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Exploring the social determinants of political consumerism in Western Europe

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1. Introduction

The decline of social class is one of the most controversial hypotheses in recent debates in the field of political sociology (Evans, 1999). Until date, however, this debate has very much focused on the question of voting behaviour, and thereby the electoral sphere of political participation. The literature has also faced (although to a lesser extent) the influence of class on the propensity of individuals to engage on political groups (particularly unions or parties) while leaving aside the question of other modes of political participation.

Since Milbraith and Goel (1977), however, we know that high-class individuals are more prone to engage in politics than their low class counterparts. Moreover, those having the highest occupational status and, in particular, professionals, present the highest likelihood to participate in politics. Nevertheless, contemporary studies of comparative political participation have almost neglected the study of the effect of objective class on non-electoral political participation (exceptions are Barry *et al.*, 1992; Verba *et al.* 1995; Norris, 2002).

This almost exclusive dedication to electoral politics seems to us unjustified in the context of a general decrease in the levels of electoral participation and civic engagement, especially in membership in traditional organisations such as trade unions and, particularly, political parties (Visser, 1992; Katz *et al.*, 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair and van Biezen, 2001). In contrast, empirical evidence has shown a general tendency of increase in new forms of political participation in the last two decades, such as demonstrations, occupying buildings, signing petitions, buying or boycotting a product for political, ethical, or ecological motivations, or raising funds for an organisation (among others, Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Norris *et al.*, 2003; Stolle and Hooghe, 2004) Some of these new modes of political participation (except participating in a public demonstration or occupations) share a communality: they constitute individualistic types of civic activism. This kind of activism often is considered as relatively low-cost political actions in comparison to other forms of action that involve working or organising collectively (Pattie *et al.*, 2003).

Among the new forms of individualistic political action, political consumerism (including both boycotting and buying for political, ethical, and/or ecological reasons) have risen across Europe, although with an outstanding variation across countries. Table 1 shows recent data coming from the first wave of the European Social Survey 2002/03. According to this survey data, there is a huge cross national variation on the levels of political consumerism in Europe, being the range of variation among the top (mainly Scandinavian countries) and the bottom countries (mainly Southern countries) around 40%. In addition, this mode of non-electoral political action appears to be the most frequent together with protest activities (see Table 1).

- TABLE 1 here -

One of the arguments explaining the thesis of the decline of class politics contends that it is a consequence of a general process of social and geographical mobility. This broad process is making citizens' electoral decisions individualistic and rational. Rather than being passive subjects, electors now are able to react to government policies or to choose the programmes or policies that parties offer in the political market while competing in elections. Hence, this image of voters as consumers also suggests that citizens' political and partisan preferences change across time.

We can use the same argument to explain the emergence of other modes of political participation, such as political consumerism. This behaviour is often considered as a kind of individualised and global-oriented action (Micheletti, 2003). Hence, political consumerism constitutes an excellent example of individual behaviour with which to test the extent to which the objective positions that individuals hold in labour markets influence their propensity to use this new channel of political participation. According to the post-modern theories, objective social class might not count as a factor influencing citizens' propensity to buying or boycotting products for political ethical, or ecological motivations.

We test this theory by studying the phenomenon of political consumerism with recent survey data (2002/03): the European Social Survey (from now onwards ESS). The ESS contains comparable information about political consumerism across very different European countries. In addition, this survey contains information about respondents'

objective class position across countries (with some exceptions such as France and Norway).

We have proceeded in six parts. First, in section 2 we review the literature on the end of class politics. From there, we derive the specific hypotheses regarding the effect of class on citizens' political civic action. We follow this with a section discussing issues of data, country selection, and a descriptive overview of the *phenomenon* of political consumerism in section 3. We then offer in section 4 a systematic descriptive overview of the socio-demographic profile of the political consumers across Western Europe, including objective class position. Section 5 provides the evidence of a multivariate analysis of the social determinants of political consumerism across fourteen Western European polities. A final section discusses the implications of these empirical results for the post-modern theories about the end of class politics.

2. The end of class politics: the argument

Various theories coming from the field of both political science and sociology has recently come to explain the assumed lack of political relevance of class inequalities. One of the main arguments explaining such decline comes from the post-modern sociological theory. This theory maintains that advanced industrial societies have experienced a transformation from being “command societies” characterized by a socio political stratification based on the democratic class struggle to “status societies” characterised by cultural stratification. It is then suggested that post-modern communities are based on life style identities formed by individual tastes and, in particular, consumption patterns that citizens are free to choose and change according to their will (Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

In the same line, individualization theory suggests that individual identities and political behaviour are no longer related to traditional cleavages such as social class (Beck, 1999). Given the structural transformation of social institutions, individuals are free of social or traditional ties. Moreover, traditional structures such as the family, local communities or the workplace, which formerly used to define individual's identities and consciousness, are no longer persistent, and have lost their regulation capacity. According to Beck (1999) the transformation of the role of women in society could be a

clear example of all these social changes. Whereas women were assumed to get married, have children and leave the labour market then to become house-wife, they are now free to choose among different options across all dimensions of life such as work, reproduction or carrying their family. Hence, there is a transition from “normal biographies” determined by the traditional roles assigned to women to “electives biographies” where individuals choose what they want, free of traditional constraints (Bernardi, 2005) and the same idea can be applied to the rest of traditional roles assigned to individuals within the social context in which they are embedded.

