


# Exploring class identification among Finnish party members

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## Abstract

Class cleavage has been an important factor in forming the West-European party systems, and class identification can still be considered one of the key types of social identity, especially among members of older parties. Nevertheless, previous research has ignored the importance of party members' class identifications. In this study, we hypothesise that party affiliation can form a context of social identity in which party members' class identification is also strengthened. By analysing unique survey data of 12,427 members of the six largest Finnish parties, we examine the extent to which party members' class identifications stem from their party affiliations and how the relationship is reinforced by their partisan identity. The results suggest that traditional class-cleavage elements still appear within class identification among the members of older parties. Members of left-wing parties identified with the working class, and conversely, upper-class identification was more prominent among members of centre-right parties. Among members of newer political parties, the class was less relevant compared to members of traditional class-based parties. Furthermore, we found that working-class identification was strongly related to the strength of partisan identity.

## KEYWORDS

class identification, Finland, Partisan identity, party members

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between political parties and their members' identities represents a crucial element of contemporary political systems, as the members of political parties continue to exercise power effectively at different levels of society (Demker et al., 2019; Van Haute & Gauja, 2015). Recent studies on political party members have focused, for example, on motives to join parties, representativeness, political perceptions and political participation (see, e.g., Demker et al., 2019; Van Haute & Gauja, 2015). None of the studies has taken the subjective class identities of the members into consideration, despite the persisting relevance of class cleavage in Western party systems and the role of class identity as a key element in the formation of social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The majority of research on class identification and party support has focused solely on voters (Langsæther, 2019) or citizens (Bankert et al., 2017), even though party members' identities may intersect to form potentially widespread attitudes at the individual, group and intergroup levels (Koivula et al., 2019).

Simply put, the starting point for this study is twofold: first, the changes in political structure give current research a prolific starting point from which to study class identification, especially among little-studied party members. Second, researchers have noticed that class identification among the Finnish electorate is relatively high in relation to common discussions on class voting and social classes' decline in general (Tiihonen, 2021). Approximately 9 out of 10 eligible voters identify with a social class in 21st-century Finland. Furthermore, scholars have argued that class identification is a relevant determinant of citizens' political behaviour, especially in Nordic countries (Oskarson, 1994; van der Eijk et al., 2005).

In addition, we claim that party members are an important group to study in this context for three reasons. First, from the perspective of representation, they can be seen as reflecting a party's supporters and their will in general (Achury et al., 2020; Van Holsteyn et al., 2017). Second, from the perspective of socialisation, party members' strong class identities can indicate parties' ability to maintain symbolic class consciousness among their members (Koivula et al., 2020; Widfeldt, 1995). By studying party members' class identities, we can provide new knowledge on the intricacies of traditional class politics. Lastly, we argue that party membership allows for a reliable assessment of a party's impact on the evolution of class identification with a more permanent and ideologically consistent measurement of party affiliation compared to, for example, a voting decision (Heidar, 2006).

In this study, we are interested in party members' class identification. We assess how partisan identity strengthens this association among Finnish party members. More specifically, we seek to analyse the extent to which a party member's class identification stems directly from their party affiliation and how

it is emphasised by their partisan identity. This is an interesting question to explore, as the significance of party membership varies not only between parties but also between party members (Gauja, 2015). Our focus is on the members of the six largest Finnish political parties, namely the Centre Party (CPF), Finns Party (FP), National Coalition Party (NCP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Green League (GL) and Left Alliance (LA).

The cooperation between trade unions and parties has been a characteristic feature of class politics in Nordic countries (Epstein, 1967; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Westinen, 2015). This cooperation has been traditional at the organisational and individual levels. In practice, at the organisation level, cooperation has meant, for instance, mutual joint committees, decision-making processes and decision-making bodies. At the individual level, cooperation has meant joint election campaigns, regular events and conferences as well as the tight connection among voters; that is, certain trade union's members' tendencies to vote for a certain political party (Raunio & Laine, 2017; Tiihonen, 2016). Therefore, we also analyse how different confounding variables, namely party members' collaboration with trade unions and the corporate sector, explain the differences between the analysed parties' partisans. Moreover, we consider their socioeconomic status (SES), which has been traditionally strongly connected with class issues (Westinen, 2015). Additionally, we are interested in the possible differences between older and newer parties' members' class identification. In our classification, newer parties are the GL and FP, and older parties include the SDP, CPF, NCP and LA.

Before turning to the empirical study, we discuss partisan identity and class identification as forms of social identity. Then, we conclude these two aspects by presenting our key arguments for studying the linkage between partisan identity and class identification among Finnish party members. We also formulate our hypotheses based on class cleavage and party differences in Finland. Then, we present our data and methods. Our analysis begins by considering the effects of independent variables, namely SES, occupational networks and partisan identity. In these models, we also control for the effect of age and gender. In the second part of the analysis, we explore whether partisan identity has altering effects on class identification across the party spectrum. In the [Discussion](#) section, we present implications of our findings by considering potential limitations and further research avenues.

