bottom through ethnocentric, welfare-chauvinist rhetoric. This argument is further supported by D’Hooge et al. (2018), who find that ‘inflators’ tend to place themselves on the right of the political scale and profess laissez-faire economic values. On the other hand, when Sousnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013) examine electoral outcomes, they find that the relationship between class inflation and the Republican vote in the US becomes insignificant once they control for race and income. Nevertheless, none of the studies focuses on right-wing populism; they either consider only the aggregates of left- or right-wing parties (D’Hooge et al., 2018) or examine the Republican vote before Trump entered the political scene in the US (Sousnaud et al., 2013).

### *Deflated Class Perceptions and Electoral Choices*

When we consider the inverse tendency toward deflation, meaning that one’s subjective class perception is below that of one’s objective class position, a different social dynamic comes into view. This mechanism may reflect a heightened sensitivity to socio-economic inequalities (Haddon & Wu, 2022) or a sense of disillusionment with the ability to sustain a middle-class lifestyle after earning a university degree (Stuber, 2006). Sociological works have shown that identifying with the working classes when one is in a more advantaged position can be a way to distance oneself from elitism, downplay one’s privilege and express pride in working-class histories (Friedman et al., 2021) or to see oneself as ‘ordinary’ (Savage, 2005). Therefore, ‘deflators’ may be more sensitive to left-wing political narratives that politicise social conflict between the rich and the poor, given their heightened perception of such tensions (Haddon & Wu, 2022) or their disappointment at the contradiction between meritocratic promises and free-market realities. D’Hooge, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2018) find that they are more likely to place themselves on the left of the left-right spectrum and be more state-interventionist in their economic preferences. Sousnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013) don’t find significant effects for deflators, but hypothesise that they may lean more towards the left or the right, depending on whether they are more sensitive to economic or cultural cleavages. Therefore, I theorise that those who deflate their class positions are experiencing status disavowal, whereby they renounce an objectively high class position and instead subjectively identify with a lower one.

Figure 3.3: The Social Mechanism of Class Deflation, or Status Disavowal



*Note: Author’s own illustration*

When subjective and objective class positions coincide, which seems to be still common across countries (Hout 2008, Sosnaud et al., 2013, D'Hooze et al., 2018, Haddon & Wu, 2022), some argue that the political preferences emanating from objective class positions may be reinforced (Michelat & Simon, 1977). Others ask whether political attitudes align more closely with individuals' subjective or objective class position, but I argue that an underlying social mechanism of electoral choice may emerge when the two are examined together. This dynamic provides a better understanding of one's sense of status anxiety, comprising both relative social positioning and a lack of recognition, which may be a key motivator of electoral choices in a tripolar electoral space.

## The Phenomenon of Class Dissonance in France

### *Class Dissonance Across Subjective and Objective Classes*

In this section, I will present the class dissonance schema inspired by Sosnaud et al. (2013) and then apply it to the French population. My data has the advantage of distinguishing between the lower, middle, and upper parts of the middle class in the subjective class scheme, allowing me to get a more accurate picture of where people subjectively place themselves in society. Regarding the objective class categorisation, I had to narrow down my categories to three to avoid having too few individuals in each cell of my class dissonance matrix. This may raise objections, given that each category is arguably highly heterogeneous in its attitudes and life chances. Nonetheless, it serves my analytical purpose of exploring class dissonance, in which relative position in an objective or imagined social hierarchy is the most important dimension. Hierarchical order in objective class structures may be especially complicated to establish in the middle (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007), but by taking fewer categories, I'm able to distinguish between relatively lower and higher positions.

Therefore, I coded service and production workers, as well as office clerks, as "Objective Working Class"; the "Objective Middle Class," including socio-cultural professionals, technical workers, and middle managers; and the "Objective Upper Class," comprising owners, the self-employed, and top managers. I end up with a 3x6 matrix of class dissonance schema, where those who identify with a class category below their objective class position have a "deflated" class category, whereas those with a class category above their objective class position have an "inflated" class category. The individuals whose subjective class identity coincides with their objective class positions are called to have concordant identities. I distinguish between slightly, strongly and very strongly inflated or deflated class positions, depending on whether the individual has chosen a class category that is one or two or more categories above or below their objective position. As there are three categories within the middle class, I call those who have objectively middle-class occupations and claim to belong to the lower- or upper-middle, instead of the middle of the middle, to be slightly deflated or inflated, respectively. I consider those objectively in an upper-class position, identifying with the upper-middle class as having a "Concordant Upper-Middle Class Identity," given the middling tendency within subjective class identification.

Table 3.1 - Class Dissonance Schema, inspired by Sosnaud et al. (2013)

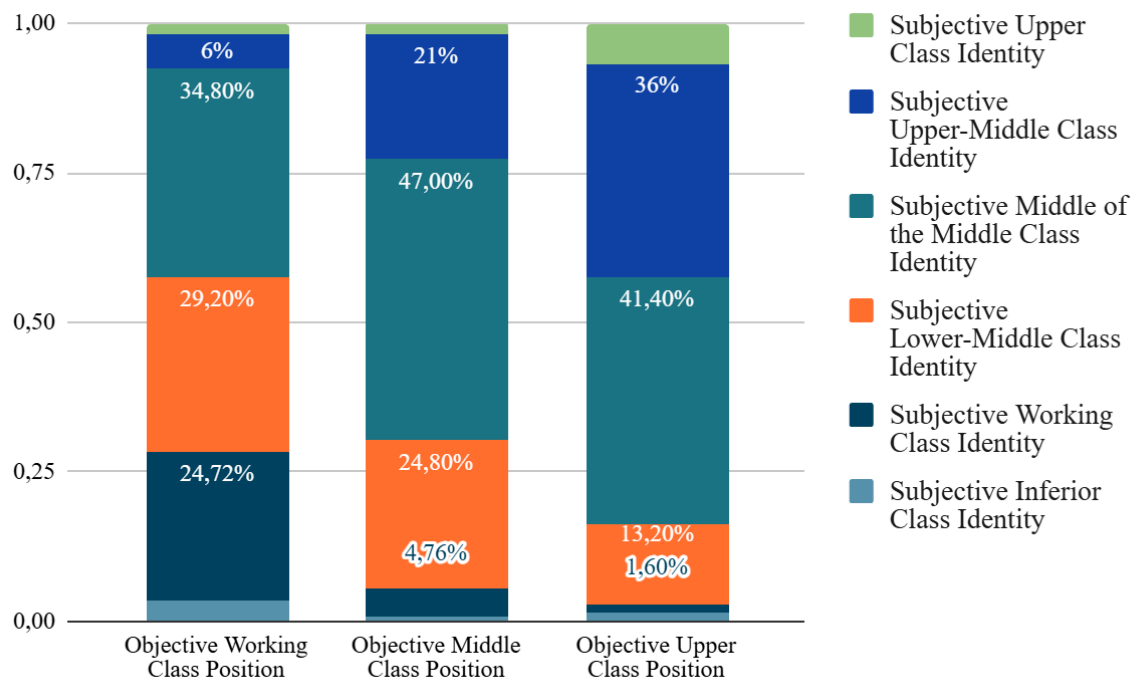
|                                                     | <i>Subjective<br/>Inferior<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Middle of<br/>the Middle<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Objective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Position</i> | Deflated<br>Working<br>Class                          | Concordant<br>Working<br>Class                       | Inflated<br>Working<br>Class                               | Strongly<br>Inflated<br>Working<br>Class                              | Very<br>Strongly<br>Inflated<br>Working<br>Class           | Very<br>Strongly<br>Inflated<br>Working<br>Class   |
| <i>Objective<br/>Middle<br/>Class<br/>Position</i>  | Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Middle<br>Class               | Deflated<br>Middle<br>Class                          | Slightly<br>Deflated<br>Middle<br>Class                    | Concordant<br>Middle<br>Class                                         | Slightly<br>Inflated<br>Middle<br>Class                    | Inflated<br>Middle<br>Class                        |
| <i>Objective<br/>Upper<br/>Class<br/>Position</i>   | Very<br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper<br>Class        | Very<br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper<br>Class       | Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper<br>Class                     | Deflated<br>Upper<br>Class                                            | Concordant<br>Upper<br>Class                               | Concordant<br>Upper<br>Class                       |

*Note: Author's own illustration*

I study how my class dissonance schema applies to the ELIPSS dataset, which I will also use to analyse the far-right vote (Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5). I see that within each objective category (Figure 3.4), a large proportion of people place themselves in corresponding subjective class categories, which I take as a good sign that my schema reflects both the objective and subjective realities. On the one hand, there is also a clear tendency for the objectively upper classes to place themselves in the middle, since 41,7% consider themselves in the middle of the middle class and 22,3% in the lower-middle class. Remarkably, class inflation is the most apparent among the objective working class, of whom 71,6% inflates their class position, and only 29,2% does so to the adjacent lower-middle class category. In Part II, I have demonstrated that these socio-economic groups were significantly more likely to vote for the far-right than middle managers, which suggests that class inflation may explain these voting behaviors. The objective middle classes on the other hand, are split between class inflation and deflation - most place themselves in the middle of the middle class (47%) and 23% of them inflate their class positions, while 30% deflate. These percentages suggest that over half of the population in each subjective class misplaces their class position.

