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**BRAHMIN LEFT VS. MERCHANT RIGHT:
THE MISCELLANEOUS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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ORCID no. 0000-0002-6003-8778**e-mail:** jakub.szabo@euba.sk**Abstract**

In his recent book, *Capital and Ideology*, French economist Thomas Piketty devotes the final chapter to the changing dimensions of political conflict in Western democracies. The goal of this article is to confront some of his findings with mainstream political science. Piketty's arguments are confronted with the findings of scholars within political science. To begin the article, we establish two research questions in the introduction. We then delineate the gradual reversal of the educational cleavage and subsequent emergence of the multi-elite system according to Piketty. He demonstrates how the classist conflict prevailing in the 1950s and 60s morphed into the Brahmin Left versus the Merchant Right system, with the "Left" being supported by the more educated electorate and the "Right" being supported by the relative well-offs. In the following two sections, we deal with his arguments regarding the causes and the outcomes of this gradual shift. Firstly, he proposes two hypotheses regarding the metamorphosis of the Left: the social and nativist hypotheses. We argue that neither of the two hypotheses is actually a comprehensive explanation and we propose alternative that takes into account the changing structure of social classes. Secondly, with regards to the outcomes of the reversal of the educational cleavage, Piketty considers one of the consequences of this shift to be a social-nativist trap, a combination of pro-redistribution policies and cultural nativism. We have concluded that the social-nativism is not a trap per se as much as an inevitability resulting from the less advantaged class feeling abandoned in the multi-elite political conflict.

Keywords: Piketty, reversal of the educational cleavage, Brahmin Left, Merchant Right, working class, social-nativism

Introduction

French economist Thomas Piketty has been academically known long before publishing his popular *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Piketty 2014), mostly as a result of his pioneering work in the sphere of the economics of inequality (see f.i. Piketty 2001, Piketty and Saez 2003). The overlap of his academic work within the political sciences, on the other hand, has always been a secondary focus of his, but it nevertheless had a significant impact on the field (Piketty 1995, Piketty 2000). In recent years, we might have observed a slight shift in his academic interests, from the development of wealth and income inequalities

to the area of political cleavages (Piketty 2018). The latest Piketty's work, the 1,000-page *Capital and Ideology* (Piketty 2020), focuses on the evolution of various inequality regimes (trifunctional, slave and proprietary, social-democratic and neo-proprietary) throughout modern history. Although *Capital and Ideology* is presented as a sequel to *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, the two books read as different books. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* had the ambition of convincing us of the fallacy embodied within the proposal of Simon Kuznets that income and wealth inequality in advanced economies will level out naturally. According to Piketty, the innate tendency of the capitalistic model of allocation will inevitably lead to a "patrimonial capitalism" (Piketty 2014). *Capital and Ideology* presents a superstructure to *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, outlining the history of inequality regimes as ideological dialectics, "turning Marx on his head" (Krugman 2020) by claiming that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the struggle of ideologies and the quest for justice" (Piketty 2020). Contrary to what the economist did in the first book, Piketty is more daring in *Capital and Ideology* and he proposes ways to reach a transcendent and new era of global hyper-capitalism by what he calls "participatory socialism".

Nevertheless, this article focuses on the fourth part of the book, which elaborates on an alleged need to rethink the dimensions of political conflict as a result of the reversal of the educational cleavage in the 1980s and 90s. While there have been various and complete book reviews of *Capital and Ideology* (Rovny 2019, Krugman 2020, Mason 2020, Subramanian 2020), this article aims to challenge Piketty's appeal to rethink the dimensions of political conflict by pointing out two major shortcomings in his argumentation regarding the cause and the outcome of the reversal.

Piketty made a breakthrough with his research in the realm of income and wealth inequality. However, obvious expertise within the field of public economics does not mean one is automatically destined to make a breakthrough within the sphere of political science. Paul Krugman (2020) asks, "Is he really enough of a polymath to pull that off?" To point out the certain shortcomings in his arguments, we propose two research questions:

(1) Is the social hypothesis regarding the metamorphosis of the Left from the workers' party to the party of the educated as suggested by Thomas Piketty a comprehensive explanation of these trends and prevailing among the political scientists?