## **PARTISAN IDENTITY AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY**

This study is grounded on social psychology models in which individuals' social identity evolves continually through comparisons and negotiations between the self and others. More specifically, self-awareness in relation to other people is formed in new ways as individuals go through the process of social interaction (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social interaction is also a crucial element in the case of

political identity, and partisan ties can be treated as ‘similar to identifications with a social class, religious denomination, or other social group’ (Dalton, 2016, p. 2). Accordingly, a political party gives a concrete expression of social identity, and thus, differences between social identities can be understood through party comparisons.

Early studies on partisan identity have not only focused on party supporters in a two-party system such as in the United States but also multiparty systems in Europe. Political identity typically addresses citizens and party supporters’ identification with a major political party (Bankert et al., 2017; Greene, 2004). However, there are no studies about party members’ class identification, or even on the concept that political party membership can be a crucial part of individuals’ social identity and have predictive power in assessing reference groups and social categorisations. A principal way for members with a stronger social (party) identity to differentiate from other parties’ members is to become more ideological (Greene, 2004). Hence, in the context of class-based parties, a way to differentiate from other parties may be stronger class identification.

The first well-known analogy of the influential party identification model was built by Campbell et al. (1960) when they developed the so-called Michigan model. In the model, party identification functions as a kind of ‘perceptual screen’ that allows for making or restricting choices even if the individual does not have enough knowledge (Kinsey & Popkin, 1993). Jacoby (1988) has argued that the idea of the ‘perceptual screen’ is based on the same assumptions as reference group theory (Hyman & Singer, 1968) in which individuals form a bond with groups that promote particular types of activities or attitudes.

Empirical studies have confirmed that these theories are relevant in the 21st century. In this view, parties are not only a channel or platform for individuals to promote opinions but also possessed of the power to shape individuals’ opinions and value preferences (Druckman et al., 2013; Goren et al., 2009). Based on these studies, partisan identity is rather stable, despite the political environment per party leader changes. For example, Goren (2005, p. 881) proved through panel analysis ‘that partisan identities are more stable than the principles of equal opportunity, limited government, traditional family values and moral tolerance; partisan identity constrains equal opportunity, limited government, and moral tolerance; and these political values do not constrain party identification’. This so-called expressive partisanship is grounded in social identity theory (Bankert et al., 2017), which means that citizens as individuals may feel a sense of belonging with the party (Green et al., 2002).

## CLASS IDENTIFICATION AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY

In this study, we are interested in a subjective approach to Finnish party members’ social class positions, namely class identification. The reference group theory (Centers, 1949) in social psychology distinguishes between citizens’

subjective class identities and objective class positions in the mid-20th century. According to it, citizens' class identities do not always coincide with their objective class positions. Thus these two indicators should not be seen as reflections of each other. Furthermore, the theory highlights that, in fact, when compared with objective class positions, citizens' subjective class identities have more of an effect on citizens' values and behaviour.

The reference group theory has been noted in election studies as well. For instance, in class voting studies—in which voters' class positions have traditionally been measured with objective class indicators, namely their occupations—considering class identification as a link between voters' class position and vote choices has become more common (e.g., Oskarson, 1994; Sosnaud et al., 2013).

Generally, in the political behaviour literature, the subjective approach to class has been often founded on the concept of class identification. Put simply, class identification tackles a fundamental question: “how people see themselves?” (G. Evans & Tilley, 2017, p. 42). Empirically, class identification is intended to discover people's subjective views on what they are and which class they consider themselves to represent. In theory, class identification and subjective class belonging are not synonyms, but rather divergent concepts. Class identification does not require strong feelings about being a member of a class; it requires awareness of being close to a certain class (Oskarson, 1994, p. 113).

Particularly in political and social psychology, class identification is considered the first component of class consciousness (Robison & Stubager, 2018). According to this view, class identification requires class consciousness; in other words, awareness of various classes in society (e.g., M. D. R. Evans & Kelley, 2004; Jackman, 1979). Obviously, self-(class) identification can only occur if there is an awareness of the existence of social classes. After that, one can attach to them and establish class identification (Robinson & Stubager, 2017, p. 5).

However, there are differing views on class consciousness and identification. Although many scholars have presented class consciousness as a vital condition for class identification, some have argued that class identification does not require one to share certain class interests or even be aware of them (e.g., Butler & Stokes, 1974). From this point of view, class identification is considered more a result of a long-lasting socialisation process alongside one's own experiences. Undoubtedly, as in partisan identity, family plays a key role in the socialisation process (Sapiro, 2004). Previous research has also acknowledged the important role of education in moderating and mediating the influence of childhood social class on adult life (e.g., Knutsen, 2006; Tiihonen, 2021). Due to various views on the linkage between class consciousness and class identification, these two concepts are separated or not separated to varying degrees in different studies. In the empirical section of this study, class consciousness and class identification

are regarded as overlapping concepts following the thinking of Butler and Stokes (1974) as well as Sapiro (2004).

## **BRINGING IT TOGETHER—PARTY AFFILIATION AS A CONTEXT FOR PARTISAN IDENTITY AND CLASS IDENTIFICATION**

In this study, we study party affiliation as the basis for partisan identity and class identification, but foremost the linkage between these separate social identities among Finnish party members. Our argument is grounded on two findings previous studies have provided on party systems and party members. First, political parties and systems have traditionally been built on the most central conflict in society, that is, class cleavage (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Voters have aligned with parties in accordance with class cleavage, as well (*ibid.*). Furthermore, according to Bartolini and Mair's seminal cleavage typology (1990), social cleavage must fulfil three elements to become a political cleavage: structural, psychological and normative/organisational. Our study focuses on the two latter elements: psychological and normative/organisational. The first one refers to Bartolini and Mair's (1990) individuals' subjective consciousness about their status, which is measured as their class identification in this study's context. The second one, the organisational element, refers to political parties that have resulted from mobilisation around the structural elements of the class cleavage (Bartolini and Mair's, 1990).