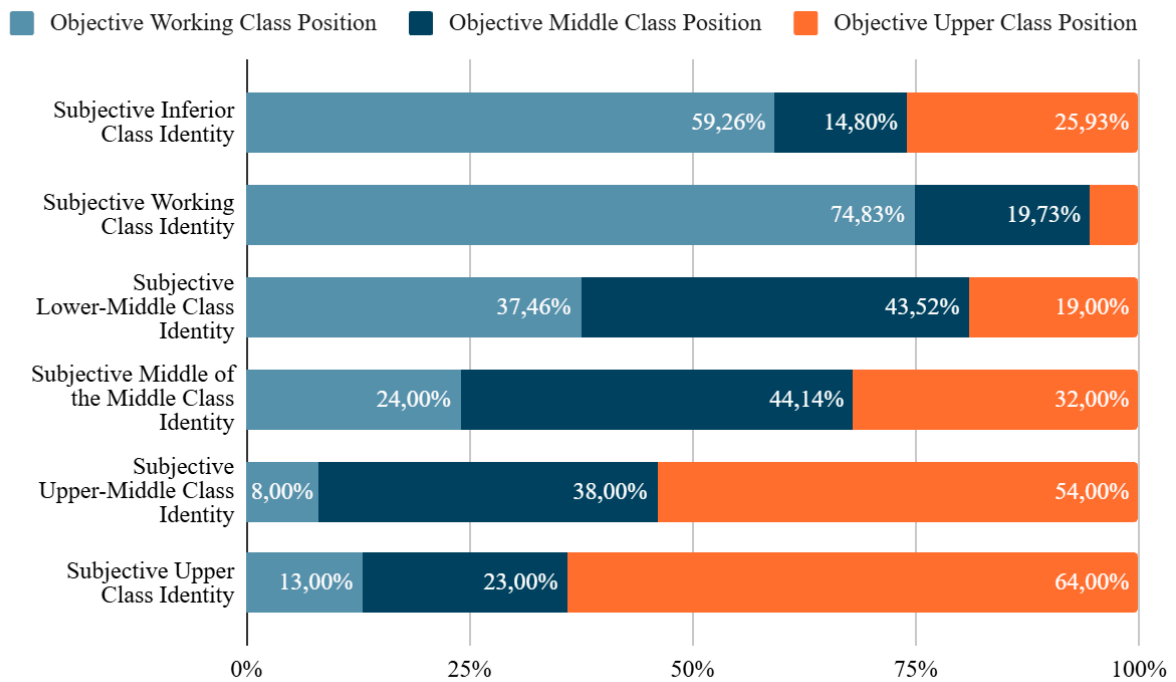
Looking at the data by subjective classes (Figure 3.5) shows that the objective middle classes have the most heterogeneous subjective class identifications, while the working and upper classes concentrate mainly at the bottom and the top of the social hierarchy, respectively. From this perspective we can see that people with vastly different socio-economic backgrounds may identify as “working class” or “middle class”. I argue that the motivations for identifying with such subjective class labels is sociologically and politically significant and differ based on one’s objective class position.

**Figure 3.4 Subjective class composition within objective classes**



*Note: Values are from the ELIPSS (2025) dataset based on 1554 observations, % values show row frequencies in percentages, see full table in Appendix C, Table C.3*

**Figure 3.5 Objective class composition within subjective classes**



*Note: Values are from the ELIPSS (2025) dataset based on 1554 observations, % values show row frequencies in percentages, for full table see Appendix C, Table C.4*

Next, I will take my original, more detailed objective class categories to disentangle the prevailing trend of class inflation among the objective working class. My data shows (Table 3.2) that 39,1% of production workers identify with the working-class category, while 27,3% consider themselves lower-middle class and 24,5% see themselves in the middle of the middle class. Service workers are somewhat more likely to have inflated class identities than production workers, with 28% considering themselves lower-middle class and 32,5% seeing themselves as middle class. Nonetheless, this tendency is strongest among office clerks, of whom 30,7% and 41,2% see themselves in the lower-middle or middle of the middle class, respectively. In my objective class categorisation, office clerks are low-level administrative workers in the public and private sectors, where the nature of their organisational work logic presumably prevents them from identifying with the working class, which may be associated with manual labour. If I compare these numbers with the regression analysis conducted on objective class in Part II. (Table 2.3), I see a perplexing result: the classes who are more likely to inflate in Table 3.2 are also the classes who were most likely to vote for the Rassemblement National holding all other socio-demographic characteristics constant. Indeed, the highest predicted probability was that of office clerks (0.22), then service workers (0.2) and lastly, production workers (0.11). This overlap suggests a potential link between class inflation and far-right support, motivating my final regression analysis.

As class labels may bias my results due to their politically loaded meanings (Kelley and Evans, 1995), as a robustness check, I compare these results with observations from the larger Crédoc dataset, where, instead of “working class”, “popular class” was offered as an option. The Crédoc survey differs in another important respect: it didn’t offer middle of the middle class as an option, only lower-middle and upper-middle classes, which may have made the choice between lower and upper-middle class more salient. Indeed, there 26% of the office clerks considered themselves in the “popular class”, while 46% saw themselves as the lower-middle, and 15% considered themselves in the upper-middle class (Appendix C, Table C.1). The diverging results indicate that, due to the class labels used, specific socio-economic categories, such as office clerks, were less comfortable with placing themselves in the working class category in the ELIPSS (2025) survey. Alternatively, they chose the lower-middle class more predominantly as the middle of the middle class was not offered as a choice. Similar patterns characterise the production and service workers as well, among whom most place themselves in the lower-middle class in the Crédoc survey, notably 33,8% of low-skilled production workers, 41,3% of skilled production workers and 38% of service workers.

Overall, the prevalence of class inflation, especially concentrated among the working classes, provides a robust foundation for my main analysis. By examining this tendency to claim higher social positions, we can better understand how status anxiety, arising from the mismatch of objective and subjective class positions, can operate as a driver of far-right voting.

Meanwhile, among those who are objectively in the middle classes, 30,2% has chosen to identify themselves with the working or lower-middle class. This tendency to deflate is the strongest among technical professionals and middle managers, among whom more than a third placed themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy, in contrast to socio-cultural



professionals (Appendix C, Table C.1). There is also a strong deflationary tendency among the objective upper classes, among whom most consider themselves to be in the middle of the middle class (41,7%). This middling tendency characterises mainly owners and the self-employed (46%), but it is also high among top managers (39,8%). When there is no middle of the middle class category offered in the Crédoc survey, we see that the objective middle classes rather deflate their class position than inflate it, since around 60-70% of each objective middle class category deflated their class position, and only 30-40% inflated it, mainly socio-cultural professionals.

Overall, in my class matrix, I get only small values for the subjective inferior and upper classes, since these indicate a strong sense of deflation or inflation. The heterogeneity and distribution of the table show that taking a more fine-grained account of subjective class categorisation may capture important differences in how people see their position in the social hierarchy.