(2) Is social-nativism an inevitability resulting from the changing structure of political conflict?

To verify our research questions, we analyse the work and data series constructed by Thomas Piketty. We then compare his findings with the current mainstream in political sciences and add our opinions utilizing qualitative and interpretative methods.

The article is organized as follows. First, we describe the principal lines of Piketty's argumentation regarding the need to rethink the dimensions of political conflict in Western democracies, from the development from the classist structure to the multi-elite system. We confront his findings with the "bread and butter" (Rovny 2019) of modern political science. Second, after a brief introduction into Piketty's findings, we proceed to two shortcomings in his argumentation and verify our research questions. Firstly, we argue that the alleged metamorphosis of the Left from the "Workers'" party to the party of the "Educated" is not a result of the changed priorities the way Piketty claims it to be. A tale of two hypotheses is cogent only to a certain extent, as it does not dig deep enough. We are persuaded that the true cause lies within the changing structure of the social classes.

Secondly, we confront Piketty's arguments regarding the recent rise of social-nativism. We argue that this phenomenon is not a trap as much as it is an inevitability of the current political alignments. The onset of social-nativist coalitions replacing the electorate left vacant by the poor and less educated who feel they have been left behind by the Left because of the multi-elite system and globalized economy.

Brahmin Left vs. Merchant Right

The evolution of political conflict following WWII, during the social-democratic era (1950–60s), used to be rigidly classist. People at the bottom of the social hierarchy tended to vote for the “Left” (socialists, communists, labourites, etc.), while the “Right” (conservatives, republicans, Gaullists, etc.) was massively supported by the relative well-offs, or the electorate with on average higher incomes (Piketty 2020). The same goes for education as well. Wealth, income, and education were significantly correlated when it came to the left/right political divide. Then, during the 1970s and the 80s, the reversal of the education cleavage started to occur with the metamorphosis of the “Left” from the “Workers’ party” to the “party of the Educated”, peaking in the 90s and early 2000s in most of the Western world. The vote for the “Left”, or for the pro-welfare coalitions, to use Häusermann's (2010) words, started to be increasingly associated with higher-educated voters (Piketty 2020). Bovens and Wille (2017) had demonstrated the same development even before Piketty. This had an effect on future generations. The children of educated parents and the children of less-educated parents experienced different educational paths than each other while in primary school. Their choices for school and extracurricular activities differ, their social and relational lives rarely mix, and they ultimately make different life choices – including how they vote. The upper classes, with the rising share of university graduates, started to support culturally more liberal and Left-leaning parties. The educational (meritocratic) aspect became a predominant cleavage in most developed democracies, where the prevalence of “diploma democracy” can be seen (Bovens and Wille 2017). The rising significance of the reversal of the educational cleavage was also confirmed by Stubager (2010), Frank (2017), and Amable and Darcillon (2020).

Piketty's main line of argumentation was assumed from his earlier work where the French economist suggested an explanation to describe the current political development in the Western world. By analysing post-election surveys in France, Britain, and the United States, Piketty observed that the structure of political conflict was shifting toward the multi-elite system, with Left-wing votes being associated with the more educated and with the highest earners opting for the Right. The political Left had become the party of the intellectual elite, the Brahmins (from the name used to describe men of letters in ancient India), while the Right represented the interests of the business elite, or the Merchants (Piketty 2018). The change can be demonstrated by pointing out the augmenting difference between the percentage of the “Left” vote among 10 percent of the highest-educated voters and the remaining 90 percent. This paradigmatic shift was documented in France, Britain and the US (Piketty 2018), in Germany and Sweden (Kosse and Piketty 2019) and in Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, and Spain (Gethin, Martinez-Toledano and Piketty 2019).