Various tendencies from the last decades in the XXth century have contributed to the so-called “individualization process”, among which the economic prosperity, welfare state development, labour regulation and trade-unions representation of labour in the capitalist process, the expansion of educational skills, together with the increase in labour and geographical mobility. All these processes led to a society with new risks such as unemployment, or job instability that come to substitute old class divisions (Beck, 2000).

The derivation of this theory for the case of political action is clear. Citizens are free from traditional social structures such as the family, local communities or the workplace. Consequently, their political behaviour is no longer structured by traditions but by changing components such as taste, cultural identities, varying value commitments, etc. As a result of the individualization process, social classes has loose meaning both in subjective and political terms. This implies that individuals with the same objective social position will not share any longer the same identities or class-consciousness, and hence, social class does no longer constitute the necessary condition for the existence of collective action.

The predominance of the cultural over the economic sphere that, according to post-modern theorists, characterizes societies of the XX first century constitutes the main factor explaining why citizens are free of social and traditional determinants, and thereby choose their life style and their mode of consuming without restrictions (Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

Which are, however, the political consequences of all these processes? According to the theory on the silent cultural revolution developed by Ronald Inglehart (1990 and 1997), the main result of these evolutions is a change in the political agenda. Moreover, as a consequence of a general process of increasing material welfare, the economic issues gradually lose political and public salience while other issues compound what he calls the post-materialist agenda. This agenda includes questions related to quality of life such as gender equalities, environmental issues, international human rights or more citizen participation in public issues. Hence, according to Inglehart, new generations are more prone to engage in elite-challenging modes of political participation (Inglehart, 1997). In fact, both theories of risk society and post-materialism share an underlying idea: they explain the emergence of new forms of political civic action by emphasizing how citizens in the new “status societies” (Pakulski and Waters, 1996) progressively develop a lack of trust in the capacity of government to satisfy their own new political demands.

In sum, postmodernist theories appear to provide an explanation to the general tendency of increase in new channels of political participation together with a general decrease in citizens’ involvement in traditional politics such as electoral participation or affiliation to party and/or trade union. This tendency is especially remarkable among the youngest generation of well-educated citizens who have been the protagonist of a dramatic rise in new forms of political participation beyond voting (*inter alia*, Bennet, 1998; Topf, 1995). The former explanation, however, uncritically assumes that social determinants of individuals’ political engagement no longer exist. This implies that citizens’ objective positions in labour markets do not influence whatsoever their propensity to use new arenas for political participation.

Up to date, however, the literature explaining the social determinants of new forms of political action has not yet tested empirically in a systematic way whether this assumption holds in reality (but see Caínzos, 2004 for an exception). This literature agrees that the level of education still counts as a significant resource in explaining citizens’ propensity to engage in new forms of political action (Norris, 2002; Pattie *et al.*, 2003; Verba *et al.*, 1995, etc.). Comparative research on educational attainment has shown the persistency over time of the inequalities of educational opportunities by social class of origin (see Blossfeld and Shavit, 1992). We should not ignore this

evidence when studying contemporary non-electoral political behaviour. This implies that, even if in an indirect manner, social class might have a considerable impact on civic behaviour. This is the main contribution that this paper seeks to provide: a systematic analysis of the potential influence of citizens' objective social class on their propensity to use consumerism as a new arena for political participation.

One of the reasons explaining the lack of comparative analyses in the study of the social determinants of non-electoral political behaviour might be the lack of suitable comparative indicators both of individuals' objective class positions and their reported political actions. However, the relatively recent experience of the cross-national research project: the ESS allow us to have an overview of the social determinants of political action across countries. This survey contains enough information as to operationalize citizens' objective class position in a suitable and reliable manner.² Additionally, it contains information about various modes of non-electoral political behaviour across polities.

In sum, this paper seeks to offer a systematic exploration of the social determinants of a new form of political participation that has been often neglected in the literature on non-electoral political participation: political consumerism (exceptions are, however, among others, Andersen *et al.* 2003; Boström *et al.* 2005; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004; Stolle *et al.* 2005; Tobiasen 2005). Various reasons explain the choice of this new form of political participation. First, among the whole set of different types of non-electoral political behaviour, this one constitutes an individualistic mode of civic action. Moreover, political consumerists act alone when they decide the products to be bought or boycotted for political, environmental or ethical reasons. We are interested in an individualistic example of political action since we want to test post-modern theories that assume the predominance of cultural over economic topics. Political consumerism can be understood as a kind of individualised and global oriented action (Micheletti, 2003), which reflects diverse life-style and which requires only sporadic mobilization efforts. Second, according to the empirical evidence presented in Table 1, political

² Nevertheless, two exceptions are noteworthy: the French case, which includes only the first two digits of 1988 ISCO / ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations whereas the rest of the countries includes up to four digits. In addition, the Norwegian case lacks information about self-employed (more specifically, we cannot figure out from the information provided in the survey how many employees do they have). For this reason, we have excluded these two countries from the multivariate analysis presented in section 5.

consumerism constitutes the most frequent reported non-electoral activity by respondents across countries (together with protest activities). Finally, Table 1 also shows political consumerism is by far the non-electoral political behaviour that presents the highest cross-national empirical variation. We turn now to present the descriptive evidence about our dependent variable across countries according to recent data of the ESS project.

3. Data and countries under analysis

We employ data coming from the first wave of the ESS. This survey includes up to 22 different European countries plus Israel. However, we have restricted the analysis to 16 OECD countries, since the theoretical discussion summarized in previous section refers only to advanced capitalist countries.³ In addition, and given the lack of suitable information about individuals' occupations, we have included Norway and France only in the descriptive and bivariate evidence presented in this paper whereas the evidence coming from multivariate empirical analyses only apply to the sixteen European countries.