Second, our argument is rooted in the findings concerning motives to join parties. Heidar and Kosiara-Pedersen (2019) studied party member's motives to join parties in the 21st century in the Nordic countries. In their study, they applied Wilson's (1973) typology, which gathers rational-choice motives together with social-psychology motives for party membership. Altogether, this typology consists of four incentives for memberships: material, specific solidarity, collective solidarity and purposive incentives. In this study, we shed light on collective solidarity, which emphasises group identities. Despite some studies (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Panebianco, 1988) having argued that group identities have declined significantly during the past couple of decades, we highlight its importance in terms of class identification due to the parties' emergence on the social cleavage model.

Moreover, Heidar and Kosiara-Pedersen (2019) found that ideology is the most important reason to join New Politics parties, whereas the members of the old political parties have joined the parties also because of the social cleavage the party represents. There are not only numerous reasons to join a party but also very different ways to be a party member. Party members receive cues on what it means to be a member from various sources: parties and other political institutions, norms of the prevalent democratic system and their own experiences and preferences (Gauja, 2015). Hence, people not only join parties

due to various ideological or social factors but the parties also actively shape the social identities of party members.

## CLASS CLEAVAGE AND PARTY DIFFERENCES IN FINLAND

In Western democracies, political parties and systems have been formed around the most central conflict in society, that is, the class cleavage (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Some have claimed that the party systems remained unchanged until the late 20th century when newer parties started to establish themselves. At the same time, the distance between class and party has purportedly grown deeper, due to the increasing importance of ‘new politics’ issues—such as minority rights, immigration and environmental protection—and increased social mobility (Inglehart, 1977; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These trends apply to the Finnish party system as well. In addition to this, rural–urban and language-cleavage have traditionally been the most significant determinants of the Finnish party system (e.g., Karvonen, 2014; Paloheimo, 2008). Over the past decade, sociocultural cleavage has become more central in Finnish party systems as well as elsewhere in Western Europe. During the 2010s, changes in the Finnish political system were significant, as the populist right-wing party, the FP, established its position as one of the largest parliamentary parties in Finland through its 2011 general election victory. The other newer party, the GL, has also steadily increased its support in the 21st century's general elections (Borg, 2019; Borg et al., 2020).

Before the 2011 general election and the historical victory of the FP, the traditional class-based parties, the SDP, NCP and CPF, had dominated the political field for over 30 years (Karvonen, 2014). The SDP has traditionally had a strong relationship with trade unions and especially labour organisations, whereas the interests of the upper class, employers' organisations and entrepreneurs have been supported by the NCP (Koironen et al., 2017; Tiihonen, 2016). The CPF has been a popular party, especially in rural areas among agrarians, thus standing out from the SDP and NCP in the middle of the traditional class-based cleavage (Arter, 2012). The LA is concerned with income inequality and has focused on class-based issues supporting the large welfare state, while backing the same kind of new-politics issues as the GL does (Eskelinen, 2015; Karvonen, 2014). However, the LA still has the highest share of working-class members among the Finnish parties (Saarinen et al., 2018b) and carries on the left-of-centre-left legacy of its predecessors. Therefore, we classified it as an older left-wing party, along with the SDP. Support for the new parties, particularly for the FP, comes not only from the expected demographics such as the working class but also includes votes from higher social positions (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018; Sivonen et al., 2019). On the other hand, many supporters and members tend to hail from rather low socioeconomic

backgrounds, yet values and attitudes concerning social policy resemble those of centre-right parties (Koivula et al., 2020). Likewise, the GL represents generally high SES, yet its members' sociopolitical attitudes lean towards the left (Bolin, 2016; Saarinen et al., 2018a). The FP's roots are in defending rural communities, but over the past decade, it has strengthened in cities and suburban areas. In contrast, support for the GL has been high, particularly in the largest city areas.

In general, it seems that for newer parties, economic factors are no longer the core issues of politics when compared to cultural and identity factors, such as gender or ethnicity (Knutsen, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In Finland, the dividing line has been revealed, especially between the FP and GL, and issue alignment is particularly related to immigration and the environment (Koiranen et al., 2020; Koivula et al., 2020). In recent years, the polarisation between these parties has grown even deeper. A recent study on the candidates of municipal elections showed an increased ideological divergence between the FP and GL and increased ideological consistency within these parties regarding attitudes towards refugees (Lönnqvist et al., 2020).

Even though postmaterial issues have become crucial parts of daily politics, Finnish parties have a different history concerning how parties are linked to socioeconomic groups and how they collaborate with class-based interest groups, such as trade unions (Koiranen et al., 2017; Saarinen et al., 2018a, 2018b). In this respect, we present the hypotheses of the study in relation to the main socio-economic cleavages of the Finnish party spectrum. We also draw on the assumption that stronger class identification is a way to differentiate parties, especially in the context of class-based parties.