Piketty's reasoning regarding the occurrence of the Brahmin Left vs. Merchant Right multi-elite system, although brilliantly supported by the extensive data series from

post-election surveys from the above-mentioned countries, was well documented even before he laid out his empirical findings. The underlying theoretical argument behind the multi-elite system is twofold. Firstly, the original electorate of the Left during the post-war classist era (50s and 60s), the less advantaged working class with lower income and lower education, diverted from the traditional left-wing parties en masse. This phenomenon was observed by Franklin et al (1992), Kitschelt (1994), or recently by Ginrich and Häusermann (2015). Secondly, the traditional left-wing parties started to draw their support from the (upper) middle classes achieving on average higher education. In particular, it is the work by Oesch and Rennwald (2010) that observes a deep divide between the socio-cultural professionals, middle class educated progressives (teachers, journalists, professionals in social and cultural services) supporting culturally progressive and economically left-wing parties, whereas the right-wing parties draw their support from business and technical professionals who are less progressive and are more conservative. This effectively divides the highly educated electorate into Piketty's Brahmin Left vs. Merchant Right. Similar conclusions were presented by Kitschelt (1994), Kriesi (1998), Oesch (2008a), and Ginrich and Häusermann (2015).

In summary, Piketty's most striking findings concern the reversed and augmenting role of the education in political alignment and the subsequent rise of the multi-elite system. The pro-welfare coalitions ("Left"), which used to be the voice of the underprivileged workers on the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy, morphed into the parties of the "intelligentsia" (Brahmins), while the pro-business coalitions ("Right") have retained their predominant support from the more affluent parts of the electorate. The great divide between two elites – between the academically and business inclined – contributed to the emergence of the multi-elite system. As we have shown so far, Piketty's findings are not entirely new in this sense. However, they provide an immense empirical base to back his main line of argumentation. In the next section, we take a closer look at the cause and outcomes of the reversal of the educational cleavage while we tackle some of the shortcomings in Piketty's argumentation.

A Tale of Two Hypotheses

Although Piketty emphasized the reversal of the educational cleavage already in his earlier paper, he acknowledged that the cause of the reversal remains with no coherent explanation (Piketty 2018). In his latest book, the French economist offers two possible explanations (hypotheses) as to why the Left transformed from the Workers' party to the party of the Educated. He begins with the "social" hypothesis. We might eventually label it as a supply-side explanation (the party changed its priorities). It is argued that the Left deliberately alienated blue-collar workers and reoriented itself toward other social categories (the higher educated). The shift in the political and ideological preferences of the electoral Left is obvious regarding the ideology of the Third Way (see e.g. Giddens 2008) resulting from the anti-communist narratives following the fall of the Soviet Union or from the incapability of the "Left" to tackle the shortcomings of the social-democratic order. The socialist, social-democratic, or labourite parties indeed changed their priorities. We can utilize as an example Tony Blair's Labour administration effectively amending Clause IV of the party's constitutional rules reorienting its focus on the middle classes (Gani 2015). The social hypothesis has some ground according to Kitschelt (1994), Arzheimer (2013),

and Rutherford (2018). On the other hand, there is a consequential question: “why did the Left change its priorities”? Piketty (2020) indirectly indicates that the offspring of the working class benefiting from the post-war education boom, especially the university graduates, continued to support left-wing parties, and that ultimately led to a need of the Left to adapt to the priorities of the newly educated. Current political science research is not as convincing as Piketty claims it to be, mainly because this hypothesis has not been widely assessed and tested by others. Other than Jackson and Marsden (2012), who do not convincingly prove Piketty’s argument, we have not found other affirmative works on Piketty’s social hypothesis.