Table 1 presents data on four different types of individualistic civic activism. There it can be appreciated the frequency of political consumerism in comparison with other types of political action, being political consumerism the non electoral political civic action most frequently reported among respondents across countries together with protest activities. What is, however, political consumerism? Political consumerism is not a completely new form of civic activism. Quite to the contrary, several examples of this type of activity can be found since the beginning of the XXth century.⁴ The concept has traditionally been used in order to label the political phenomena of consumers' boycotts. However, political consumerism may also refer to other sort of behaviours

³ The countries considered in the analysis are the following: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom. The rest of the sample corresponds to former East European Communist countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia) and Israel. See the web page of the European Social Survey: [http:// www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org).

⁴ For instance, the White Label campaign consisted on an anti- sweatshop initiative calling women to buy only cotton underwear that was certified "sweatshop free" or the 1960s consumers' boycotts organised by the United Farm Workers as a way of protest against Californian landowners (Stole *et. al.*, 2005). For an interesting review on diverse historical initiatives of political consumerism see the special issue of *Politics and Societies* (2003)

such as deliberately choosing certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons. This new form of political consumerism is becoming increasingly popular since the 90s (Micheletti, 2003).

- TABLE 1 here -

Traditional studies of political participation have considered as political activities only those people's behaviours directly cooperating with political actors and public institutions, or inversely, challenging them. However, contemporary political consumerism implies a change on the target of the action. As it often involves concerns for transnational issues of human rights, fairness and defence of the environment or the labour conditions of workers, political consumerism is usually targeting against corporations or private enterprises. Therefore, the market appears as new place for politics in the twenty-first century (Micheletti, Follesdal and Stolle 2003: xii). In sum, there are clear theoretical justifications to conceive consumption participation as a political phenomenon, even if its organizing principles and strategies tend either to be less collectivist or novel in orientation in comparison to other traditional forms of non-electoral political actions (Micheletti, 2003). In addition, empirical evidence has shown the politicalness character of this form of civic action (see, for instance, Ferrer 2004). Political consumerism is clearly correlated with other modes of political participation, in particular, less insitutionalised actions such as protest.

The ESS is one of the first cross-national surveys that provide information on both behavioural indicators of political consumerism.⁵ The respondents were asked, among other activities related to political participation, whether they had boycotted certain products (what can be thought as "negative" consumerism) and whether they had deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons during the last 12 months (what can be considered as "positive" consumerism).⁶ Table 2 provides detailed information about the two aforementioned dimensions of political

⁵ Other comparative project that includes two survey questions to measure political consumerism is the *Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy* (CID) but data are still under embargo. In addition, the *Political Action* study (1979), the *Eurobarometer* or the *World Values Survey* series only asked whether the respondent had taken part in a boycott, but never mentioning of which type.

⁶ The specific question is: "There are different ways of trying to improve things in (country) or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?" Then a battery of 10 political activities is mentioned, and the respondent has to answer for each activity whether she/he did it or did not.

consumerism (that is, positive and negative political consumerism). The first two columns of Table 2 present the percentage of citizens that has boycotted or bought products within the last 12 months in Europe. The next column shows the empirical relationship between boycotting and buying (by means of Pearson's correlation) for each country. As can be seen, the coefficients are relatively high for all countries and confirm the close association between both activities. The last column displays the rates of overall political consumerism, that is, the percentage of citizens that has incurred in at least one of the two (or both) political activities.⁷ This last column constitutes our dependent variable.

- TABLE 2 here -

This evidence shows a huge cross-national variation on political consumerism in Western Europe, especially concerning the action of buying products for political, ethical or ecological motivations. More specifically, the range of variation between the top (Sweden) and bottom countries (Portugal for boycotting, and Portugal, Italy and Greece for buying) is 30% for negative consumerism and 50% for positive consumerism. Sweden presents the highest rates of citizens engaging in both activities. More than half of the respondents have bought certain products and one third have performed consumer boycotts actions. Switzerland presents the second highest rates for both activities. In the case of boycotts, the next countries among the highest positions of the ranking are the other Scandinavian countries (Finland in third place), United Kingdom, Germany and Austria with rates between 27% and 22%. Regarding positive political consumption, we find Denmark and Finland in the top positions with rates around 40%, followed by Germany, Norway and United Kingdom with one third of the respondents acting as political consumers.

In contrast, countries presenting the lowest rates of participation in boycotts are Southern European countries. Somehow surprisingly, among this group of countries, the Netherlands also emerges with only 10% of boycotters and below the average European level (16%). As social movements, and especially, ecologist groups have a strong

⁷ This figure has been calculated by computing a dichotomous variable that classify people that have performed at least one activity of the two acts or more versus citizens not having performed any of the two political activities.

representation and visibility in Dutch society (Kriesi, 1993), the lower rates are a bit surprising. Especially considering that one of the common repertoires of action of social movement organisations is boycott activities. It might be that the period 2002-2003 has been characterised by a context of scarce mobilisation in the Netherlands and this explains the unexpected low rates in consumers' boycotts in this country.

In the case of positive consumerism, the geographical cluster of countries presenting the lowest rates is even clearer than in the case of boycotting. Southern European countries are below the Western European average (30%), presenting rates below 10%. Finally, for overall political consumerism (see the last column in Table 2) cross-national variation is also very high, and quite similar to the figures regarding positive political consumerism, which is clearly the most popular political action.