Table 3.2 Class Dissonance Schema Applied to Occupational Classes

|                                         | <i>Subjective<br/>Inferior<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Middle of<br/>the Middle<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Production<br/>workers</i>           | <b>5,45%</b>                                          | <b>39,1%</b>                                         | <b>27,3%</b>                                               | <b>24,5%</b>                                                          | <b>3,6%</b>                                                | <b>0</b>                                           |
| <i>Service<br/>workers</i>              | <b>4,4%</b>                                           | <b>28,1%</b>                                         | <b>28%</b>                                                 | <b>32,5%</b>                                                          | <b>3,5%</b>                                                | <b>3,5%</b>                                        |
| <i>Office Clerks</i>                    | <b>2,26%</b>                                          | <b>15,8%</b>                                         | <b>30,7%</b>                                               | <b>41,2%</b>                                                          | <b>8,6%</b>                                                | <b>1,4%</b>                                        |
| <i>Technical<br/>professionals</i>      | <b>1%</b>                                             | <b>9,1%</b>                                          | <b>25,3%</b>                                               | <b>53,5%</b>                                                          | <b>10,1%</b>                                               | <b>1%</b>                                          |
| <i>Socio-cultural<br/>professionals</i> | <b>0,3%</b>                                           | <b>2,6%</b>                                          | <b>20%</b>                                                 | <b>44,2%</b>                                                          | <b>30%</b>                                                 | <b>2,6</b>                                         |
| <i>Middle<br/>managers</i>              | <b>1%</b>                                             | <b>5,8%</b>                                          | <b>31,4%</b>                                               | <b>47,8%</b>                                                          | <b>13%</b>                                                 | <b>1,5%</b>                                        |
| <i>Top Managers</i>                     | <b>0,8%</b>                                           | <b>0,8%</b>                                          | <b>12,4%</b>                                               | <b>39,8%</b>                                                          | <b>39,2%</b>                                               | <b>7%</b>                                          |
| <i>Owners/<br/>Self-employed</i>        | <b>3,1%</b>                                           | <b>3,9%</b>                                          | <b>15,6%</b>                                               | <b>46%</b>                                                            | <b>25%</b>                                                 | <b>6,3%</b>                                        |

*Note: Values are from the ELIPSS (2025) dataset based on 1554 observations, % values show row frequencies in percentages*

### *Class Dissonance Across Socio-Demographic Characteristics*

In the following section, I will further explore the socio-demographic characteristics of those exhibiting class dissonance, drawing on a similar assessment by Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013). My previous analyses have shown that discrepancies in class position are common in French society (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5), and my theoretical exploration has attested to their potential political implications. Therefore, analysing the socio-demographic profiles associated with different forms of class dissonance helps substantiate my findings regarding its impact on the far-right vote.

I use multinomial logistic regression to predict class inflation and deflation among a variety of socio-demographic characteristics, with class concordance being the base outcome. I either have binary variables or I set the reference value in the middle of the categories. I use sample weights to run my regression, and I demonstrate the relative risk ratios for each variable with linearised standard errors.

*Table 3.3, Multinomial logistic regression on the socio-demographic determinants of class dissonance*

| The Socio-Demographic Determinants of Class Dissonance |                                                             |                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| VARIABLES                                              | (1)<br>Class Deflation<br>(Subjective < Objective<br>Class) | (2)<br>Class Inflation<br>(Subjective > Objective<br>Class) |
| <i>Education - ref: Bac</i>                            |                                                             |                                                             |
| Without a diploma                                      | 1.19<br>(0.46)                                              | 1.65*<br>(0.5)                                              |
| CAP or BEP                                             | 2.66**<br>(0.93)                                            | 2.71***<br>(0.795)                                          |
| Bac +2                                                 | 0.25<br>(0.33)                                              | 1.056<br>(0.27)                                             |
| Bac +5                                                 | 1.18<br>(0.62)                                              | 0.393**<br>(0.12)                                           |
| <i>Gender, ref: men</i>                                |                                                             |                                                             |
| Women:                                                 | 1.17<br>(0.25)                                              | 0.465***<br>(0.09)                                          |
| <i>Age: ref: 45-54 years</i>                           |                                                             |                                                             |
| 18-22 years                                            | 0.82<br>(0.41)                                              | 1.483<br>(0.63)                                             |
| 23-34 years                                            | 1.15<br>(0.43)                                              | 0.618<br>(0.22)                                             |
| 35-44 years                                            | 0.83<br>(0.316)                                             | 2.30<br>(0.71)                                              |
| 55-64 years                                            | 0.80<br>(0.28)                                              | 0.82<br>(0.25)                                              |
| 65-75 years                                            | 0.89<br>(0.30)                                              | 0.47<br>(0.16)                                              |

|                                                              |                  |                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 76-79 years                                                  | 1.53<br>(0.77)   | 1.23<br>(0.61)    |
| <b><i>Household income – ref:<br/>between 1900-2000€</i></b> |                  |                   |
| Low – under 1400€                                            | 1.57<br>(0.59)   | 0.75<br>(0.25)    |
| Lower-middle – between 1400 - 1900€                          | 1.03<br>(0.39)   | 0.94<br>(0.3)     |
| Upper-middle - between 2200-2500€                            | 1.59<br>(0.26)   | 1.56<br>(0.58)    |
| Upper - over 2500€                                           | 0.934<br>(0.34)  | 0.73<br>(0.2)     |
| <b><i>Religion - ref: non-religious</i></b>                  |                  |                   |
| Religious                                                    | 0.84<br>(0.18)   | 1.28<br>(0.172)   |
| <b><i>Union membership - ref: no membership</i></b>          |                  |                   |
| Union membership                                             | 1.08<br>(0.26)   | 0.80<br>(0.18)    |
| <b><i>Public vs Private employment – ref: public</i></b>     |                  |                   |
| Private employment                                           | 1.19**<br>(0.56) | 0.55**<br>(0.112) |
| Observations                                                 | 1441             |                   |
| F(48, 1393)                                                  | 2.81             |                   |

Linearised standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Source: ELIPSS (2025 (Silva et al., 2026)

*Note: Relative risk ratios from a multinomial logistic regression with survey-weighted linearised standard errors. Relative risk ratios for Class Deflation (1) and Class Inflation (2) are reported relative to the reference category indicated for each independent variable.*

My socio-demographic exploration of class inflation and deflation (Table 3.3) yields several significant relative risk ratios, especially in terms of gender, education, and employment status. Notably, the most interesting results appear when we examine educational outcomes - relative to those who possess the general high school diploma, those without it, or those with only CAP or BEP levels, are significantly more likely to inflate their class position. Compared to those with a general high school diploma, the relative risk of inflating one's class position (rather than accurately assessing it) is 1.64 for individuals with no education and 2.71 for those with vocational education (CAP or BEP). On the other hand, the risk of deflating class position, for those with vocational degrees, also increases by a factor of 2.6 relative to the concordant category. Compared to those with a general high school diploma,

the relative risk ratio for inflating one's class position is 0.39 among those who completed 5 years of tertiary education, indicating a 61% lower relative risk. These results show that inflation does not primarily occur when one's education levels are relatively high, but when individuals have low educational levels, contrary to the findings of D'Hooge, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2018).

Overall, my assessment of class dissonance by education level shows that those with vocational degrees are most likely to inflate or deflate their class position, while the risk of inflation is relatively high for those without education and relatively low for those with higher degrees. This finding complements previous sociological research on educational levels and class perceptions: Frank (2004) argues that those on the lower rungs of society don't have a realistic perception of their position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, Evans and Kelley (2004) contend that people's subjective class perceptions are rooted in their immediate surroundings, which could imply that individuals with low levels of education are surrounded by others with similarly low educational levels. As they are not confronted with socioeconomic inequalities in their local networks, they may be more likely to inflate their class perceptions.<sup>9</sup>

I also get strong, significant relative risk ratios for the gender variable, indicating that women have a 53.5% lower risk of inflating their class position than men. This result stands in contrast to the findings of Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013), who found that being a woman increases the odds of inflated class perception in the US, which may signal cultural differences in gender attitudes. On the other hand, it complements sociological research on gender-based status perceptions, which shows that men are more likely to perceive themselves as having higher socioeconomic status (Cundiff et al., 2013). In addition, I find that those working in the private sector are significantly less likely to inflate their class positions than those in the public sector, which could further refine the identification of occupational groups affected by such trends of class dissonance.

