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The politicization of the economic fraction of the upper class

A qualitative study of ordinary relationships to politics among the privileged in Norway

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Abstract

In this thesis I aim to study the economic fraction of the upper class' (EUC) relationship to politics. Politics and class are often conceptualized as being entwined – different social groups have different interests, but also has differing relationships to politics: differing competence, and possibilities in projecting their interests into the field of politics. A recurring observation by political scientists and sociologists is that there is a strong correlation between socio-economic status and political engagement, with educational level as the strongest mediator. I aim to contribute to this field by two theoretical innovations:

1) Bourdieu's theory of social class and social practice, and its political-sociological elaboration in the works of Daniel Gaxie. While recent research in the Nordic context has been successful in applying Bourdieu's theories to account for class-voting, they have to lesser extent grappled with the question of politics as a form of symbolic practice, which mastery depends on unequally distributed resources. Gaxie thus speaks of unequal levels of *politicization* – the degree to which actors pay attention to events in the political field and judge by a specifically political logic. Politicization depends on a twofold competence: a *cognitive/technical* competence which increases by educational level, and *statutory* competence - a feeling of entitlement to speak politically, which increases by position in the division of labour, thus in a hierarchy of social status. Politics, a form of legitimate culture, appears to come easier for the privileged, a theory which gains support by a simple glance at voter turnouts in the affluent districts of Vestre Aker and Ullern in Oslo, Norway (where most of my interviewees reside).

2) Contemporary research has drawn attention to how only a minority of actors appear to be homogeneously invested in "legitimate" culture, also among the upper-class. Post-Bourdieuian sociologist Bernard Lahire holds that most actors may be characterized by dissonant dispositions for practice. Such dissonance reveals themselves through the study of intra-individual variations of dispositions, between different contexts of practice (between fields or in the same field). I draw attention to contemporary developments in the French field of political sociology, which through applications of qualitative methods have argued for the *ambivalent politicization* of the EUC. While highly mobilized as voters (overwhelmingly for the right wing), they often appear less invested in politics in ordinary contexts, may display scepticism towards political objects, avoid conflicting political discussion et cetera. I thus

highlight the meta-question of “legitimism” in cultural class research – the tendency to caricature social classes as homogenously dominant and dominated in cultural practice. While not disproving socially differentiated relationships to politics, such reflections may allow social science to more precisely describe *how* the dominant dominate politically.

The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews on relationships to politics among 12 individuals of EUC-position. Interviewees are questioned on varied contexts of their relationship to politics, among others, interest through the life course, everyday practices of political talk, judgements of agents, and voting behaviour. Additionally, I utilize drawing exercises on (on a left-right scale), and photo elicitation techniques, where interviewees are presented pictures of prominent political agents.

I argue that the EUC may be characterized by a strong statutory competence – a feeling of entitlement to talk about and interest oneself in politics. However, the picture appears to be more nuanced. Interviewees are found to show clear weaknesses of cognitive competence, for example by failing to name prominent politicians. Certain actors, while highly mobilized towards their political interests, are found to be sceptical of professionalized politics and political solutions. While handling political topics as a natural object of talk, many interviewees seem to downplay elements of struggle when talking about politics among friends. Thus, while these actors often appear to be political competent, this competence and investment is not without its reservations. Following Lahire, one may argue that their political dispositions are dissonant, as legitimate and illegitimate behaviour coincides in EUC-actors. I argue that there may be a pattern to such dissonance. Actors of high volume and a more balanced composition of capital appear to be more homogenously invested in politics. Among those with a preponderance of economic capital and business school educational capital, the dissonance appears to be stronger. While the most affluent business alumni may be characterized by a form of “relaxed investment” in politics (where a strong mobilization, f.i. putting money into politics, coexists with a sceptical take on politics), the least economically endowed appear to gravitate towards a more homogenous disinvestment and a weaker sense of competence. Concludingly, most actors of EUC position appear to conceive themselves into politics with ease, often with a “natural” inclination towards the political right wing: a class vote not easily disturbed. But, researchers should be wary of too generalizing use of concepts such as “competence” and “participation” when describing the behaviour of social groups, as investment and disinvestment coexists among the EUC.

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Secondly, I want to thank my supervisor Professor Magne P. Flemmen, and co-supervisor Vegard Jarness. Magne has, since I got to know him and sent him my first nervous emails, been inclusive to a degree no professor could be expected to. From sharing memes, to the exchange of esoteric French readings, Magne has been as meticulous in his critical commentaries as he has been available, friendly, and inspiring. Every anxious and aspiring sociologist needs such superintendents, and I am very grateful for having you. Vegard Jarness helped me in the beginning stages of the qualitative research process and should be specially thanked for his draft-reading in the final weeks before delivery (before the project was postponed to September). His kind and constructive words were of great help.