Why, then, boycotting constitutes a more frequent reported activity than boycotting in most of the countries? The explanation may be related to the fact that the politically motivated boycott of certain goods/enterprises is a more temporary action and easily influenced by the context of mobilisation of political or economic groups, whereas boycotts may imply more regular patterns of behaviour in daily life. For instance, going to buy to the supermarket and choose a fair trade coffee or an eco-labelling product, or avoiding consuming in a chain of supermarkets (by recurring to traditional markets of the neighbourhood). In sum, it seems reasonable to assume that boycott is a more constant activity that people incorporate in their daily live, and it is less dependent than boycott on the dynamic contexts of mobilisation campaigns. Consequently, the indicator of overall political consumerism has a higher representation of positive political consumerism than boycotting actions.

We shall turn now to the exploration of the social determinants of political consumerism. We start with a descriptive overview of the socio demographic profile of the political consumerist across Western Europe in section 4.

4. Who are the political consumers in Western Europe? A socio-demographic profile

Who are the political consumers? What are the social characteristics of political consumers? Do they differ among countries? Before we present the results of a systematic bivariate analysis there is one point worth pointing out. As previously indicated, our dependent variable is the overall indicator of political consumerism (see last column of Table 2). Yet, we have replicated the same analyses for both boycott and boycott participation separately, and the results remain quite consistent. We have preferred to focus on the indicator of overall political consumerism to avoid commenting on redundant results.⁸

We have systematically explored the empirical relationship among political consumerism and the following individual characteristics, as provided by the ESS: gender, age, education, employment status, and objective social class. The two more problematic variables for a cross-country comparison are indeed level of education and objective social class. For the case of education, each country measured this variable in a particular manner, depending on its own educational system. Nevertheless, two additional comparable variables in the survey are available. The first one consists of the number of years of full-time education completed by the interviewed. Hence this constitutes a cardinal variable ranging from 0 to 40. The second is an ordinal variable measuring the highest level of education achieved by the respondent across countries in a comparable manner. The codification of this variable is then the following: (0) not completed primary education, (1) primary or first stage of basic education, (2) lower secondary or second stage of basic, (3) upper secondary, (4) post secondary, non-tertiary, (5) first stage of tertiary, and finally (6) second stage of tertiary. We have used this second variable for our empirical analysis.⁹

Regarding objective social class, fortunately the ESS provides not only the employment status of the respondent (or the bread-winner at its household, when the respondent declared that he / she is or has been employed) but it also provides detailed information

⁸ Results of these additional separate analyses are, however, available to the interested readers on request

⁹ Recall, however, that we have specified this variable by collapsing it into four main categories more suitable to be compared across countries: (1) from not completed to 1st stage of basic education, (2) second stage of basic education, (3) from upper secondary to post-secondary, and (4) tertiary education.

as to operationalise individuals' objective class positions in a suitable and reliable manner.¹⁰ Hence, we have used a comparable version of the Eriksson and Goldthorpe class schema, as summarised in Table 3. As can be seen there, we have collapsed the original category of agricultural labourers (VIIb) with the category of farmers (IVc), the reason being that in the majority of the Western European countries analysed here, the percentage of the total individuals classified as farmers or agricultural labourers is so small that we might encounter problems of statistical efficiency when keeping the two categories separated.¹¹

Table 3. A description of the Eriksson-Goldthorpe class schema used in this paper

Title	Description
Service class (I + II)	I. Managers, administrator and large proprietors II. Professionals, high-class technicians, supervisors non-manual workers
Routine non-manual class (III)	Routine non manual employees in administration and commerce; sales personnel; other rank-and-file service workers
Petty bourgeoisie (IVa + IVb)	Small proprietors and artisans, with and without employees
Farmers and agricultural labourers (IVc + VIIb)	Farmers, smallholders and other self-employed workers, agricultural and other workers in primary production
Skilled workers (V+VI)	Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers; skilled manual workers
Non-Skilled workers (VIIa)	Semi- and unskilled, non agricultural manual workers

The results of the bivariate analysis are displayed in Table 4 and 5 where we have performed crosstabulations of each pair of variables. More specifically, Table 4 includes

¹⁰ More specifically, to reconstruct the objective social class of respondents we have used the following information as provided by the European Social Survey: occupational status, for those employed (or who used to be employed) the type of employment relation, whether they have responsibilities for supervising other employees, the establishment' size, the number of employees (for those being self-employed), and finally, and more importantly, the 1988 ISCO / ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations including four digits. Again, for the cases of France and Norway we were not able to reconstruct respondents' objective social class, since the information provided in the European Social Survey was not detailed enough. We wish to thank Miguel Caínzos for his generosity to share with us part of his routines to operationalise the objective social class with the European Social Survey.

¹¹ The outstanding exception is the case of Greece where according to our data around a 20% of the total respondents have been classified as farmers or agricultural labourers whereas Finland, Ireland, Portugal and Spain present around 9% to 12% of respondents. The rest of the countries present percentages under the 5% of the total respondents for which we could reconstruct their objective social class. Recall that these figures might seem inflated, since we also include those respondents who were retired at the time of the interview but who used to be employed in the agricultural sector.

the results of cross-tabulation between gender, age¹², employment status, level of education and our indicator of overall political consumerism. Table 5 presents the results of a cross-tabulation of individuals' objective class position (according to Erikson & Goldthorpe class schema) and the indicator of overall political consumerism. Let us start by commenting on the results of Table 4.