Piketty’s second explanation, the “nativist” hypothesis, or the demand-side explanation (the circumstances changed the character of the party), is built upon the premise of the Left being abandoned by the workers who were lured by the anti-immigration and xenophobic stances of the radical right parties. He almost immediately rejects the second hypothesis for two reasons. First, the reversal of the education cleavage had happened before the immigration cleavage became truly salient (60s and 70s). Second, Piketty argues that xenophobia and racism is common throughout societies, including the most affluent and the higher-educated electorate. As a result, of these two arguments, Piketty claims to lean toward the social hypothesis, albeit arguing that the two are not mutually exclusive (Piketty 2020). Although there is certainly some merit in the social hypothesis, we would not discharge the nativist hypothesis so quickly given the multidimensionality of the issue. Piketty argues, “racism is not more natural among the least favoured classes than among the well-offs” (Piketty 2020). Albeit not universal, the nativist hypothesis, granting the less-educated higher levels of prejudice (racism/xenophobia) seems to have some empirical relevance as well. A survey conducted by the American National Election Studies 2008–2009 confirmed that more positive attitudes towards Blacks as non-Hispanic Whites’ educational level increases (Kuppens and Spears 2014). By analysing representative samples from more than 10,000 respondents in 12 European countries (EEC at that time), Quillian (1995) found that people with higher levels of formal education report on average lower levels of anti-immigrant prejudice. Coenders and Scheepers (2003) concluded that the negative association between educational attainment and ethnic prejudice is one of the most consistent findings in social research, eventually confirming the tendency. All of the studies included income as an independent variable as well, demonstrating a high level of positive correlation between education and income (Goldin and Katz 2008). We conclude that discharging the nativist hypothesis seems to be relatively premature given a well-documented linkage between education and racial attitudes.

Both social and nativist hypotheses provide a certain degree of explanation when it comes to the reversed role the Left plays in defending the interest of the under-educated and lower income groups. It is true that the parties of the Left changed their priorities. All parties do what they are obliged to do to adjust to changing social circumstances if they want to be politically successful. It is also true that the “New Left” political movements of 1968 assumed more a progressive, globalist, and post-modern agenda, in contrast to the subtle authoritarianism of the working-class, former electoral base of the Left (Lipset 1959). As we have shown, Piketty’s argument about the same level of nativist alignment throughout the entire social stratum is not scientifically based, thereby we consider his refusal of the nativist hypothesis to be utterly premature. Albeit both being very cogent, we do regard the two hypotheses to be lacking true substance. Naturally, we are convinced

that both social and nativist hypotheses are not complete. We argue that the metamorphosis of the Left is mainly due to the changing structure of the social classes. It has less to do with the strategies of the Left or the rise of the migration cleavage.

Some of the societal changes have been laid out in the previous section. We argue that there are two crucial changes affecting the changing structure of the social classes that led to the metamorphosis of the Left. The first is the expansion of the educational system with the rising share of educated people in the electorate. More people are getting their college degrees and the occurrence of people not obtaining their high school diplomas is becoming rare. Barro and Wha Lee (2013) demonstrate that the global average for the number of years spent at school for persons aged fifteen and older was 3.2 years in 1950, 5.3 in 1980, and up to 7.8 in 2010. The number of years in school per child more than doubled over the span of a couple decades. Most advanced countries recorded a drastic increase in the share of the population aged over 15 years with a secondary education, from 12.6 percent in 1950 to 46.3 percent in 2010, as well as with tertiary education, from 2.2 percent to 14.2 percent. Former lower educated classes benefited largely from the post-war social-democratic expansion of education. As Emmons, Kent, and Ricketts (2018) show, the less-educated white working class share of the American population declined by one-third between the mid-1970s and 2016. On the other hand, we are witnessing a steady population growth share of less educated minorities in the United States, and this might explain the tendency of the Democratic Party to prioritize minorities over the white working class, the alleged backbone of the Western leftist movements. According to the Democratic Party's forecasts, the working class will reach minority status by 2032. The follow-up question should not be whether the Left changed its priorities, but why the Left changed its priorities. One reason is the rising population share of the higher educated and the shrinking share of the less educated working class.