### Class Dissonance and the Far-right Vote

#### *Methodology*

To test how class dissonance influences the far-right vote, with a particular focus on class inflation, I utilise the ELIPSS dataset, which collected information on who people voted for in both rounds of the 2022 French presidential elections and subjective class. I use the electoral choices made in the first round of the presidential elections as the best expression of political affinities, since voters may have cast their vote against their actual political preferences in the second round. My dependent variable is coded as choosing the Rassemblement National (1) against any other party or abstention (0). I run a binary logistic regression with sample weights, with my main independent variable a class dissonance variable I created from my subjective-objective class matrix (Appendix C, Table C.3), with separate values for deflation, concordance, and inflation, and concordance set as the reference

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that for those with low education levels, who are likely to be in the objective working class category. I could not have got significant results for the tendency to deflate their class position, since the subjective class category of the "inferior" class only had 29 observations in my sample.

category. Moreover, by doing so, I ensure that I have sufficient observations in each cell and isolate the social mechanisms of inflation and deflation. I include the usual control variables of household disposable income, education, gender, union membership, religious practice, region, agglomeration size, and employment status. Among my control variables, I present only those categories that show significant marginal effects.

To assess the relationship between class dissonance and far-right voting, I estimate three separate models. Model 1 tests only class dissonance, alongside socio-demographic controls. Model 2 additionally controls for the subjective class, whereas Model 3 controls for the objective class variable. Comparing these specifications allows me to evaluate whether the mechanism of inflation or deflation is primarily driven by the objective or subjective component of class dissonance, as I'm partialling out each component of my class dissonance variable separately.

*Table 3.4, Binary logistic regression models based on the relationship between class dissonance and far-right voting*

| Class Dissonance as a Predictor of Far-Right Voting     |                    |                                               |                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| VARIABLES                                               | (1)<br>RN vote     | (2)<br>RN Vote<br>subjective class<br>control | (3)<br>RN Vote<br>objective class<br>control |
| <i>Class dissonance - ref: concordance</i>              |                    |                                               |                                              |
| Class deflation                                         | 0.16<br>(0.032)    | -0.0007<br>(0.02)                             | 0.048<br>(0.05)                              |
| Class inflation                                         | 0.12***<br>(0.033) | 0.145***<br>(0.035)                           | 0.049<br>(0.038)                             |
| <i>Subjective class - ref: Middle class<br/>middle)</i> |                    |                                               |                                              |
| Inferior Class                                          |                    | 0.23*<br>(0.12)                               |                                              |
| Working Class                                           |                    | 0.11**<br>(0.05)                              |                                              |
| Lower-Middle Class                                      |                    | 0.033<br>(0.033)                              |                                              |
| Upper-Middle Class                                      |                    | 0.0014<br>(0.04)                              |                                              |
| Upper Class                                             |                    | 0.12<br>(0.13)                                |                                              |
| <i>Objective class, ref: Middle Class</i>               |                    |                                               |                                              |
| Working class                                           |                    |                                               | 0.12**<br>(0.04)                             |
| Upper class                                             |                    |                                               | -0.023<br>(0.04)                             |
| <i>Education - ref: Bac</i>                             |                    |                                               |                                              |

|                                              |                     |                     |                     |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Without a diploma                            | 0.11**<br>(0.052)   | 0.096*<br>(0.05)    | 0.083*<br>(0.05)    |
| CAP or BEP                                   | 0.086*<br>(0.049)   | 0.07<br>(0.05)      | 0.07<br>(0.046)     |
| Bac +2                                       | -0.02<br>(0.038)    | -0.21<br>(0.04)     | -0.005<br>(0.04)    |
| Bac +5                                       | -0.12***<br>(0.033) | -0.12***<br>(0.036) | -0.107**<br>(0.036) |
| <i>Religion - ref: non-religious</i>         |                     |                     |                     |
| Religious                                    | 0.059**<br>(0.028)  | 0.062**<br>(0.029)  | 0.058**<br>(0.028)  |
| <i>Union membership - ref: no membership</i> |                     |                     |                     |
| Union membership                             | -0.067**<br>(0.03)  | -0.07**<br>(0.02)   | -0.068**<br>(0.03)  |
| Observations                                 |                     | 1411                | 1411                |
| Model 1: F(31, 1380)                         | 2.93                |                     |                     |
| Model 1: F(36, 1375)                         |                     | 2.54                |                     |
| Model 2: F(33, 1378)                         |                     |                     | 3.01                |
| Linearised standard errors in parentheses    |                     |                     |                     |
| *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1               |                     |                     |                     |

Source: ELIPSS (2025) (Silva et al., 2026), Author's calculations, number of observations: 1410

*Note: Average marginal effects from a multinomial logistic regression with survey-weighted linearised standard errors. dy/dx for factor levels represents the discrete change in the predicted probability relative to the reference category indicated for each covariate.*

### *Analysis of the Results*

Based on my results (Table 3.4, Model 1), I find strong support for my third hypothesis (H3): individuals with inflated class identities have a significantly higher predicted probability of voting for the far-right than those with concordant class identities. The estimated marginal effect of my class variable is positive and highly statistically significant ( $dy/dx = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that a class inflation relative to concordance is associated with approximately a 12 percentage-point increase in the predicted probability of voting for the far-right. This result implies that individuals who are objectively lower in the occupational hierarchy than their subjective class position would suggest show higher levels of support for the Rassemblement National.

My two additional models show that when subjective-class controls are included, the effect of class inflation slightly increases (Model 2), whereas when objective-class controls are present (Model 3) both class inflation and deflation remain insignificant. This implies that most of the effect is driven by one's objective class position. As I have shown in Part II, objective class position significantly increases the predicted probability of voting for the far-right

among production, service, and clerical workers. Moreover, as I have established in Figure 3.4, that 71.6% of the objective “working classes”, namely production, service and clerical workers, inflate their class position. Taken together, the results suggest that the standalone effect of class inflation is driven by people at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. The significant marginal effect for class inflation (Model 1) implies that individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a higher class than their objective class position would indicate may experience a form of socio-economic fragility in their perceived status position, which is associated with greater support for the far-right.

#### *Robustness Check*

As politically loaded class labels may introduce measurement bias into the analysis, the regression results in Table 3.4 should be interpreted with this limitation in mind. To assess the robustness of the findings and examine the potential impact of such bias, I conduct an additional multinomial logistic regression using the Crédoc dataset (Appendix C, Table C.2), with year fixed effects and the same controls as in my previous analysis. Nonetheless, in this case, my dependent variable will be replaced with left-right self-placement as a proxy for electoral choice, with 1 indicating being on the left, 2 indicating the centre, and 3 indicating the right of the political scale. I find partial confirmation of my results (Appendix C, Table C.2): those who inflate their class positions are significantly more likely to place themselves on the right and significantly less likely to place themselves on the left, relative to those whose subjective and objective class positions align. Whether the left-right scale can be a robust proxy for far-right voting is up for debate, and my coefficients remain relatively low for class inflators (-0.019\*\* for placing oneself on the left and 0.016\* for placing oneself on the right), therefore I can only establish partial support for my main analysis (Table 3.4).

#### Discussion

My results complement prior findings in the literature by examining how the relationship between subjective and objective class positions may drive populist far-right voting in France. In contrast to Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013), who don't find significant results for class dissonance once they control for race and income in the US, I have revealed that status anxiety arising from an inflated class position significantly predicts the far-right vote, even when I control for income. Further research, with improved data availability, could re-evaluate my results by considering individuals' racial belonging or immigration background. Although I couldn't separate my sample like D'Hooze, Achterberg, and Reeskens (2018) into three material class categories due to sample size limitations, I showed that class inflation in itself is a significant predictor of the far-right vote. Future research, with bigger sample sizes, could explore whether class inflation or deflation has differentiated impacts on electoral outcomes based on one's objective class position. Nonetheless, there is ample ground to believe, based on Figure 3.4 exploring class dissonance, that the mechanism of inflation mainly concerns the objective working classes, among whom 71,6% inflates their class position, in contrast to only 23% of the objective middle classes. Moreover, I have shown that men working in the public sector with low educational attainment are more likely to inflate their class position (Table 3.3), which further substantiates research that finds that

men or civil servants tend to vote for the far-right (Mayer, 2016; Rouban, 2024), although recently, the radical right gender gap has been put to question (Durovic et al., 2025).