- TABLE 4 here -

A first interesting result is that it appears to exist a gender gap in favour of women. Several authors pointed that historical consumer boycotts were often realised by women (see Friedman 1999, Micheletti 2003). Women have usually been the person in charge of the shopping basket and still are in most countries. Recent empirical works also signal political consumerism as a women-friendly form of political engagement (Stolle and Micheletti 2003; Ferrer 2004). Table 4 shows that in those countries where differences among men and women are significant always go in the same direction: men participate less and women more. Moreover, Scandinavian countries, Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium are the countries where this pattern is clear-cut.

The effect of age is, in general, very clear. Two points are worth mentioning. First, although according to the literature the highest levels of political consumerism were expected among the youngest (see, for instance, Stolle *et al.*, 2005), in more than half of the countries included here the group age 35-54 is more active in political consumerism. Only in Finland and Spain, the youngest are among the most consumer activists whereas in Greece and Portugal are both age groups. Second, the oldest group, aged 55 or more, is always less active in the political consumerism dimension than younger groups. This pattern is consistently significant across all polities analysed here.

Regarding employment status, its empirical relationship with political consumerism appears to be relatively clear too, at least for three of the five diverse groups presented in Table 4, although in opposite directions. On the one hand, working people are clearly more involved in political consumer actions in most countries. On the other hand, being

¹² With the aim to present the empirical evidence in the most summarised manner, we have recoded the variable years of respondents in three main age groups: 15-34, 35-54 and 55 to the oldest. In addition, the categorisation of age lets us to explore the potential existence of a non-linear effect of age on political consumerism.

outside of the labour market for structural reasons such as unemployment, retirement or disablement is negatively related to political consumerism. These patterns are consistent across the whole set of countries under analysis here.

In addition, being a student or a housewife seems to be more related to political consumerism – very often students participate more than unemployed and pensioners – although there are some country exceptions. On the one hand, in Switzerland or United Kingdom students participate less than other social groups. On the other hand, in Southern European countries but Italy, housewives show a statistically significant lower propensity to act as a political consumer than the rest of groups. In contrast, in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, and to a lesser extent, Sweden being a housewife displays higher percentages of political motivated consumers. These cross-national differences might be related to the different familiaristic structures enforcing traditional gender roles that are still prevailing in Southern European countries.

The last individual resource under consideration in Table 4 is the level of education. The results are overwhelming. Political consumers are highly educated in all Western Europe. This is by far the most systematic and clear cut socio-demographic profile emerging for all countries. Moreover, the percentage differences among citizens with the lowest level of education (those who have not completed studies up to lower secondary) and people with tertiary education are huge in most countries. However, the strength of this empirical relationship among education and political consumerism appears to be slight for those countries presenting the lowest levels of political consumerism such as Italy, Portugal, Greece and Spain.

Let us now turn to the comments on the systematic bivariate analysis of the empirical relationship between individuals' objective social class and the indicator of political consumerism as given by Table 5. We offer two alternative (and somehow redundant) results. Our aim was simply to bring out that when we have enough observations, the distinction among managers, proprietors and administrators on the one hand, and professionals on the other is relevant in identifying the political consumerists in Europe. Hence, we can be very confident that the consumerists are overrepresented in the service class, but more specifically in professionals, high-class technicians, and

supervisors of non-manual workers. And this tendency is very robust across all countries under analysed here.

- TABLE 5 here -

In contrast, manual workers (and especially non-skilled workers) appear to be underrepresented among the political consumerists in all countries but Switzerland. The same tendency can be seen for the case of skilled workers but the strength of this underrepresentation is smaller than in the case of non-skilled workers.

To sum up, according to the bivariate evidence presented in this section, the social determinants of political consumerism appears as very relevant. This suggests the existence of a social bias of this civic activity, thereby reiterating the inequality intrinsic to other modes of political participation (*inter alia*, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Moreover, political consumerism in Western Europe is an activity that belongs to high-resources citizens: the well-educated, students, employed, middle aged, and more importantly, those who belong to the service class. These results are highly robust across polities.

Let us now turn to comment on the results of a systematic multivariate analysis of the social determinants of political consumerism across Western European countries in the next section

5. A multivariate analysis of the social determinants of political consumerism in Western Europe: the results

The main objective of this last section is to test whether the clear cut objective social class profile of political consumers is robust when we specify in a prediction equation of political consumerism the rest of the socio-demographic variables considered here. According to postmodernist theorists, the effect of education on political consumerism should be predominant over the effect of objective social class, and thereby the coefficients corresponding to objective social class will not turn out to be statistically significant once the level of education of respondents is controlled for. Our counter-hypothesis is that objective social class (and despite the important empirical relationship among social class and education) might still count as a predictor for political

consumerism across European Western polities in the XX first century. In fact, this is what emerges from the multivariate results which are summarised in Table 6.

We have estimated the propensity of citizens to act as political consumers as a function of their gender, age, education, and objective social class, and by way of binomial logit equations across countries. It should be clarified from the beginning that we have been less concerned with finding the best fitting model, than with testing our theoretical hypotheses on the social determinants of political consumerism in Western Europe. Therefore, more than exploratory, this research is confirmatory (and comparative across countries). Some might criticise our prediction equations by arguing their potential under-specification. In fact, we could have increased the goodness of fit of the estimations by specifying in the right hand side of the equations variables concerning respondents' political attitudes. We have preferred, however, to concentrate our analysis on the social determinants of political consumerism, in the same vein as Evans (1999) does in his analysis of class voting.