First, we assume that members of traditional class-based parties, namely the LA, SDP and NCP, are more likely to identify with the working class and upper social classes. More specifically, we hypothesise that (H1) the members of left-wing parties (the LA and SDP) are identified with the working class, and the members of centre-right party (the NCP) are identified with the upper class.

We acknowledge that SES affects political opinions and is generally related to party choice (e.g., Langsæther, 2019). In this respect, we expect party members' SES to predict how they identify with different classes. We also expect that it is related to party differences. We hypothesise that (H2) SES will explain differences between centre-right parties (the NCP) and left-wing parties (the LA and SDP) when it comes to identification with higher social and working classes.

Third, we expect that members' occupational networks will be reflected in their class identification. In this regard, we consider the parties' histories as drivers of the interests of various stakeholders and analyse how collaborations with the corporate sector and trade unions are linked to party differences in terms of class identification. We hypothesise that (H3) collaboration with trade

unions and the corporate sector relates to the way left-wing (the LA and SDP) and centre-right (the NCP) party members identify with class.

Finally, we considered the moderating effect of partisan identity. As we suggested, the party can be considered a social context shaping members' social identity and can be used to differentiate those members from members of other parties (Goren, 2005; Green et al., 2002). In this respect, it is reasonable to expect that identification with certain social classes is stronger among members having strong partisan ties with class-based parties. More specifically, we propose that stronger partisan identity is associated with strong class identification among the right- and left-wing parties' members. We hypothesise that (H4) partisan identity moderates the association between party affiliation and class identification by increasing differences between the centre-right (the NCP) and left-wing parties (the LA and SDP).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Participants

The analysis is based on the survey data from 12,427 members of the six largest parties in Finland: the SDP, NCP, CPF, FP, GL and LA. We collected data from party members between March and September 2016. The final response rates varied between 17% and 34% across the six parties. Sample sizes varied across parties based on the coverage of parties' email registers (see Table 1). Across the parties, older members were slightly underrepresented, and we have therefore corrected their proportion to meet population criteria with a weight variable. To compare the parties, we have also weighted them to represent their population shares and thereby proportionally reflect the Finnish political spectrum. The population figures are based on the total number of members that parties reported at the time of data collection. Table 1 displays more detailed information about data collection and the samples.

### Measures

Our dependent variable was class identification<sup>1</sup>, and our independent variable was party affiliation. We generated a new variable 'Class Identification' for the analysis. We merged 'upper class' and 'upper-middle class' into the same category, which we labelled 'Upper class'. We used 'middle class', 'lower-middle class' and 'working class' in their original form. Those who had identified with other classes and those who had no class identification were separated into the category 'Other'. In the analysis, we focused mainly on predicting identification with the higher class or working class (see Table 2).

To find the adjusted effect of partisan identity, we controlled for the effect of other variables: age, gender, SES and occupational networks. We focussed

TABLE 1 Description of data collection, samples and weighting

	Time	Response mode	Population	Sample size	Final sample	Mean weight
The Greens of Finland (GL)	Apr 2016	Web <sup>a</sup>	6951	6034 <sup>a</sup>	1653	0.23
Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP)	Jun 2016	Web and mail <sup>b</sup>	40,754	5000 <sup>b</sup>	1540	1.61
Centre Party of Finland (CPF)	Jun 2016	Web and mail <sup>b</sup>	101,618	22,097 <sup>b</sup>	3967	1.56
Left Alliance (LA)	Aug 2016	Web and mail <sup>b</sup>	10,173	6764 <sup>b</sup>	2384	0.26
The Finns Party (FP)	Sep 2016	Web and mail <sup>b</sup>	9520	6022 <sup>b</sup>	1932	0.30
The National Coalition Party (NCP)	Sep 2016	Web <sup>c</sup>	35,000	5000 <sup>c</sup>	951	2.24
Total			204,016	50,917	12,427	12,427

<sup>a</sup>Total sample from email register.

<sup>b</sup>Simple random sample from both postal and email registers.

<sup>c</sup>Simple random sample from email register covering approximately 60% of the population.

**TABLE 2** Descriptive statistics of applied variables

Variable	Obs	%/Mean	Std. dev.	Range
<i>Dependent variable = Class identification</i>				
Upper class		14.0%		
Middle class		41.3		
Lower middle class		14.9		
No class identification/else		8.7		
Working class		21.1		
<i>Independent variable = Party affiliation</i>				
The National Coalition Party (NCP)	12,427	7.7%		1.0–6.0
The Green League (GL)		13.3		
The Centre Party of Finland (CPF)		31.9		
The Finns Party (FP)		15.5		
The Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP)		12.4		
The Left Alliance (LA)		19.2		
<i>Moderating variable</i>				
Partisan identity	12,212	3.5	1.1	1.0–5.0
<i>Confounding variables:</i>				
Socioeconomic index (ISEI)	10,471	53.7	21.9	11.6–89.0
Collaboration with the trade unions	11,928	2.2	1.2	1.0–5.0
Collaboration with the corporate sector	11,734	2.0	1.2	1.0–5.0
<i>Control variables: Age</i>				
Age	12,088	55.4	14.9	16.0–99.0
<i>Control variables: Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)</i>				
Gender	12,334	0.4	0.5	0.0–1.0

especially on the confounding effects of SES and occupational networks and did not separately report the effects of age and gender. To measure SES, we used the Standard International Socioeconomic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI). The ISEI is a useful status measurement because of its multidimensionality, as SES is predicted by considering occupations' average incomes and education levels (Ganzeboom et al., 1992). Koivula et al. (2020) and Rehmert (2021) used ISEI scores in their studies of political party members.