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1 Introduction

This is a thesis on the economic fraction of the upper class' relationship to politics. In representative democracies, every citizen is competent to best judge his political interests, by drawing on a supply of choices presented by political agents. Since the heydays of democracy in Post-war Europe, the citizens' relationship to politics seems troubled. From the critique of the *political elites* of radical right parties, to the Yellow West movement and the presidency of Donald Trump, democratic politics does not seem as straightforward as in theory. On the other hand, one may observe news-headlines of billionaires, *economic elites*, who give millions to political agents they favour. Between topics of public interest such as *political elites* and *economic elites*, we seem to know little about what's beneath moneyed interests, how the upper class *perceive and relate to politics*.

Social science may answer such questions, which taps into two subjects which should be of public relevance: How does ordinary citizens of varying positions in the social structure perceive democratic politics, of which there is an *expectation of participation*? And how does possessing economic resources, which are not equally distributed in society, affect this relationship? While the reader will not meet any billionaires in this thesis, I have recruited 12 interviewees belonging to the upper-most decile of the income distribution, whose relationship to politics will be analysed.

Politics is a form of legitimate culture, the mastery of which may produce both social esteem and power. However, there appears to be clear inequalities of access to the world of politics. Social scientists have through concepts such as political "knowledge" and "competence" highlighted how socially differentiated individuals vary in their competences facing questions of politics. Despite such observations, politics has mostly remained the privileged object of political science, and its sub-field "electoral research". Sociology, with its theoretical apparatus attuned to study of *socially differentiated individuals*, may provide newfound observations of the political dispositions of citizens in democracies.

Electoral research has a long and successful story in Norway. Since the international acclaim of Stein Rokkan, "Valgforskningsprogrammet" has continually and persistently offered their take on the peculiarities of each election, the movement of voters (Bergh & Aardal, 2019). While their production is large, they have yet to approach voters by perspective of *symbolic practice*, categories by which social actors orient themselves by, forms of

understanding and meaning, in citizens' *own words*. The citizen, the voter, this eternal object of electoral science seems somewhat obscured by the labels of variables and survey-questions. What do we know about *the meaning of politics*, as seen from the perspective of ordinary citizens? Perhaps not very much.

This is of course also a methodological issue. Political science seems to be dominated by quantitative techniques which by definition disable knowledge of actors by their own words, at least in their depth and individuality. While these methods enable statistical generalizability, they also obscure ordinary forms of symbolic practice and understanding. This thesis puts forward a possible take on politics as symbolic practice, through utilization of qualitative interviewing and specific theoretical perspectives.

Regarding the object of the "economic fraction of the upper class", I draw on a tradition which now has become mainstream. The twenty first century has become the stage of a reorientation towards a social science of elites, also a field well represented in Norway. By making the upper class my object, I aim to contribute to this reorientation. Furthermore, the sociology of elites seems mostly absent of projects on the elite's relationship to politics. While perhaps a chief source of power in society, politics often glimmers with its absence.

This has however been a contested issue in French research on class and politics. While for a long time dominated by a perspective on "the bourgeois" as a "mobilized class", always ready and able to defend their interests, certain contemporary researchers draw attention to *the upper class' ambivalent relationship to politics*. While often strongly mobilized as voters, the upper class may seem "distanced", or even sceptical in their take on politics and political practice.

In this thesis I aim to explore this assumption of an economic fraction of the upper class split between mobilization as voters, and disinvested or distanced when facing politics in contexts of ordinary life. I take Bourdieu's theory of social class as my starting point, which enables the study *class conditioned forms of symbolic practice, facing the field of politics*. While recent contributions have utilized Bourdieu to describe class-voting and classed political opinion in Norway, they lack a qualitative perspective on the relationship between class and politics. However, this thesis is not mainly concerned with *political opinion*, but rather what I will define as *politicization* – modes and levels of political interest, competence, and investment. And as opposed to practices of formal *political participation*, I am interested in how the EUC practice and judge politics in *contexts of ordinary life*.

Simultaneously, I am interested in variation across my sample of upper-class actors. Do certain social characteristics facilitate different dispositions facing politics? Paying attention to intra-class variation of politicization in the EUC may allow me to point beyond this specific fraction. For example, do certain forms of educational capital predispose actors to stronger politicization and different modes of political investment?

Exploring the Norwegian context is also of interest. While application of Bourdieusian cultural class analysis in Norway has been a contested subject, due to the country's supposed egalitarian cultural repertoire, where strong cultural judgements seem less salient, we know little about perceptions of politics. Norway is often considered a consensus-democracy, where ideological distances between outer left and outer right is smaller than many other political contexts. By such standards, one could expect politics to be more legitimate and facilitate lesser forms of distancing than elsewhere, such as France. What is it like, *politically*, to be a privileged class in an "egalitarian" country?