- TABLE 6 here -

As can be appreciated in Table 6, a general comment about the results is that the social profile of political consumers that has been drawn in the previous section remains intact. The results, however, suggest that the most systematic social patterns of political consumerism is located on citizens levels' of education and or their objective social class whereas the gender and age profile still emerge but is not systematic across polities, and its magnitude seems to be smaller than that of education or social class.

In fact, women's propensity to engage in political consumerism in comparison to men turned out to be statistically significant only in eight of the fourteen countries analysed here. Hence, according to the multivariate results, the gender gap in favour of women for the case of political consumerism is not a systematic pattern across countries.

In addition, the advantage of medium-age (35-54) people in comparison to young (less than 35) and old people (more than 54) appears as statistically significant in eight of the fourteen countries included here. This evidence can be interpreted as the result of the economic advantages of medium-age people. The politically motivated act of buying some times implies to pay greater prices in the market. For instance, fair trade coffee or

eco-labelling products assure a certain level of quality, and are more expensive than normal products. People aged 35 to 54 are more prone to have stable salaries and to have regular patterns of consumption than young people, especially those under 25. This explanation is perfectly plausible, since we have seen that our indicator of overall political consumerism has a higher representation of positive political consumerism than boycotting actions.

In contrast, the level of education presents a systematic effect of the propensity of citizens to behave as political consumers across Western European countries. Compared to citizens with tertiary education, individuals with the lowest level of education present a lower propensity to incur on political consumerism for all countries analysed here. And the same is true for the comparison among lower secondary *versus* tertiary as well as upper and post secondary *versus* tertiary. The magnitude of the differences, however, seems to decrease as the level of education increases, since the coefficients corresponding to the contrast among upper and post secondary are all smaller (and in Portugal and Italy they did not turn out to be significant) than the coefficients corresponding to the lowest level of education.

Let us comment on the effect of citizens' objective social class on the propensity to experience political consumerism. According to the results shown in Table 6, the contrast among service class and the rest of social class' categories produce negative and statistically significant coefficients across all countries studied here. The magnitude of the advantage of service class as political consumers is different depending on the categories we look at. The highest coefficients correspond to those comparing non skilled workers with service class. They turned out to be significant in all countries but Belgium, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland. Additionally, the contrast among skilled workers and service class is the most systematic, since the coefficients turned out to be significant in all countries but Greece and Italy whereas the contrast among farm workers and the service class turned out to be statistically significant in all countries but Denmark, Portugal and the UK.

In contrast, the advantage of the service class on the propensity to behave as political consumers in comparison to the petty bourgeoisie seems to be smaller and less systematic than the advantages with respect to the aforementioned class' categories.

More specifically, the coefficients corresponding to the petty bourgeoisie did not turn out to be significant for Austria, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Switzerland. And the same is true for the case of the contrast among the service class and routine non-manual workers, since the coefficients corresponding to the latter did not turn out to be significant in Austria, and the Southern European countries: Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

Overall, however, citizens' objective social class clearly structures their predisposition to behave as political consumers. Moreover, in all countries the effect of social class turned out to be statistically significant in at least three categories of contrast with the notable exception of the Southern countries Italy, Portugal, and specially Greece where the effects of social class seem to be smaller than in the rest of countries analysed here. We shall now conclude this paper with a brief discussion of the implications of these empirical findings for the theoretical questions posited in the second section.

6. Discussion

This paper has explored the social determinants of an individualistic type of political action: political consumerism, with the intention to test some of the implications of postmodernist theories about the assumed end of class politics. We have chosen this type of political action, since it can be considered as one of the examples which post-modern theories use as evidence of the individualization process and the predominance of the cultural over the economic sphere characterizing societies of the XX first century. Moreover political consumerism can be thought of as a sort of individualised and global oriented action (Micheletti, 2003), which reflects diverse life style and which requires only sporadic mobilization efforts. Hence, according to post-modernist theories citizens' objective social class should not influence on their propensity to use this new channel of political participation.

The empirical evidence offered in this paper, however, shows that the social profile of political consumers emerges very clearly among Western European citizens. Therefore, high-resources citizens such as the well-educated, students, employed, middle aged, and more importantly, those who belong to the service class are those more prone to behave as political consumers. These results are quite consistent for all the countries analysed

here, although they are less impressive for three Southern European countries: Greece, Italy, and Portugal.

Initially, our comparative interest was to test the consistency of the social determinants of political consumerism across countries, and whether the extension of the welfare state come to mediate this potential relationship among citizens' objective social position and their propensity to engage in political consumerism. The hypothesis was that may be in those polities where the degree of welfare state development was higher the social profile of political consumerism was less prominent. Welfare state development is mentioned among other factors such as economic prosperity, labour regulation, the expansion of educational skills, etc. as causes of the advent of the new risk society (Beck, 2000). Therefore, according to individualization theory, the social profile of political action in advanced capitalist and universalistic welfare states should be blurred. The comparative design of this paper allows us to conclude that there are not clear differences in the social profile of political consumerism across countries. Moreover the pattern identified seems to be quite consistent across polities.