Secondly, as we have demonstrated, the traditional working class has almost vanished from Western democracies. Other than the educational expansion, industrial production being outsourced to less-developed economies in Southeast Asia or Latin America and the ongoing trends in technological change and automation have played a crucial role as well. These are the trends coming from a globalized economy: developed economies outsource blue-collar jobs abroad to countries with less skilled workers whose labour is cheap and where labour standards are low (Munch 2010, Rodrik 2011, Stiglitz 2017). The consequences of job outsourcing border on economic cliché. The decreased demand for less skilled workers as a result of labour offshoring was demonstrated by Anderton, Brenton and Oscarsson (2002) for Sweden, Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom, by Falk and Wolfmayr (2005) for EU countries, and by Harrison and McMillan (2006) for the United States. Crinò (2006) concluded that although the outsourcing of blue-collar jobs in labour-intensive production leads to a decrease in low-skilled employment in Western democracies, it ultimately contributes to the creation of new jobs that demand skilled workers. The other side of the coin is the rampant onset of technology and automation. Jobs formerly carried out by working class citizens in advanced economies are either outsourced abroad or become automated (Adams 2018). Technology is reshaping the structure of social classes by decreasing the demand for low-skilled labour and at the same time increasing the demand for high-skilled labour. Overall, according to the World Bank (2019), the share of industrial employment in the high-income countries is declining rapidly and it is the working class who is suffering the most from automation.

The social and nativist hypotheses were proposed by Piketty as an alleged explanation as to why the pro-welfare coalitions (Left) morphed from the Workers' party to the party of the Educated. To recapitulate, the social hypothesis argues that it is the Left who alienated the working class by reorienting its priorities to the post-modern issues. The nativist hypothesis sees the cause of this shift in the working class electorate opting for more nativist parties. We argue that neither of the two hypotheses sufficiently explain this phenomenon due to their lack of deeper substance. Even though Piketty to a certain extent is right, we conclude that the social hypothesis is not the prevailing opinion even within many political science scholars as indicated by Piketty. We propose an alternative explanation consisting of the changing structure of the social classes. There is no doubt that the composition of social classes changed from the post-war period, and we attribute this to two tendencies. First is the share of people with formal education increased rapidly over recent decades and has contributed to the gradual decline of the traditional working class. Second, the effects of the globalized economy are also causing this decline. Blue-collar jobs are being either outsourced to countries with lower wages and labour protection, or they are completely automatized. Ultimately, it is true that the Left changed its priorities according to the social hypothesis. However, it did not come to this conclusion arbitrarily but because of pure inevitability. The former social base of the big social democratic and labourite movements – the working class – is gradually disappearing in developed countries. The parties of the Left merely adjusted to this reality.

Social-nativism: Trap or Inevitability?

One of the main consequences of the multi-elite system according to Piketty (2020), besides the convergence of centre-left and centre-right parties, is the declining electoral turnout of the less advantaged class and the subsequent onset of the social-nativist parties. The multi-elite system led to a convergence of the centre-left and centre-right parties defending the interests of the higher educated (Brahmins) and the wealthier (Merchants) while at the same time abandoning the electorate of the working class. Anti-elite political parties, mainly the radical right parties (RRP), as coined by Cas Mudde (2007), filled up the former strongholds of the Left: the working class electorate. These trends were also observed in the works of Oesch (2008b) and Arzheimer (2017). This brings us implicitly to a three-way political conflict, where the RRP competes with the Right for the votes of the old middle class made up of small business owners and with the Left for the support of the working class (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). The parties of the elites compete for the middle class, higher income, and higher-educated electorate, while the social-nativist electorate succumb to the proletarianization (Bornschieer and Kriesi 2013). Piketty (2020) argues that the strategy of the social-nativists is successful due to assuming pro-redistributive policies combined with the nativist ideology. Social-nativist parties started to emphasize the protection of workers and their social rights, as long as the workers were native-born. As we have demonstrated in the previous section, lower income and lower levels of formal education correlate with the more nativist attitudes. The RRP became alluring for many after it took over the redistribution agenda and combined it with anti-immigration stances. By exploiting the rage of (native-born) low-wage workers, radical right parties might eventually assume the social agenda quite convincingly. It must be emphasized that the nativist axis is of superior relevance over the economic one for these parties (Mudde

2007). Former anti-tax and pro-business parties in Europe (National Rally, Freedom Party of Austria, and League, for example) abandoned their neoliberal stances in the 1980s (De Lange 2007). Piketty (2020) claims that they do not mind usurping the social protection and the just taxation agendas in a utilitarian fashion (e.g. the wealth tax in France), only to give up the agenda of redistribution due to its inconsistency with their nativist stances. We will see later how the two are mutually exclusive. Dutch political scientist Mudde also argues that the nativism will always be the priority over the social policies. However, it may be as Rovny (2013) argues: it is not that these parties assumed pro-redistributive stances as much as they have blurred their true positions so they could attract more voters.