My results highlight that the ambiguous concept of status anxiety, as an explanation of the far-right vote, has to be nuanced. Indeed, I find that people whose perceived social position is not supported by their material, occupational class tend to vote for the far-right. In fact, their status anxiety stems from the fragility of their material position, not from feeling that they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy and that they are inferior to others. One may also understand their subjective class choices as aspirational, but nonetheless constrained by their occupational class position and the deficits in social recognition they imply. In this sense, subjective status anxiety is less of a reaction of the “left behind” but rather a response to the inconsistency in perceived and actual social class. It reflects a tension generated by class dissonance, which individuals seek to resolve through political alternatives that promise recognition and elevate their social positions relative to others. My results show the need to understand class positions in their relational dynamics to understand their political implications.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Based on my exploration of how the interrelations between subjective and objective class positions may influence the far-right vote in France, I have noticed several methodological ambiguities and data-related issues that could merit further investigation in political science research.

Firstly, my results suggest that the systematic inclusion of subjective class position in post-electoral survey questionnaires is warranted. On the other hand, the Topbot measure should be used with caution, and research on subjective social position should rather use the more reliable MacArthur Scale or a subjective class measure. Moreover, studies on subjective status should conceptually differentiate between social recognition and self-perceived position in the social hierarchy, and also distinguish between measures that ask respondents to classify *themselves* versus those that involve categorising *other* social groups, as these approaches may be subject to different forms of bias.

As for the literature on class-voting, I have also shown that focusing only on objective socio-economic variables overlooks how individuals perceive themselves within the social hierarchy. In fact, subjective class could be indicative of political attitudes, especially when considered alongside objective class variables. Such a subjective class variable must present a clear hierarchical order, with differentiation between lower- and upper-middle classes to avoid the tendency towards the middle. It should also be explored which label categories are most fitting, especially when it comes to different understandings of “popular” or “working” classes. As my results are limited to the French context, it could be explored in other societies how the dissonance between subjective and objective class positions influences electoral choices.

Moreover, based on Michelat and Simon (1977), who noted that subjective class belonging is constructed through one’s “situation and biography” (1977, p. 147), further research could



explore how one's life trajectories, educational and family background, as well as immediate social networks, influence their perception of subjective class position. As studies have suggested that race is an important factor in both subjective class position (Sosnaud et al., 2013) and electoral outcomes (Collective Focale, 2022), post-electoral surveys should ask about one's immigration background as well and study its political implications.

I have found that objective class still plays an important role in electoral outcomes; one could explore cleavages among occupational classes using more fine-grained socio-professional categorisations and ISCO-88 codes, which would allow for a fully tested Oesch's class categorisation schema in France. Aggregated categories of production, service, and clerical workers may obscure important cleavages that, due to survey limitations, have been explored only in terms of political participation in France (Peugny, 2015). Future research with larger sample sizes could also directly examine how class inflation and deflation affect electoral outcomes differently by individuals' objective class position.

Throughout my research, it has become apparent that methodological specifications, such as the setting of reference categories, the inclusion of control variables, or how the dependent variable is coded, significantly influence the results. To ensure the robustness and validity of findings, these methodological choices must be justified. For instance, in research on populist political attitudes, abstention rates must be accounted for in regression models and a clear distinction between populist left and right parties is necessary.

As I have shown, the prevalence of both class inflation and deflation in French society, more in-depth ethnographic studies could investigate inconsistencies in individuals' visions of the social order, their objective socio-economic position and conditions, and political attitudes. Qualitative interviews could be conducted to get a better understanding of why class inflation or deflation happens, posing the question of why people want to perceive themselves in a way that doesn't match their reality. In this study I could only theorise explanations based on others' work, but asking people about their own perceptions could confirm these ideas. Since my approach presents a potential operationalisation of Olivier Schwartz's notion of "triangular social consciousness" (2009), further quantitative-qualitative research with more targeted questions could explore the presence of such visions of the social order. For instance, one could ask more questions about the stigmatisation of the poor and how that relates to attitudes on specific policies among production, service, and clerical workers.

Such studies would give a better understanding of how ideological affiliations are constructed through the interaction of subjective perceptions and objective realities of one's position in the social hierarchy, and how that may relate to a sense of lack of social recognition. Future research could also connect the phenomenon of class dissonance with the supply-side of politics, exploring how individuals' subjective perceptions are being shaped by political narratives, or how political narratives evoke a sentiment of 'being heard' due to their already existing subjective visions of the social order and their position within it. Exploring what interpretive frameworks do not fall on deaf ears, as they are built on existing perceptions, could give us a better understanding of electoral behaviour.

## Political Relevance and Implications

My results suggest that political narratives must be sensitive to potential electors' objective and perceived realities, especially regarding how they view their position in the social hierarchy. They indicate that the far-right narrative, mobilising on social conflict on the bottom and the top, is particularly effective at eliciting popular support by appealing to a prevailing sense of status anxiety. My findings don't imply that political parties should copy the far-right's narrative strategy in its *substance* (which has been shown to fail and strengthen the far-right instead; see Kraus et al., 2023), but rather to learn from the *approach* used in its construction. As Michel Feher put it on the cover of his book titled 'Producers and parasites: the so desirable imaginary of the Rassemblement National', "to resist against the RN, it is as necessary to denounce its imaginary as to recognise its attractiveness" (2024). Competing parties should focus on exploring prevailing subjective perceptions of the social order and how people imagine it could be changed, and adapt their narrative strategy accordingly. To achieve this, self-reflection on who is reached and who could be reached by specific interpretive frameworks is essential. Moreover, given the success of the far-right's imaginary and the prevalence of the sentiment it is built on, only a large coalition of parties could stand a chance against it in the 2027 presidential elections.

## Conclusion

Electoral choices and outcomes are the culmination of various interrelated steps in a political ecosystem: unexpected political scandals, charismatic personalities, fear-mongering AI ads, or the price of wheat, all influence whether one party is at an advantage. In the 2022 elections, it seemed that socio-economic and cost-of-living issues would give progressive parties an edge, but the far-right Rassemblement National remained the first among politically active workers at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Election results are complex, and electors' motivations can vary (hence, the RN's electorate is sometimes referred to as a "conglomerate", Gaxie, 2017), but this thesis attempts to shed light on how the mechanism of status anxiety may drive voters towards the far-right. I argue that where people want to belong in the social order is a powerful motivator, and parties that promise to acknowledge their social worth in society successfully mobilise on such aspirational sentiments.

The theory that status anxiety may explain the recent surge of populist far-right parties has been popularised by the hallmark study of Gidron and Hall (2017, 2020). Nonetheless, I have shown that both their concept and measure of subjective status needs reassessment (Part I). Taking subjective social class as a better measure of one's perceived position in society, I show that it only predicts the far-right vote once we don't include socio-demographic controls, including occupation.

Such results motivated me to explore how one's objective, occupational class position may influence their electoral choices. France has a rich literature on class voting, which I complement by using a class schema inspired by Oesch, that is composed of two main dimensions: the horizontal based on work logic and the vertical based on marketable skills. My regression results suggest that holding all other socio-demographic variables constant, service, production and clerical workers are significantly more likely to vote for the far-right

than middle managers. Nonetheless, such mechanisms raise more questions than answers: what social mechanism may explain that people at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy vote for the far-right?

In my third and final part, I argue that class dissonance, and specifically, class inflation is a key mechanism underlying the far-right vote. Indeed, identifying with a subjective class above one's objective class increases the predicted probability of voting for the far-right by 12 percentage points relative to those holding concordant class positions. Conceptually, I argue that class inflation may imply a form of status anxiety, where individuals' aspirations for social recognition are not supported by their objective class position. Understanding what makes millions of people turn to the far-right is a complex phenomenon, but the dynamic of fragile status aspirations and a triangular view of the social order (Schwartz, 2009), helps illuminate some of the social dynamics at play.