In sum, the results of this paper raise some doubts about the sometimes too often assumed hypothesis on the end of class politics in the post-modern theories of political behaviour. This implies that the emergence of new channels of political participation does not automatically means the end of class politics, since political consumers seems to reproduce the inequality intrinsic to other modes of political participation (*inter alia*, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

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Exploring the social determinants of political consumerism in Western Europe

Mariona Ferrer and Marta Fraile (orden alfabético)

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Levels of citizen political activism in Western Europe, 2002-3 (in percentages)

Countries	Contacting politicians government officials	with or giving money political groups	Participation or to	Protest activities	Political consumerism	N
Austria	19	32		33	35	(2257)
Belgium	18	33		39	31	(1899)
Denmark	18	26		33	48	(1506)
Finland	24	37		33	47	(2000)
France	18	21		43	37	(1506)
Germany	13	25		35	45	(2919)
Greece	15	12		9	12	(2566)
Ireland	22	23		32	29	(2046)
Italy	12	12		24	10	(1207)
Netherlands	15	29		25	28	(2364)
Norway	23	38		47	39	(2036)
Portugal	12	10		12	8	(1511)
Spain	12	21		30	14	(1729)
Sweden	17	32		45	60	(1999)
Switzerland	17	32		43	50	(2040)
United Kingdom	18	17		43	40	(2052)
<i>Western Europe</i>	17	25		33	34	(31633)

Notes: the numbers are the percentage of respondents that report to have realised at least one of the activities of each mode of political participation. Source: European Social Survey (2002-3)

Table 2. Political consumerism in Western Europe, 2002-3 (in percentages)

	Boycotted certain products within last 12 months	Bought certain products within last 12 months	Correlation between boycott & buycott	Overall political consumerism	N
Austria	22	30	,54**	35	(2257)
Belgium	13	27	,37**	31	(1899)
Denmark	23	44	,42**	48	(1506)
Finland	27	42	,47**	47	(2000)
France	27	28	,54**	37	(1503)
Germany	26	39	,45**	45	(2919)
Greece	9	7	,36**	12	(2566)
Ireland	14	25	,42**	29	(2046)
Italy	8	7	,52**	10	(1207)
Netherlands	10	26	,37**	28	(2364)
Norway	19	35	,42**	39	(2036)
Portugal	3	7	,39**	8	(1511)
Spain	8	12	,56**	14	(1729)
Sweden	33	55	,40**	60	(1999)
Switzerland	31	45	,50**	50	(2040)
United Kingdom	26	32	,47**	40	(2052)
<i>Western Europe</i>	19	30	,48**	34	(31633)

Notes: the numbers are the percentage of respondents reporting to have realised at least one of the activities of each mode of political participation.

**Coefficients of Pearson correlations are all significant at least at the 99,9% level of confidence

Source: European Social Survey (2002-3).

Table 3. A description of the Eriksson-Goldthorpe class schema used in this paper

Title	Description
	I. Managers, administrator and large proprietors
Service class (I + II)	II. Professionals, high-class technicians, supervisors non-manual workers
Routine non-manual class (III)	Routine non manual employees in administration and commerce; sales personnel; other rank-and-file service workers
Petty bourgeoisie (IVa + IVb)	Small proprietors and artisans, with and without employees
Farmers and agricultural labourers (IVc + VIIb)	Farmers, smallholders and other self-employed workers, agricultural and other workers in primary production
Skilled workers (V+VI)	Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers; skilled manual workers
Non-Skilled workers (VIIa)	Semi- and unskilled, non agricultural manual workers

Table 4. Political consumerism by socio-demographic characteristics in Western Europe, 2002-2003 (in percentages)

	AUS	BEL	DEN	FIN	FRAN	GER	GREE	IRE	ITA	NETH	NOR	POR	SPAIN	SWE	SWI	UK
<i>GENDER</i>																
Men	34	28*	44*	38*	36	40*	11	28	8	27	34*	8	14	54*	47*	38
Women	35	34*	52*	55*	37	50*	13	29	11	30	44*	8	14	67*	54*	42
<i>AGE</i>																
15-34	37	34	51	56*	38	43	15*	29	7*	26	43	10	20*	66	38*	33*
35-54	38	33	53	48	42*	53*	17*	36*	15*	32*	44*	11*	15	65	58*	48*
55 to oldest	28*	23*	41*	37*	28*	39*	6*	20*	7*	26	30*	4*	7*	51*	50	39
<i>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</i>																
Employed	37	35*	53*	53*	43*	50*	16*	33*	13*	32*	43*	10*	19*	65*	52	45*
Student	45*	36*	49	52	22	48	17*	27	8	24	44	17*	21*	62	37*	30*
Unemployed	30	24	37*	40	32	34*	7*	26	6*	31	38	2*	9*	57	41	37
Retired/disabled	26*	20*	35*	31*	26*	34*	7*	19*	6*	22*	24*	4*	4*	45*	46	35*
Housewife	33	31	59*	61*	33	54*	8*	26	13	27	34	4*	9*	61	55*	36
<i>LEVEL of EDUCATION</i>																
From not completed to 2nd stage of basic education (or Lower secondary)	21*	17*	30*	34*	24*	31*	6*	17*	5*	16*	17*	5*	7*	49*	34*	27*
Upper secondary and Post secondary (or non-tertiary)	37	34	50	48	40	44	17*	36*	16*	31	36	18*	17*	67*	51	47*
Tertiary education	59*	55*	69*	66*	58*	61*	25*	50*	20*	49*	60*	20*	34*	73*	71*	66*

Notes: Entries are the percentages of people in each group that realised political consumer actions. An asterisk means that the percentages differ statistically significant from the mean values of the overall sample for a level of confidence of at least 95%.