In the survey, we initially asked about occupation with an open-ended question, after which we categorised it based on the ISCO-08. Then we recoded

**TABLE 3** Predicting class identification by party affiliation, SES, collaboration with occupational networks and partisan identity

Variables	Upper	Middle	Lower middle	Working
<i>Party affiliation</i>				
NCP (ref.)				
GL	-1.59 (0.19)***	-1.11 (0.19)***	-0.34 (0.23)	0.43 (0.36)
CPF	-1.71 (0.19)***	-0.73 (0.18)***	0.22 (0.22)	0.67 (0.34)
FP	-2.80 (0.20)***	-1.44 (0.19)***	-0.14 (0.22)	1.91 (0.34)***
SDP	-1.29 (0.23)***	-0.35 (0.22)	0.48 (0.25)	3.40 (0.36)***
LA	-2.91 (0.21)***	-1.78 (0.19)***	-0.23 (0.22)	2.78 (0.34)***
McFadden's $R^2$	0.095			
Observations	12,427			
SES	0.07 (0.00)***	0.03 (0.00)***	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)***
McFadden's $R^2$	0.079			
Observations	10,471			
Collaboration with corporate sector	0.53 (0.05)***	0.20 (0.04)***	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.24 (0.05)***
McFadden's $R^2$	0.025			
Observations	11,928			
Collaboration with trade unions	0.33 (0.05)***	0.30 (0.05)***	0.21 (0.05)***	0.63 (0.05)***
McFadden's $R^2$	0.012			
Observations	11,734			
Partisan identity	0.29 (0.05)***	0.24 (0.04)***	0.20 (0.05)***	0.29 (0.05)***
McFadden's $R^2$	0.003			
Observations	12,212			

*Note:* Multinomial logit models. Multinomial logit coefficients with standard errors. Base category = No class identification/else.

Abbreviations: CPF, Centre Party; FP, Finns Party; GL, Green League; LA, Left Alliance; NCP, National Coalition Party; SDP, Social Democratic Party; SES, socioeconomic status.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

the responses as ISEI scores according to the introduction by Ganzeboom (2010). We did not separate retired, unemployed or studying people into their own categories. Instead, we asked respondents to report their prior occupation if they were not currently working.

Many party members also act in various extra-parliamentary networks. When we focus on class issues, occupational networks are especially noteworthy. In our analysis, we measured how party members have collaborated with the corporate sector and trade unions. The original question was, ‘How involved are you in cooperating with the following?’ We asked collaborators this question separately, and the given responses ranged between 1 (*not at all*) and 5 (*very much*).

Finally, our moderating variable was partisan identity, which we also used as a confounding variable. We used a single-item measurement based on the original question: ‘How strongly do you feel that you are part of your own political party?’ We scored the responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strongly*). Most of the recent studies on partisan identity relied on single-item measures (Long et al., 2019; Mason, 2015), but some researchers, such as Bankert et al. (2017), used a multi-item approach.

## Analysis strategy

The analysis began by assessing party affiliation's effects on the dependent variable while holding control variables constant. We employed multinomial logit regression to model the likelihood of members identifying as upper, middle, lower-middle or working class. We examined how variables predict class identification according to multinomial logit coefficients and McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$ .

Then we constructed the multivariate models to predict the relationship between party affiliation and identification with the upper class or working class. In Tables 4 and 5, we first present the direct association between party affiliation and class identification without confounding variables, and then we introduced the confounding variables step-by-step into the base model. Finally, we estimated the total effect of a party with each confounding variable considered. We presented the results as the conditional marginal effects, which we postestimated from the multinomial logit coefficients. The marginal effects can be interpreted as the change in probability of identification due to a unit change in the predicting variable.

To evaluate the extent to which the confounding variables explained the differences between parties, we used the method Karlson et al. (2012) developed, that is, the Karlson–Holm–Breen method. More specifically, we decomposed the relationship between party affiliation and class identification based on confounding variables while holding control variables constant. By doing so, we could estimate the indirect effects of party affiliation via confounding variables. We present the indirect effects as logit coefficients in Table A1.