So, I ask: what characterises the economic fraction of the upper class (EUC) relationship to politics? Through semi-structured interviews with 12 interviewees of EUC-position, I will try to shed light on the following overarching research questions:

1. One may suspect the EUC is more interested in politics than average citizens, due to high social status and often higher education. But may we also observe forms of *distancing* and scepticism in their accounts of politics?
2. Adding to the former, how do the EUC talk about politics in ordinary contexts, for example in ordinary social settings?
3. While the EUC is expected to be interested in politics, may we observe signs of lack of political knowledge in their accounts?
4. Building on the last three questions, is there any patterns to variation of mode of *politicization* among the EUC?

2 Procedure

The thesis begins with a long chapter on theory and previous research. While it may come off as front-loaded, I believe this is necessary. First, because a thesis such as this orients itself somewhat in opposition to mainstream political science in Norway, both by methodological and theoretical procedure. Secondly, because a large part of the literature I utilize is mainly known and read in France, and most by use of translation software. While I believe the chapter on analysis may stand on its own feet, the chapter on theory may be a valuable contribution to English-speaking social science in its own right, as it introduces perspectives with less traction in our academic sub-sphere. I believe there is much to be gained by using translating software such as Google Translate to push the research agenda forward, in an academic field which tend to close in on literature written in English.

Followingly, I present methodological techniques used for gathering of data – the semi-structured interview. I also present some additional methodological tools. As the reader will come to notice, I also engage in methodological reflection throughout the chapter on theory. I believe matter of theory and methodology is deeply entwined – different methods grasp different facets of social reality. Methodological choices may distort the object it seeks to understand.

Finally, I analyse the accounts of 12 interviewees belonging to the economic fraction of the upper class, as I have operationalized this concept. The analysis proceeds through four sections, each corresponding to the research questions outlined above. At the end of my argument, I give a concluding discussion of my findings.

3 Theory and previous research

Research on political behaviour differs both by methodological procedure and by “context” studied: the context of voting, of abstracted opinion on various subject matter, or different forms of “political participation”. A common way of studying citizens’ political behaviour is through electoral research – quantitative surveys on political opinion, often analysed with reference to social and demographic attributes of the individual respondent. This perspective has a strong standing in Norway through “Valgforskningsprogrammet”, which after each election publish works on the peculiarities of each elections, movement of voters, salient political issues (Bergh & Aardal, 2019). However, it could be argued that this tradition of research simply reproduces the normative ideals of democracy: Each individual citizen is equally competent and likely to “produce” political opinion. The citizen, the voter, is a stock of political attitudes which the researcher can simply draw out by using a questionnaire.

Another finding of political science is that there are clear inequalities of access to the world of politics. Whereas a survey on political opinion “constructs” the formula of response through a predefined set of possible answers, research has shown how levels of “political competence”, “political knowledge and “ideological consistency” is unequally distributed in society. In his seminal contribution “The nature of belief systems in mass publics”, Philip Converse claimed that only about 15% of the electorate argued politically in a way consistent with proposals of producers of the political field, the political elites. While remaining a classic of political science, the consequences of Converse’s observation was not put to forefront of the field of political science before the 1990s (Blondiaux, 2007). Thus, Carpini and Keeter held, in one of the most comprehensive surveys on political knowledge ever, that:

Inequality in citizens’ knowledge is not simply an idiosyncratic characteristic of individuals. Groups of citizens vary in knowledge in ways that mirror their standings in the social, political, and economic world, calling into question the fundamental democratic principle of equality among citizens. In particular, women, African Americans, the poor, and the young tend to be substantially less knowledgeable about politics than men, whites, the affluent, and older citizens. Much of the knowledge gap between these groups persists even when such relevant personal characteristics as education or occupation are taken into account, pointing to a legacy of the long-term exclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged citizens from many aspects of the public sphere

(Carpini & Keeter, 1996, 271).

Carpini and Keeter holds, similarly to many in the field, that educational level is the strongest predictor of political knowledge. However, it seems clear this is not only a question of technical proficiency – but of classed individuals who vary in their standing vis-à-vis the game of politics – a game which rules are understood and played by differently according to

differences in social standing. While less sociologically sensitive, it is the same “tragedy of political science” that concerns Achen and Bartels in their recent and much discussed work *Democracy for Realists* (2016): there are few reasons to believe that citizens at large relate to politics in a uniform way aligning with the ideals of democracy – equality of voice and “rational” self-interest. Compared to such ideals, actions of many citizens seem all but rational. This is not an elitist critique of capacities of laymen, but rather a motivation for researchers to acknowledge that the relationship between citizens and politics is not as translucent as theorized. One could thus claim, that when dealing with political opinion of citizens, one is simultaneously facing *the unequal political competence of socially differentiated individuals*. As opposed to the homogenizing effect democratic normative ideals attribute to citizens, citizens are no homogenous mass, *and the relationship between individual citizen and politics varies*.