## Appendix A

*Table A.1 Table 1. Effect of Subjective Class on Electoral Choice (OLS Estimates), the dependent variable coded as a choice between the far-right and mainstream parties*

| Objective class<br><i>ref: middle managers</i>                  | Predicted Probability of Voting for the Far-right vs<br>Mainstream parties |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Subjective class, ref: middle of the middle class</i></b> |                                                                            |
| Inferior class                                                  | 0.36** (0.148)                                                             |
| Working class                                                   | 0.17** (0.08)                                                              |
| Lower-middle class                                              | 0.08 (0.06)                                                                |
| Upper-middle class                                              | 0.044 (0.056)                                                              |
| Superior class                                                  | 0.091 (0.10)                                                               |
| <b><i>Objective class, ref: middle managers</i></b>             |                                                                            |
| Production workers                                              | 0.15 (0.11)                                                                |
| Service workers                                                 | 0.42*** (0.09)                                                             |
| Office clerks                                                   | 0.27*** (0.07)                                                             |
| Technical professionals                                         | 0.048 (0.1)                                                                |
| Sociocultural professionals                                     | 0.127 (0.085)                                                              |
| Top managers                                                    | -0.015 (0.063)                                                             |
| Owners/ Self-employed                                           | 0.1 (0.09)                                                                 |
| <b><i>Income, ref: between 1900-2200€</i></b>                   |                                                                            |
| Low (Under 1400€)                                               | -0.009* (0.09)                                                             |
| Lower-middle (between 1400-1900€)                               | 0.087 (0.07)                                                               |
| Upper-middle (between 2200-2500€)                               | 0.089 (0.08)                                                               |
| High (over 2500€)                                               | 0.082 (0.07)                                                               |
| <b><i>Size of agglomeration, ref: rural</i></b>                 |                                                                            |
| Below 19 999 residents                                          | 0.0136 (0.066)                                                             |
| Between 20 000 and 99 999 residents                             | -0.14** (0.078)                                                            |
| Between 100 000 and 1 999 999 residents                         | 0.007 (0.06)                                                               |
| Parisian agglomeration                                          | -0.12 (0.134)                                                              |
| <b><i>Age, ref: 18-25</i></b>                                   |                                                                            |

|                                                                                            |                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 26-35 years                                                                                | -0.38*** (0.11) |
| 36-45 years                                                                                | -0.24** (0.11)  |
| 46-55 years                                                                                | -0.29** (0.11)  |
| 56-65 years                                                                                | -0.5*** (0.1)   |
| 66-75 years                                                                                | -0.38*** (0.1)  |
| 76 years or more                                                                           | -0.24*** (0.13) |
| <b>Gender, ref: women</b>                                                                  |                 |
| men                                                                                        | 0.09** (0.042)  |
| <b>Education, ref: high school diploma (Bac)</b>                                           |                 |
| No education                                                                               | 0.014 (0.08)    |
| Vocational diploma (CAP or BEP)                                                            | 0.029 (0.07)    |
| Bac+2                                                                                      | -0.086 (0.07)   |
| Bac+5                                                                                      | -0.24** (0.08)  |
| <b>Unemployment, ref: employment</b>                                                       |                 |
| unemployment                                                                               | 0.01 (0.05)     |
| <b>Religion, ref: non-religious</b>                                                        |                 |
| religious                                                                                  | 0.06 (0.042)    |
| <b>Union membership, ref: non-membership</b>                                               |                 |
| union membership                                                                           | -0.06 (0.047)   |
| Number of observations: 747<br>F(41, 706) = 8.67<br>Prob > F = 0.000<br>R-squared = 0.3094 |                 |

Linearised Standard Errors in Parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

*Note: OLS coefficients (linear probability model) with survey-weighted linearised standard errors. Coefficients in column 2 represent the change in the predicted probability relative to the reference category*

*Table A.2: Spearman correlations between objective class, subjective class, education, and income, using the ELIPSS (2025) dataset*

|                         | <i>Subjective class</i> | <i>Education</i> | <i>Objective class</i> | <i>Income</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Subjective class</i> | 1                       |                  |                        |               |
| <i>Education</i>        | 0.4032                  | 1                |                        |               |
| <i>Objective class</i>  | 0.3853                  | 0.4010           | 1                      |               |
| <i>Income</i>           | 0.5237                  | 0.3547           | 0.3585                 | 1             |

*Note: This analysis was conducted to avoid multicollinearity among the independent variables. Additional VIF tests were run without sample weights for each regression, and all values remained below the threshold value of 5.*

## Appendix B

Table B. 1: Objective Class Categories, ELIPSS (2025)

| PCS29                                                    | #  | # of Obs | Recoded Objective Class Categories              |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----|----------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Agriculteur exploitant                                   | 10 | 22       | Owners/Self-employed                            |
| Artisan                                                  | 21 | 30       | Owners/Self-employed                            |
| Commerçant et assimilé                                   | 22 | 30       | Owners/Self-employed                            |
| Chef d'entreprise de 10 salariés ou plus                 | 23 | 6        | Owners/Self-employed                            |
| Profession libérale et assimilé                          | 31 | 41       | Owners/Self-employed<br>Self-employed/Employers |
| Cadre fonction publique,                                 | 33 | 85       | Top Managers                                    |
| Professeurs et professions scientifiques                 | 34 | 103      | Socio-cultural Professionals                    |
| Professions de l'information, de l'art et des spectacles | 35 | 32       | Socio-cultural Professionals                    |
| Cadre administratifs et commerciaux                      | 37 | 154      | Top Managers                                    |
| Cadres techniques d'entreprise                           | 38 | 136      | Top Managers                                    |
| Professions de l'enseignement primaire et professionnel  | 42 | 79       | Socio-cultural Professionals                    |
| Intermédiaires de la santé et du travail social          | 43 | 92       | Socio-cultural Professionals                    |
| Intermédiaires de la fonction publique                   | 45 | 61       | Middle Managers                                 |

|                                                    |    |     |                         |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|-----|-------------------------|
| Intermédiaires des entreprises                     | 46 | 112 | Middle Managers         |
| Technicien                                         | 47 | 101 | Technical Professionals |
| Agent de maîtrise de production                    | 48 | 36  | Middle Managers         |
| Employé de la fonction publique                    | 52 | 119 | Office Clerks           |
| Policiers, militaires et agents de sécurité privée | 53 | 10  | Clerks (?)              |
| Employé administratifs d'entreprise                | 54 | 94  | Office Clerks           |
| Employé de commerce                                | 55 | 32  | Service Workers         |
| Personnel des services directs aux particuliers    | 56 | 53  | Service Workers         |
| Ouvrier qualifié de type industriel                | 62 | 32  | Production Workers      |
| Ouvrier qualifié de type artisanal                 | 63 | 36  | Production Workers      |
| Conducteurs du transport                           | 64 | 31  | Service workers         |
| Conducteurs d'engins et magasiniers                | 65 | 12  | Production workers      |
| Ouvriers peu qualifiés de type industriel          | 67 | 15  | Production workers      |
| Ouvriers peu qualifiés de type artisanal           | 68 | 10  | Production workers      |
| Ouvrier agricole                                   | 69 | 8   | Production workers      |

Source: ELIPSS 2025 survey (Silva et al., 2026), Author's own recoding



Table B.2: Objective Class Categories, Crédoc<sup>10</sup>

| PCS24                                                            | #  | # of Obs | Recoded Objective Class Categories |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------|------------------------------------|
| Agriculteur exploitant                                           | 1  | 1494     | Petite Bourgeoisie                 |
| Artisan                                                          | 2  | 1553     | Petite Bourgeoisie                 |
| Commerçant et assimilé                                           | 3  | 1739     | Petite Bourgeoisie                 |
| Chef d'entreprise de 10 salariés ou plus                         | 4  | 459      | Employers/ Self-employed           |
| Profession libérale et assimilé                                  | 5  | 930      | Employers/ Self-employed           |
| Cadre fonction publique, profession intellectuelle. & artistique | 6  | 3075     | Socio-cultural professionals       |
| Cadre d'entreprise                                               | 7  | 4125     | Top Managers                       |
| Prof. inter. enseignement, santé, fonct. publ. et assimilé       | 8  | 6198     | Socio-cultural semi-professionals  |
| Prof. inter. administrative et commerciale des entreprises       | 9  | 2933     | Middle Managers                    |
| Technicien                                                       | 10 | 2585     | Technical Professionals            |
| Contremaître, agent de maîtrise                                  | 11 | 1678     | Middle Managers                    |
| Employé de la fonction publique                                  | 12 | 5857     | Office Clerks                      |
| Employé administratifs d'entreprise                              | 13 | 4863     | Office Clerks                      |
| Employé de commerce                                              | 14 | 3549     | Service Workers                    |