Finally, regarding our fourth hypothesis, we assessed the interaction effect between partisan identity and party affiliation. In this final model, our intent

**TABLE 4** Predicting upper-class identification by party affiliation and confounding variables, postestimated conditional marginal effects from multinomial logistic regression

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
NCP (reference category)					
GL	-0.131*** (0.020)	-0.132*** (0.018)	-0.053* (0.022)	-0.129*** (0.021)	-0.072*** (0.019)
CPF	-0.226*** (0.017)	-0.143*** (0.017)	-0.183*** (0.017)	-0.228*** (0.017)	-0.117*** (0.016)
FP	-0.306*** (0.017)	-0.220*** (0.018)	-0.254*** (0.017)	-0.307*** (0.017)	-0.187*** (0.017)
SDP	-0.269*** (0.018)	-0.192*** (0.018)	-0.210*** (0.019)	-0.272*** (0.018)	-0.154*** (0.018)
LA	-0.321*** (0.016)	-0.244*** (0.017)	-0.247*** (0.018)	-0.324*** (0.017)	-0.189*** (0.018)
Age	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)
Female	-0.039*** (0.009)	-0.036*** (0.009)	-0.021* (0.009)	-0.039*** (0.009)	-0.020* (0.010)
SES		0.006*** (0.000)			0.044*** (0.004)
Collaboration with the corporate sector			0.051*** (0.004)		-0.008 (0.004)
Collaboration with trade unions			-0.003 (0.004)		0.005*** (0.000)
Partisan identity				0.013** (0.004)	0.009 (0.005)
McFadden's pseudo $R^2$	0.09	0.17	0.11	0.09	0.18
Wald $\chi^2$	2446.1***	2353.8***	2447.3***	2458.0***	2334.2***
Observations	11,966	10,139	11,236	11,778	9562

*Note:* Conditional marginal effects from multinomial logit regression. Predictable category: 'Upper class'. Standard errors in parentheses.

Abbreviations: CPF, Centre Party; FP, Finns Party; GL, Green League; LA, Left Alliance; NCP, National Coalition Party; SDP, Social Democratic Party; SES, socioeconomic status.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

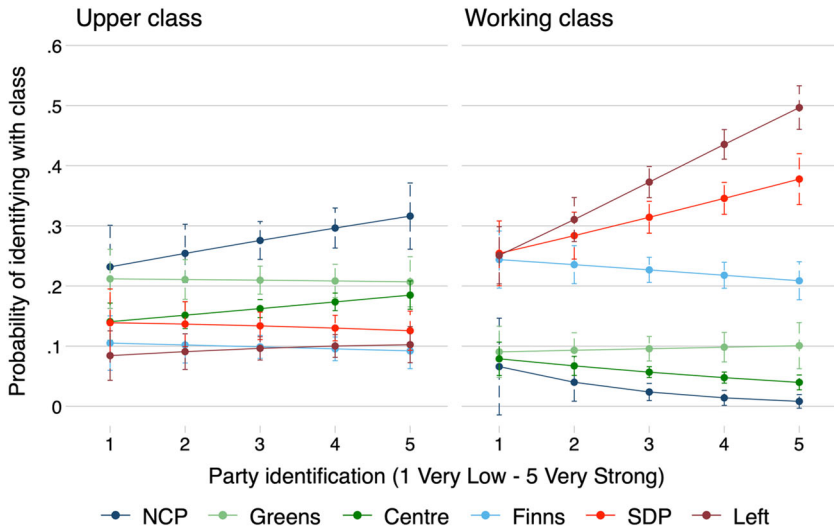
**TABLE 5** Predicting working-class identification by party affiliation and confounding variables, postestimated conditional marginal effects from multinomial logistic regression

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
NCP (reference category)					
GL	0.043*** (0.007)	0.064*** (0.014)	0.034*** (0.008)	0.044*** (0.007)	0.056*** (0.015)
CPF	0.041*** (0.005)	0.013 (0.010)	0.043*** (0.007)	0.040*** (0.005)	0.013 (0.012)
FP	0.250*** (0.011)	0.193*** (0.014)	0.240*** (0.012)	0.246*** (0.011)	0.183*** (0.015)
SDP	0.371*** (0.013)	0.343*** (0.015)	0.306*** (0.014)	0.368*** (0.013)	0.288*** (0.017)
LA	0.496*** (0.012)	0.436*** (0.014)	0.391*** (0.014)	0.493*** (0.012)	0.363*** (0.017)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Female	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.000 (0.007)	-0.016* (0.007)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)
SES		-0.004*** (0.000)			-0.029*** (0.004)
Collaboration with the corporate sector			-0.042*** (0.003)		0.004*** (0.003)
Collaboration with trade unions			0.023*** (0.003)		0.020*** (0.003)
Partisan identity				0.002 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)
McFadden's pseudo $R^2$	0.09	0.17	0.11	0.09	0.18
Wald $\chi^2$	2446.1***	2353.8***	2447.3***	2458.0***	2334.2***
Observations	11,966	10,139	11,236	11,778	9562

*Note:* Predictable category: 'Working class' Standard errors in parentheses. Conditional marginal effects from multinomial logit regression.

Abbreviations: CPF, Centre Party; FP, Finns Party; GL, Green League; LA, Left Alliance; NCP, National Coalition Party; SDP, Social Democratic Party; SES, socioeconomic status.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**FIGURE 1** Interactions between partisan identity and party affiliation when predicting upper-class and working-class identifications. NCP, National Coalition Party; SDP, Social Democratic Party

was to determine whether partisan identity has a moderating effect on class identification across the party spectrum. Figure 1 shows the interaction analysis we conducted using user-written Stata packages, namely *coefplots* (Jann, 2014).