Piketty (2020) considers social-nativism to be a trap. As we had explained before, the economist argues that the former anti-tax movements, like National Rally (former Front Nationale) with a Poujadist background aiming to abolish income tax, acceded to a pro-welfare agenda only to attract the working class voters. The movement led by Marine Le Pen, for instance, supported the Yellow Vest movement of 2017–2019, which had risen up to face a new carbon tax that burdened more the poorer part of society in order to finance the abolition of the wealth tax. Piketty claims that if National Rally gained power, it would support the abolition in favour of the richest. We eschew evaluating the true intentions of the parties due to the lack of scientific rigor. Social-nativism is indeed based on the idea that native-born workers shall come first (see “Make America Great Again”), which will ultimately lead to fiscal dumping and subsequent austerity, international race to the bottom in labour and environmental protection, inability of the governments to fight against the offshore financial centres, unsustainability of the pension systems, ecological deterioration, economic nationalism, growing inequality, and even further social tensions. This is the trap.

Piketty’s argumentation is based on the implicit assumption that social-nativist parties tricked the working class electorate by opportunistically assuming the pro-welfare agenda. He does not consider their intentions as being sincere. Our assessment is slightly different. Instead of describing the trend of falsely adopting a pro-welfare agenda as a trap, we should instead talk about the inevitability of this trend. As we have explained earlier, social-nativism represents a logical response to the detachment between the working class and left-wing parties. The response is populist and anti-elitist (Betz 1994, Mudde 2004, Kaltwasser 2012), pro-welfare, and, most importantly, nativist. The development follows a certain logic, and it is not the result of deliberate choices of the elites leading the Left. It is more of a vicious circle predetermined by the changing structure of social classes. Post-war educational expansion with the technological boom and accelerating globalization contributed to the reversal of the educational cleavage, which eventually led to the emergence of the multi-elite system, with the Left becoming the party of the Educated elite (“Brahmins”) and the Right representing the financial elite (“Merchants”). The working class, the former electorate base of the Left, albeit slowly downsizing due to the previously described changes, was left unrepresented by the Left, hence Piketty’s social hypotheses. RRP parties had quickly given up their anti-tax past and started to promote pro-welfare policies combined with their ideological core – nativism. They combined what Kitschelt (1995) calls a “winning formula”. It has been argued in this article that the working class is more likely to hold xenophobic stances. Social-nativism, or some sort of social-nativist coalition like the one that ruled in Italy (Lega and M5S), is on the rise in various European countries. It is an inevitability. Why would have the Left deliberately changed its priorities

had it known the RRP would assume the blue-collar electorate? The answer is obvious: the (white) working class is on a steady decline.

Piketty recommends for the Left to adjust to the more socially just and internationalist agenda of the “participatory socialism” so that the working class will not be lured by the call of the xenophobic and destructive nativism. The baseline of Piketty’s argumentation is, in our opinion, again incorrect and it is linked to the premature rejection of the nativist hypothesis. The French economist is not willing to accept certain differences among social groups regarding their xenophobic stances. The electorate with lower income, less wealth, and lower levels of formal education statistically tends to be more inclined to hold xenophobic or racist views, as was already explained regarding the premature rejection of the nativist hypothesis. The old industrial working class has never been inherently culturally progressive. Rovny (2019) argues that even internationalism of the Marxist ideology, the long-standing ideology of the working class, was merely socially constructed (Rovny 2019). Only the onset of the globalized economy and the subsequent creation of its losers and winners truly divided society according to the nativist cleavage (Bornschiefer 2010, Hooghe and Marks 2018). Thereby, it is not plausible the working class will opt for the proposal of new internationalist agenda even if the Left returns with propositions from the socialist and federalist platforms. The reason is not a shortage of pro-redistribution policies as much as an excess of a globalist agenda. As a result of the globalized economy – free movement of capital and interstate tax avoidance, liberalization of trade and outsourcing, decoupling of the financial system from the real economy – the working class became the biggest loser of global hyper-capitalism. As it turns out, globalization is not a win-win situation, as it widens the discrepancies between the higher educated, more mobile, and higher earning individuals and the less mobile, risk-averse, and more communitarian and paternalistic society on the other. It became a zero-sum game. The consequence is a clash between the electorate benefiting from the multi-elite system, meritocratic, and financial elite, and the electorate losing greatly due to these processes. It leads to the aforementioned vicious circle.