Table 5. Political consumerism by social class in Western Europe, 2002-2003 (in percentages)

	AUS	BEL	DEN	FIN	GER	GREE	IRE	ITA	NETH	POR	SPAIN	SWE	SWI	UK
SEVEN-CLASS EGP scheme (farmers and agricultural labourers collapsed)														
Service class (I+II)	44*	46*	63*	63*	58*	22*	44*	19*	37*	17*	28*	73*	61*	57*
Routine non-manual workers (III)	36	30	48	48	42	18*	28	14	27	10	18*	60	48	36*
Petty bourgeoisie (IVa+IVb)	36	19*	40	46	50	12	35	5*	30	5	17	47*	53	35
Farm workers (IVc+VIIb)	20*	9*	36	37*	34	5*	20*	2*	5*	5	4*	44	41	40
Skilled workers (V+VI)	24*	19*	39*	34*	36*	10	20*	7	16*	4*	7*	51*	35*	25*
Non-Skilled workers (VIIa)	15*	22*	29*	31*	34*	8*	14*	9	17*	3*	8*	42*	45	26*
SEVEN-CLASS EGP SCHEME (Service class divided, and farmers and agricultural labourers collapsed)														
Managers, administrator and large proprietors (I)	44	54*	58	57	56	15	37	15	35	8	18	63	56	51*
Professionals, high-class technicians, supervisors non-manual workers (II)	44*	45*	64*	64*	59*	24*	46*	17*	39*	17*	30*	74*	63*	59*
Routine non-manual workers (III)	36	30	49	48	43	18*	28	15*	26	10	18	61	48	36*
Petty bourgeoisie (IVa+IVb)	36	19*	40	46	50	12	35	5*	30	5	17	47*	53	35
Farm workers (IVc+VIIb)	20*	10*	36	37*	34	5*	20	2*	5*	5	4*	44	40	40
Skilled workers (V+VI)	24*	18*	39*	34*	36*	10	21*	7	16*	3*	7*	51*	34*	24*
Non-Skilled workers (VIIa)	15*	23*	31*	31*	35*	8*	13*	9	16*	5	8*	42*	46	27*

Notes: Entries are the percentages of people in each group that realised political consumer actions. An asterisk means that the percentages differ statistically significant from the mean values of the overall sample for a level of confidence of at least 95%. For France and Norway, the EGP class scheme was not calculated due to different coding of the ISCO-88 (for France, only two digits) and lack of some suitable variables (Norway). The categories 'farmers' and 'agricultural labourers' were collapsed due to the low number of cases in these categories in most countries.

Table 6. Multivariate analysis of the social determinants of political consumerism in Western Europe

Dependent variable is 1 (yes) and 0 (no)

	AUS	BEL	DEN	FIN	GER	GREE	IRE	ITA	NETH	POR	SPAIN	SWE	SWI	UK
Women	,01	,39**	,39**	,67**	,56**	,34*	,08	,44+	,21*	,02	-,11	,70**	,32**	,21*
35-54 °	-,03	-,09	,01	-,55**	,20+	,32*	,32*	,90**	,33**	,62*	-,22	-,19	,60**	,61**
55 to oldest °	-,32*	-,23	-,30*	-,69**	-,27*	-,26	-,08	,62+	,22	-,37	-,63*	-,57**	,38**	,56**
From not completed to 1 st basic education	-2,75**	-1,55**	-1,94**	-1,12**	-1,06**	-1,48**	-1,48**	-2,20**	-1,70**	-1,49**	-1,61**	-,62**	-1,07**	-1,73*
Lower Secondary	-1,37**	-1,43**	-1,27**	-,62**	-,96**	-,90**	-1,03**	-1,01*	-1,47**	-,53	-1,29**	-,33*	-1,36**	-1,47**
Upper secondary and post secondary	-,80**	-,69**	-,58**	-,42**	-,59**	-,58**	-,41*	-,14	-,68**	-,15	-,63**	,08	-,68**	-,63**
Routine non-manual workers (III)	-,11	-,35*	-,39*	-,61**	-,51**	,11	-,33*	-,03	,05	-,29	-,05	-,61**	-,38**	-,24+
Petty bourgeoisie (IVa+IVb)	-,06	-,94**	-,54*	-,21	-,11	-,13	-,05	-,90*	-,06	-,96*	,21	-,73**	-,14	-,50**
Farm workers (IVc+VIIb)	-,81**	-1,69**	-,41	-,50*	-,57*	-,56+	-,52*	-1,28+	-1,79**	-,17	-1,01*	-,66*	-,49*	-,02
Skilled workers (V+VI)	-,52**	-,77**	-,57**	-,76**	-,52**	-,21	-,63**	-,34	-,51*	-,76+	-,67*	-,55**	-,68**	-,64**
Non-Skilled workers (VIIa)	-,93**	-,32	-,87**	-,97**	-,66**	-,32	-,93**	,15	-,44+	-,81	-,69+	-1,01**	-,20	-,51**
Constant	,51	-,15	,46	,24	-,16	-1,60	-,14	-2,58	-,54	-1,47	-,29	,36	,11	,04
N	1957	1488	1407	1896	2559	1990	1755	946	2212	1285	1372	1920	1870	1951
LR Chi-square	157,02**	162,01**	137,8**	247,4**	195,6**	125,1**	170,6**	71,02**	214,3**	77,3**	127,5**	196,8**	152,41**	258,2**
DF	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Pseudo R-square (Nagelkerke)	,11	,14	,12	,16	,09	,11	,13	,14	,13	,14	,16	,13	,11	,16
% correctly classified	67%	71%	63%	66%	61%	87%	71%	89%	72%	92%	85%	66%	62%	67%

Notes: Entries are binomial logit maximum-likelihood estimates. p<0,01=**, p<0,05=*, p<0,10=+.

° Reference categories: age=15-34; level of education=tertiary education; class EGP scheme=service class (I+II)