## RESULTS

We conducted the first analyses to find individual associations between each background variable and class identification. The results in Table 3 indicate that each variable was related to class identification to some extent. The differences between the parties were most remarkable when predicting upper-class and working-class identification. Higher SES was positively associated with upper-class identification and negatively with working-class identification. Collaboration with the corporate sector was positively associated with upper-class identification but negatively with working-class identification. Instead, collaboration with trade unions was associated positively with each class category, as was partisan identity. According to the McFadden pseudo- $R^2$ , class identification was explained by party affiliation at 9.5% and SES at 7.9%. The other variables modelled explained only a maximum of 2.5% of the variation in class identification. Next, we analysed more specifically how party affiliation was associated with upper-class identification when we considered other variables. Table 4 shows the results. The first model (M1) indicated that the largest

difference occurred between the NCP and the LA, as the members of the NCP were more than 30 percentage points likelier to identify with the upper class than were members of the LA. The difference was also remarkable between the NCP and the SDP.

A member's SES contributed to their identification with the upper class, as the second model (M2) shows. We also found that controlling for members' SES reduced the differences between parties. This finding shows that members of the NCP are, on average, of a higher SES than members of other parties, and their SES is linked to their higher probability of identification with the upper class.

The third model (M3) indicated that identification with the upper class was related to collaboration with the corporate sector. However, collaboration with trade unions was not associated with upper-class identification. The results of the decomposition analysis suggested that differences between parties in their occupation networks are related to their different tendencies in class identification. In general, as we standardised members' collaboration with the corporate sector, the differences between the parties increased. Indeed, standardising trade union collaboration would only seem to widen the gap between left-wing parties and the NCP.

The fourth model (M4) suggested that strong partisan identity increased identification with the upper class. However, according to the decomposition analysis, it did not appear to be linked to the differences between parties.

The full model (M5) indicated that party differences existed even after controlling for each confounding variable at the same time. The results indicated that members' SES was significantly associated with upper-class identification in the full model. We also found that collaboration with the corporate sector or partisan identity did not remain significant when we held other variables constant.

Next, we analysed party members' likelihood of having working-class identification. Table 5 shows the conditional marginal effects estimated from the same multinomial logit model as effects presented in Table 4. The first model (M1) suggested that the differences between the parties were even greater compared to upper-class identification. The members of the LA were almost 50 percentage points more likely to have working-class identification than the NCP's members. Also, the members of the SDP and FP were more likely to identify with the working class than the NCP's members. However, the differences in probability were less than 5 percentage points when we compared the members of the GL and CPF to the NCP's members.

The second model (M2) indicated that a given member's SES was negatively associated with working-class identification. The results of the decomposition analysis suggested that SES was also strongly linked to the differences between parties. In this respect, it seems that the differences between parties even increase when socioeconomic differences are standardised.

The third model (M3) showed that collaboration with occupational networks was related to working-class identification. Collaboration with the corporate sector was negatively associated with the likelihood of identification with the working class. According to the results of the decomposition analysis, it was also related to party differences, indicating that the differences between the parties were even greater if members' collaboration with the corporate sector was standardised. Collaboration with trade unions was also positively linked to working-class identification, regardless of the differences between parties.

The fourth model (M4) indicated that partisan identity did not appear to be related to identification with the working class. Moreover, we did not find a confounding effect of partisan identity on the differences between the parties.

The final model (M5) suggested that the party differences remained largely similar after controlling for each confounding variable simultaneously. However, the FP's effect was not retained in the final model. The results also indicated that members' SES, collaboration with trade unions and collaboration with the corporate sector were associated with working-class identification in the full model. Partisan identity was not related to working-class identification in the final model, either.

Finally, we conducted a two-way interaction analysis in which we analysed the extent to which partisan identity moderated party differences in class identification. We also controlled the effects of confounding variables presented in the previous sections of the analysis. As the results of the interaction analysis in Figure 1 shows strong partisan identity clearly increased the probability of working-class identification among the left-wing parties, the LA and SDP. At the same time, partisan identity slightly decreased the probability of identifying with the working class among the centre-right parties, namely the NCP and CPF, as well as among the FP. We did not find a similar interaction regarding upper-class identification. Instead, a stronger partisan identity was relatively insignificant in terms of it. Yet, the probability of identifying with the upper class increased slightly among those NCP members who had a strong partisan identity.

## DISCUSSION

This article has focused on class identification among party members of the six largest Finnish parties. First, we examined the extent to which party affiliation was associated with class identification. The results partly confirmed our first hypothesis (H1), as the members of the left-wing parties, the SDP and the LA, were more likely to identify with the working class, and the members of the centre-right party, the NCP, identified with the upper class.

Our second hypothesis (H2) was that SES explains the differences between parties in class identification. The results partly supported the hypothesis. Based

on our results, SES was associated with party members' upper-class identification, and it was also related to differences between parties. Members of the NCP were more likely to identify with the upper class than members of the LA. However, as an exception, SES did not significantly explain the GL members' upper-class identification.

Regarding party members' working-class identification, SES was a less significant factor than identification with the upper class. However, differences between parties were wider in identification with the working class than with the upper class. Compared to upper-class identification, SES bears a weaker connection to working-class identification. This finding indicates that identifying with the working class might be more related to the influence of political parties as a social reference group.