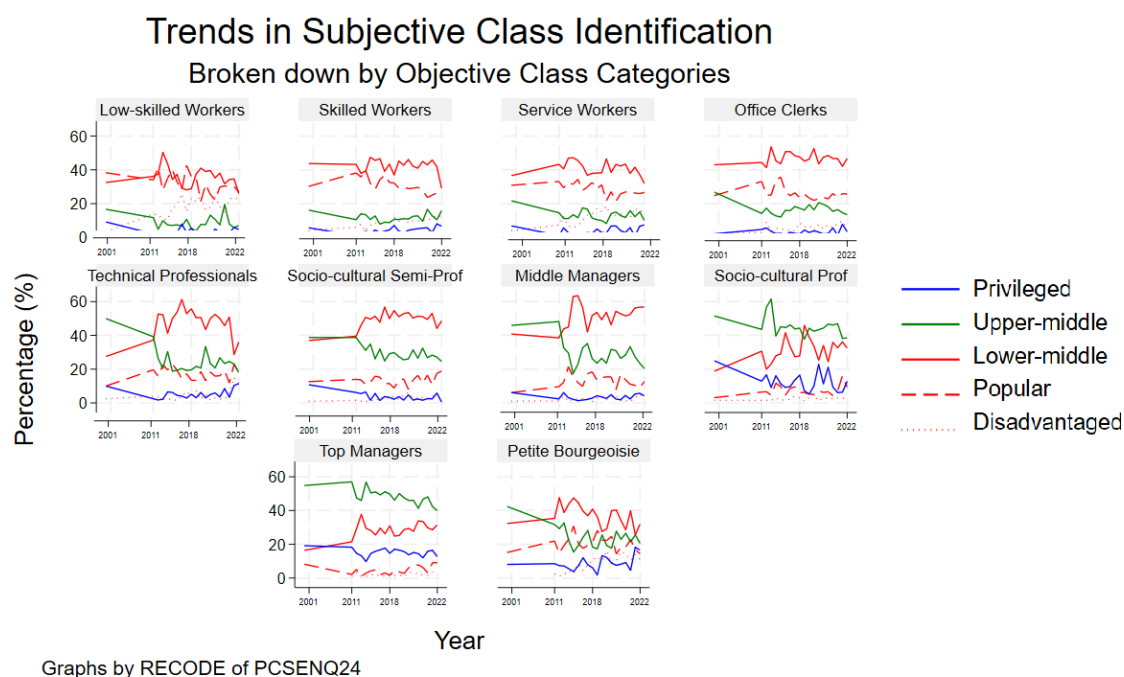
---

<sup>10</sup> I will restrict my analysis to the working population, as I am unable to account for the specific social dynamics associated with retirement or unemployment. Moreover, there is no detailed occupational categorisation available for retired people in the Crédoc data; it would be impossible to examine the Oesch-based class categories when they are included.

|                                                 |    |       |                                |
|-------------------------------------------------|----|-------|--------------------------------|
| Personnel des services directs aux particuliers | 15 | 3902  | Service Workers                |
| Ouvrier qualifié                                | 16 | 9362  | Skilled Production Workers     |
| Ouvrier non qualifié                            | 17 | 4354  | Low-skilled production workers |
| Ouvrier agricole                                | 18 | 554   | Low-skilled production workers |
| Ancien agriculteur exploitant                   | 19 | 1100  | -                              |
| Ancien artisan, commerçant, chef d'entreprise   | 20 | 1690  | -                              |
| Ancien cadre et profession intermédiaire        | 21 | 11750 | -                              |
| Ancien employé et ouvrier                       | 22 | 10701 | -                              |
| Chômeur n'ayant jamais travaillé                | 23 | 989   | Inactive                       |
| Inactif divers (autre que retraité)             | 24 | 17320 | Inactive                       |

Source: Crédoc survey, Author's own recoding

Figure B.1 Time trends in subjective class identification, broken down by objective class categories<sup>11</sup>



Source: Crédoc survey, Author's calculations

Table B.3, Objective Class as a Predictor of Populist Left Voting

| Socio-economic Predictors of Populist Left Voting |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| VARIABLES                                         | (1)<br>LFI Vote   |
| <i>Objective class – ref: top managers</i>        |                   |
| Production Workers                                | -0.134<br>(0.052) |
| Service Workers                                   | 0.025<br>(0.066)  |
| Clerks                                            | -0.033<br>(0.043) |
| Technical Professionals                           | -0.070<br>(0.045) |
| Socio-cultural Professionals                      | 0.107**           |

<sup>11</sup> Data for the subjective class variable was not recorded between 2001 and 2011. The straight lines in this interval represent an interpolation intended to improve the graph's readability and maintain a consistent timeline.

| VARIABLES                                                           | (1)<br>LFI Vote     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                                                     | (0.05)              |
| Middle managers                                                     | 0.076<br>(0.05)     |
| Owners/Self-employed                                                | -0.07<br>(0.037)    |
| <i>Subjective Class Belonging – ref: middle of the middle class</i> |                     |
| Inferior Class                                                      | -0.06<br>(0.052)    |
| Working class                                                       | -0.034<br>(0.055)   |
| Lower-middle class                                                  | -0.008<br>(0.031)   |
| Upper-middle class                                                  | -0.02<br>(0.034)    |
| Upper class                                                         | -0.1<br>(0.033)     |
| <i>Household income – ref: between 1900-2000€</i>                   |                     |
| Low – under 1400€                                                   | 0.12**<br>(0.05)    |
| Lower-middle – between 1400 - 1900€                                 | 0.12**<br>(0.04)    |
| Upper-middle – between 2200 - 2500€                                 | -0.013<br>(0.03)    |
| High – over 2500€                                                   | 0.033<br>(0.032)    |
| <i>Gender – ref: women</i>                                          |                     |
| Men                                                                 | 0.041*<br>(0.02)    |
| <i>Education – ref: Bac</i>                                         |                     |
| Without diploma                                                     | 0.015*<br>(0.045)   |
| CAP or BEP                                                          | 0.018<br>(0.04)     |
| Bac+2                                                               | 0.065<br>(0.034)    |
| Bac+5                                                               | 0.038***<br>(0.043) |
| <i>Religious practice – ref: non-religious</i>                      |                     |
| Religious                                                           | -0.049**            |

| VARIABLES                                                               | (1)<br>LFI Vote<br>(0.024) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Past or Present Union membership – ref: no membership</i>            |                            |
| Union membership                                                        | 0.12***<br>(0.032)         |
| <i>Public vs Private employment – ref: public</i>                       |                            |
| Private employment                                                      | -0.023<br>(0.03)           |
| Observations                                                            | 1411                       |
| F(41, 1370)                                                             | 3.07                       |
| Robust standard errors in parentheses<br>*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 |                            |

Source: ELIPSS (2025) (Silva et al., 2026), Author's calculations

Table B.4: Subjective and Objective Class Identification of RN voters

| Subjective class categories | Objective class categories |       |        |        |        |        |        |              |       |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------------|-------|
|                             | Prod.                      | Serv. | Clerks | Techn. | Socio. | Mid m. | Top m. | Own/S -empl. | Total |
| Inferior                    | 1                          | 4     | 1      | 0      | 0      | 0      | 1      | 0            | 7     |
| Working                     | 8                          | 10    | 10     | 1      | 1      | 4      | 0      | 0            | 34    |
| Lower-mid dle               | 5                          | 13    | 13     | 5      | 5      | 5      | 6      | 2            | 54    |
| Middle of the Middle        | 7                          | 4     | 18     | 6      | 7      | 10     | 10     | 5            | 67    |
| Upper-mid dle               | 1                          | 0     | 5      | 4      | 7      | 4      | 8      | 1            | 30    |
| Privileged                  | 0                          | 0     | 0      | 0      | 0      | 1      | 3      | 2            | 6     |
| Total                       | 22                         | 31    | 47     | 16     | 20     | 28     | 28     | 10           | 198   |

Source: ELIPSS (2025) (Silva et al., 2026)