In the end, by extrapolating this tendency, Piketty (2020) warns against the rising polarisation, the binary conflict of “progressives” vs. “nationalists”, or “globalists” vs. “patriots”, whichever suits the competing side more. The working class, while challenging the elites, tends to label the mainstream left and right parties as globalists while it considers the social-nativist parties to be patriotic. The Brahmin Left and Merchant Right, on the other hand, inveigh against the nationalists from the progressivist positions. This tendency is a deeper problem, as it is an incarnation of the ideological struggle we have described earlier and what Kitschelt (1994) described as the authoritarian (traditionalist)/libertarian (Green, Left) cleavage. Bornschiefer (2010) described it as a libertarian-universalistic/traditionalist-communitarian cleavage; De Wiele (2019) described it as a cosmopolitan/communitarian cleavage; De Vries (2018), meanwhile, preferred the description of the cosmopolitan/parochial cleavage. All of these labels serve as an approximation of two sides of the political conflict: losers of globalization as against the winners of globalization. Warning against the acoustic power of these cleavages is like appealing to surrender of the class conflict finally due to its divisive nature. To answer the second research question, the consequences of the multi-elite system, be it a social-nativism or other forms of elite/working class struggle, are not just a trap. They sprang out as the socioeconomic inevitability.

Conclusion

This article deals with the multi-elite system described by French economist Thomas Piketty. He demonstrates that the classist post-war conflict transformed into the system where only the elites get a proper political representation, with the Brahmin Left defending the interests of the more educated and the Merchant Right of the more affluent class. He argues that the political Left willingly abandoned the working class according to the social hypothesis. The outcome of this process is the onset of social-nativist parties filling up the former strongholds of the Left – the strongholds being the less educated electorate with lower incomes and less wealth. These parties assumed, with utilitarian motives, pro-welfare stances on top of nativist stances by proposing higher social standards and more redistribution while finally emphasizing the exclusion of foreign-born.

We proposed two research questions. (1) Is the social hypothesis regarding the metamorphosis of the Left from the Workers' party to the party of the Educated as suggested by Piketty a comprehensive explanation of these trends and is it prevailing within the political science? Our take is that the Left changed its priorities because of the changing structure of the social classes; it was not a deliberate decision of the elites on the Left. We argue that social classes reshape themselves as more and more people obtain higher levels of formal education, either college degrees or high-school diplomas, and illiteracy in the Western world is almost completely wiped out. The working class, the backbone of the classist left-wing parties, is gradually shrinking due to outsourcing, technological changes and automation. This process is quasi-deterministic.

(2) Is the social-nativism hypothesis an inevitability resulting from the changing structure of political conflict? We tackle the research question by pointing out that it was inevitable for a political force with the “winning formula” of pro-welfare positions and nativism would succeed in gaining the trust of the working class, the former electorate of left-wing parties. As we have demonstrated by criticizing the premature dismissal of the nativist hypothesis, the electorate most eager for pro-redistribution is statistically more inclined to nativism and xenophobia. The inevitability of the political cleavage (globalist/patriots, progressives/nationalists) is embedded within the changing structure of the social classes when we identify the cleavage between the losers and winners of the globalized economy. The losers are on average less mobile, communitarian, and traditionalist in favour of redistribution policies. The winners, on the other hand, who benefit from the free exchange of capital, goods, services, and labour, are statistically more mobile, richer, and higher educated.

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