Third, we hypothesised (H3) that collaboration with the corporate sector and trade unions are the trajectories for how the left- and right-wing party members have identified with party and class. The results confirmed this hypothesis. Occupational networks were significantly connected with class identification: Collaboration with the corporate sector increased the likelihood of identifying with the upper class, and collaboration with trade unions increased the likelihood of working-class identification. Our results also proved that collaboration with trade unions and the corporate sector explained differences between parties.

Finally, we hypothesised (H4) that strong partisan identity is associated with strong class identification among the members of old class-based parties. The results partially confirmed the hypothesis. A striking result of this study was that if the members of left-wing parties, the SDP and the LA, have a strong party identity, they also have a strong working-class identification. Likewise, upper-class identification is more likely among those NCP members who had a strong partisan identity. Moreover, strong partisan identity was negatively associated with the likelihood of working-class identification among the members of the NCP, CPF and FP. At the same time, stronger partisan identity among the SDP's members decreased their likelihood of identifying with the upper class.

Overall, the connection between partisan identity and class identification differed between traditional and newer parties: Among traditional left-wing parties' members, stronger party identification was linked with working-class identification, but stronger party identification among right-wing parties' members was more likely connected to upper-class identification. Regarding especially the members of the GL, stronger party identity had very little effect on class identification.

Certain Finnish parties have had a long tradition of working either with labour market organisations or in the corporate sector. The NCP, especially, is often associated with close ties to the corporate sector whereas the SDP and LA have close links with trade unions. This study's results imply that these links are still connected to party members' class identities. For example, cooperation with

trade unions will likely strengthen working-class identity. We can consider this trend a continuation of the identity socialisation process, which often starts during a person's early years.

This study's results indicate that members' class identification is clearly linked with their party membership. This notion is also in line with the results of Bankert et al. (2017). Additionally, the results show that parties' independent explanatory power has become stronger and more independent of socio-demographic factors. Koivula (2019) also presented similar findings. However, we went a step further and proved that class identification varied between party affiliations: the relationship between party affiliation and class identification is associated with the level of party identification. This study's results suggest that the stronger the partisan identity is among the traditional parties' members, the greater the relationship between party affiliation and class identification.

Our research also showed that the CPF's members differ to some extent from the members of left-wing and right-wing parties. The CPF's members do not identify so strongly with working class or upper class. The CPF differs from the other parties with its larger number of members, which may be related to a more heterogeneous crowd of class identities as well (Koivula, 2019). In addition, the party has historically represented the interests of rural communities and farmers, which our class measure may not have been able to capture. However, it is noteworthy that stronger partisan identity among the CPF's members was negatively associated with working-class identification and positively associated with upper-class identification. In this regard, the core of the CPF seems to be closer to members of the right-wing NCP.

Whereas traditional political parties are formed largely around social-class conflict, the formation of newer parties is related more to identity and new value questions. This study's results support this claim: In particular, the GL's members were less likely to identify as working-class than left-wing parties' members and less likely to identify as upper-class than the NCP's members. Also important was that among members of newer parties, the FP and especially the GL, social class was a less relevant factor in terms of class identification than among traditional parties' members. Here, it is worth noting that the ISEI does not recognise a new postindustrial social-class structure, such as social-cultural specialist classes (Güveli, 2006), which may be connected to the relationship with newer parties and a new type of class identification. This topic would be suitable for further research.

Even though the FP enjoys strong support among workers and its members were likely to have working-class identification, a stronger party identity does not predict working-class identification. Instead, it makes such class identification less likely. It is possible that a group inside the Finnish working class does not find a social class as a relevant question and they base their party choices primarily on other factors. However, at the same time, stronger identification with left-wing parties increases the likelihood of having working-class

identification. This notion is interesting, especially regarding the LA, whose supporters have claimed to be shifting recently towards prosociocultural values and societal equality, as in many other Western industrial democracies. This finding applies especially to the party's highly educated supporters in Finland and elsewhere in Western democracies (Stubager, 2010; Westinen, 2015). An overall implication is that ideological cohesion, in terms of class identification, is the most important driving force among members of the LA despite all other nominators. Furthermore, despite the value shift, the LA's members appear still to rely on working-class identity, even stronger than the SDP's members.

Altogether, the findings suggest that class identification is not only linked to party membership but also associated with the strength of partisan identity. This result applies foremost to the Western European party systems, where both class cleavage and the division between socioeconomic left and right have been traditionally strong. Our results also encourage future researchers to pay more attention to distinguishing identities from objective indicators. Furthermore, the results imply a demand to redefine 'working-class identity' in future research. As stronger identification with the newer parties, the FP and—particularly—the GL, was not a very significant predictor of party members' class identification. Other issues may be related to strong party identification among the FP and GL, such as the questions about immigration or climate change. To achieve a more comprehensive picture of the links between class identification and political parties in contemporary politics, researchers should explore also these new-politics identities. Additionally, as in many other studies about class, we used cross-sectional data to explore associations between party affiliation and class identification. In future studies, researchers should use longitudinal data sets to test the potential causality of party affiliation on class identification while considering partisan identity's mediating effect.

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## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The original question for the class identification was 'Which social class would you say you belong to?': (1) Upper class, (2) Upper-middle class, (3) Middle class, (4) Lower-middle class, (5) Working class, (6) None of the above, (7) Other, what?'

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