

Political Worries, Underpinning Social Structures: Occupational Cleavages and the “Most Important European Issues” in Historical and Spatial Perspective

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[Short Abstract:] Contemporary European citizens' political feelings and acts are driven less by isolated policy preferences than by multidimensional profiles of issue salience shaped by uncertainty and ongoing social change. This study (1) introduces a novel empirical approach for analysing occupational position and class structure data through the Eurobarometer, (2) develops a typology of latent trait concern profiles revealed among European citizens, and (3) models multilevel equations and Generalised Linear Model Trees algorithms (GLMTree) to examine the alignment between occupational class categories and types of citizen concerns, accounting for social features through time-series and regional analyses. Controlling for demographics, household composition, and subjective attitudinal variables—specifically institutional trust and household financial expectations—the models first evaluate the effects of social classes on these latent traits. The micro-level findings show stark class alignments: “overhead professionals and managers” occupations strongly predict post-material universalism, prioritising environmental and educational issues while deprioritising crime and immigration. Conversely, capital-owning classes prioritise taxation over unemployment, corresponding directly to the Libertarian Concerns profile. Also, the models identify effects of distinct macro-historical periods on these latent traits, with notable breaks in type-based worries, mainly in 2008, 2016, and 2021. There is a strong tendency towards convergence over time for most occupational social groups materialistic and security issues, whereas polarisation persists between “direct producing labourers” and “small business entrepreneurs” and other occupational social groups post-materialistic traits.