## Appendix C

Table C.1: Subjective Class Identification Broken Down by Objective Class Categories

|                                                   | <i>Subjective<br/>Inferior<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper-Mid<br/>dle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Advantage<br/>d Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Privileged<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Low-skilled<br/>production<br/>workers</i>     | <b>23,9%</b>                                          | <b>30,5%</b>                                       | <b>33,8%</b>                                               | <b>7,14%</b>                                               | <b>2,47%</b>                                             | <b>2,2%</b>                                             |
| <i>Skilled<br/>production<br/>workers</i>         | <b>12,8%</b>                                          | <b>26,8%</b>                                       | <b>41,3%</b>                                               | <b>13%</b>                                                 | <b>4%</b>                                                | <b>2%</b>                                               |
| <i>Service<br/>workers</i>                        | <b>16,5%</b>                                          | <b>26,8%</b>                                       | <b>38%</b>                                                 | <b>13,4%</b>                                               | <b>3,7%</b>                                              | <b>1,7%</b>                                             |
| <i>Office Clerks</i>                              | <b>8,25%</b>                                          | <b>25,9%</b>                                       | <b>46%</b>                                                 | <b>15,2%</b>                                               | <b>2,7%</b>                                              | <b>2%</b>                                               |
| <i>Technical<br/>professionals</i>                | <b>10,42%</b>                                         | <b>17,4%</b>                                       | <b>41,3%</b>                                               | <b>23,7%</b>                                               | <b>7,3%</b>                                              | <b>0,4%</b>                                             |
| <i>Socio-cultural<br/>semi-professio<br/>nals</i> | <b>4%</b>                                             | <b>16,5%</b>                                       | <b>49,4%</b>                                               | <b>27,15%</b>                                              | <b>2,1%</b>                                              | <b>0,9%</b>                                             |
| <i>Middle<br/>managers</i>                        | <b>2,8%</b>                                           | <b>10,6%</b>                                       | <b>57,1%</b>                                               | <b>24,3%</b>                                               | <b>3,8%</b>                                              | <b>1,4%</b>                                             |
| <i>Socio-cultural<br/>professionals</i>           | <b>2,7%</b>                                           | <b>11%</b>                                         | <b>34,8%</b>                                               | <b>42,5%</b>                                               | <b>5,7%</b>                                              | <b>3,3%</b>                                             |
| <i>Top Managers</i>                               | <b>2,9%</b>                                           | <b>7,4%</b>                                        | <b>30,4%</b>                                               | <b>44%</b>                                                 | <b>12,1%</b>                                             | <b>3,2%</b>                                             |
| <i>Owners/<br/>Self-employed</i>                  | <b>12%</b>                                            | <b>19,3%</b>                                       | <b>34%</b>                                                 | <b>22,9%</b>                                               | <b>7,5%</b>                                              | <b>4,2%</b>                                             |

Values are from the last three rounds of the CRÉDOC dataset from the year 2022, based on 6070 observations

Robustness check for regressions in Table 3.4 with year-fixed effects

Table C.2. Multinomial logistic regression analysis on the relationship between left-right self placement on the political spectrum and class dissonance

| Class dissonance<br><i>ref: class concordance</i>                                | Average Marginal Effects<br><i>with controls</i><br>(1) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Deflated Class Identity</i></b>                                            |                                                         |
| Left                                                                             | 0.008 (0.014)                                           |
| Center                                                                           | -0.02 (0.014)                                           |
| Right                                                                            | 0.014 (0.014)                                           |
| <b><i>Inflated class identity</i></b>                                            |                                                         |
| Left                                                                             | -0.019** (0.008)                                        |
| Center                                                                           | 0.004 (0.008)                                           |
| Right                                                                            | 0.016* (0.008)                                          |
| (1)<br>Number of observations: 17974<br>F(80, 17894) = 11.62<br>Prob > F = 0.000 |                                                         |

Linearised Standard Errors in Parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1<sup>12</sup>

Source: Crédoc dataset, between 2015 and 2022

Note: Average marginal effects from a multinomial logistic regression with survey-weighted linearised standard errors.  $dy/dx$  for factor levels (1) represents the discrete change in the predicted probability relative to the reference category, which is class concordance

<sup>12</sup> The results for covariates that were not statistically significant, such as region, agglomeration size are not shown in consideration for space constraints.

Table C.3: Subjective class composition within objective classes

|                                                     | <i>Subjective<br/>Inferior Class<br/>Identity</i>          | <i>Subjective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i>       | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower-Middle<br/>Class Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Middle of the<br/>Middle<br/>Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper-Middle<br/>Class Identity</i>   | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper Class<br/>Identity</i>      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Objective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Position</i> | <b>3,6%</b><br>Deflated<br>Working<br>Class                | <b>24,72%</b><br>Concordant<br>Working<br>Class            | <b>29,2%</b><br>Inflated<br>Working Class             | <b>34,8%</b><br>Inflated<br>Working<br>Class                          | <b>6%</b><br>Very Strongly<br>Inflated<br>Working Class | <b>1,6%</b><br>Very<br>Strongly<br>Working<br>Class |
| <i>Objective<br/>Middle<br/>Class<br/>Position</i>  | <b>0,66%</b><br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Middle Class       | <b>4,76%</b><br>Deflated<br>Middle<br>Class                | <b>24,8%</b><br>Slightly<br>Deflated<br>Middle Class  | <b>47%</b><br>Concordant<br>Middle<br>Class                           | <b>20,85%</b><br>Slightly<br>Inflated Middle<br>Class   | <b>1,97%</b><br>Inflated<br>Middle Class            |
| <i>Objective<br/>Upper<br/>Class<br/>Position</i>   | <b>1,4%</b><br>Very<br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper Class | <b>1,6%</b><br>Very<br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper Class | <b>13,20%</b><br>Strongly<br>Deflated<br>Upper Class  | <b>41,7%</b><br>Deflated<br>Upper<br>Class                            | <b>35,60%</b><br>Concordant<br>Upper Class              | <b>6,8%</b><br>Concordant<br>Upper Class            |

*Note: Values are from the ELIPSS (2025) dataset based on 1554 observations, % values show row frequencies in percentages*

Table C.4: Objective class composition within subjective classes

|                                                     | <i>Subjective<br/>Inferior Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Working Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Lower-Middle<br/>Class Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Middle of the<br/>Middle Class<br/>Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper-Middle<br/>Class Identity</i> | <i>Subjective<br/>Upper Class<br/>Identity</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Objective<br/>Working<br/>Class<br/>Position</i> | <b>59,26%</b>                                     | <b>74,83%</b>                                    | <b>37,46%</b>                                         | <b>24,00%</b>                                                     | <b>8%</b>                                             | <b>13,00%</b>                                  |
| <i>Objective<br/>Middle Class<br/>Position</i>      | <b>14,80%</b>                                     | <b>19,73%</b>                                    | <b>43,52%</b>                                         | <b>44%</b>                                                        | <b>38,00%</b>                                         | <b>23,00%</b>                                  |
| <i>Objective<br/>Upper Class<br/>Position</i>       | <b>25,93%</b>                                     | <b>5,44%</b>                                     | <b>19,00%</b>                                         | <b>32%</b>                                                        | <b>54,00%</b>                                         | <b>64,00%</b>                                  |

*Note: Values are from the ELIPSS (2025) dataset based on 1554 observations, % values show column frequencies in percentages*



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# Where One Wants to Belong: Class Aspirations, Status Anxiety, and the Far-right vote in France

The Political Implications of the Dissonance Between Subjective and Objective Class Positions

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## Abstract

What social mechanisms underlie the surge of the far-right in France, culminating in more than 10 million votes in the 2024 legislative elections, is all the more pertinent as we approach the 2027 presidential elections. The consensus view in political science is established by the influential work of Gidron and Hall (2017), which builds on the concept of subjective social status anxiety; however, this account warrants both conceptual and methodological reassessment. Nonetheless, I argue that subjective positions in the social hierarchy still matter, but only relative to one's objective class position. It is established that objective class schemas (Oesch, 2006) reveal political cleavages in the occupational structure, but it has not yet been explored how they relate to one's subjective position in the social hierarchy. Building on the class dissonance framework of Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk (2013) and the causal mechanisms identified by Michelat and Simon (1977), I show that the *friction* between subjective and objective class positions is a significant predictor of the far-right vote in France. In fact, inflated class positions—where individuals perceive themselves as occupying a higher position than their objective class location would suggest—significantly increase the predicted probability of voting for the far-right by 12 percentage points. Class inflation is particularly pronounced (71,6%) among production, service, and clerical workers, highlighting the extent of the phenomenon. This mechanism is corroborated by ethnographic and sociological evidence and offers a plausible operationalisation of Schwartz's 'triangular social consciousness' (2009). Taken together, these findings suggest that analysing the interaction between objective and subjective class positions provides a more profound understanding of the forms of status anxiety underlying the far-right's support.

Keywords: subjective class, objective class, subjective status, social stratification, far-right vote, class dissonance