Certain social scientists have shifted their gaze from the “context” of voting and opinion, by focusing on “political participation”. Political participation is in its minimalist form defined by four characteristics: (1) It’s an activity or action, (2) it’s voluntary, (3) committed to as a non-professional, (4) concerns government, politics, or the state in the broad sense (van Deth, 2014). As such, the concept covers a range of actions with political motivation, from voting and contacting elected officials, to boycotting certain products. As van Deth (2016) puts it: an “action” is something different than claims or mental states of “interest in politics”. While participatory perspectives have merits and enable mapping of political behaviour which is of importance for the well-functioning of democracy, it also has clear limitations. First, the delineation of what the concept of “participation” covers. While it may seem extensive, it is in fact is rather limited. By focusing explicitly on clearly delineated and observable “actions” and “activities”, “political participation” ends up with a concept which describes the political behaviour of a minority of citizens. In what has become a common trope of research in this tradition: only a minority of citizens are active political participants (Verba & Nie, 1972). A recent report from SSB in Norway reports that while 78% of citizens vote, only 10% “have tried to influence a political subject matter through political effort” [My translation] (Lande With, 2017). While this latter number may vary according to definition and form of participation, “participation” seems to be an ill-suited concept for describing political behaviour of the wider electorate. While few participate actively, most citizens have some say or concept of politics, which lay the groundwork for their judgements (f.i. their vote). Rather than studying participatory actions, perhaps more is to be gained by studying more

general dispositions for appreciation of political objects. As such, rather than studying how the private individual actively breaches into the public sphere (participates), one could ask: how does the political exist *in* the individual, *as dispositions for appreciation of political objects and practices?*

One may claim there are two weaknesses of dominant approaches in political and electoral science: 1) a lack of taking account of *inequalities in political competence*, and 2) a *narrow conceptualization of “contexts” where the political is, in a way, present*. To remedy these deficiencies, one needs theories which take account of differing dispositions of political practice. One possible solution is Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social class and social practice. Bourdieu aims to shed light on how socializing experiences and sources of power (capital) shapes dispositions for social practice. Actors living through similar conditions tend to develop similar *habitus* – similar potentialities of seeing and being in the social world. Habitus structures social practice in various fields of practice, for instance: education, cultural consumption, – and politics. By the latter example: Certain actors, predominately those strong in cultural and economic capital, are predisposed to grasp the “hidden rules” of politics, both through having acquired the cognitive resources through socialization (f.i. coming from a cultured home, where newspapers were read and societal matters discussed) and possessing a sense of entitlement to handle political categories and objects, empowered by having a higher standing in society. The academic or business executive may be more likely to interest themselves in politics than the supermarket cashier. The former inhabits social environments where one may be expected to interest oneself in the matters of the state, the latter less so.

While educational level (cultural capital) is a known predictor of “political competence”, the Bourdieusan “sense of entitlement” is an addition to traditional political science. As agents rise in the hierarchies of the division of labour, they are more likely to feel politics is for them, that it should and *ought* interest them. Heeding one’s voice politically is not only a question of cognitive resources (knowing about politics), but of a feeling of entitlement (feeling one should know about politics). A claim of “interest in politics” is not without substance for scientific scrutinization but may signify something fundamental about socially differentiated individuals in democracy. In what has now become a well-tested claim, Bourdieu held that the amount of “Don’t Know”-responses in surveys on political opinion highly correlated with such “sense of entitlement” – by position in a hierarchy of social status. The probability that a respondent will choose to abstain from answering, rather than

choosing any of the predefined answers in a questionnaire, rises among actors of lower social status: among workers, young people, and women (at similar educational level!). Competence is not merely a question about technical proficiency, but of obligation, of symbolic call to arms. It appears Bourdieu was on to the same hunch of a “classed” relationship to politics as Carpini and Keeter was, almost 20 years before the publishing of their survey on political knowledge in the US.

While Bourdieu devoted a chapter to “Culture and Politics” in his work *Distinction*, this strand of Bourdieusian political sociology is perhaps given its fullest expression in the work of Daniel Gaxie, starting from his magnum opus *Le cens caché* (1978). Gaxie takes explicit inspiration from Bourdieu’s research on museum visitors and reception of legitimate art (Bourdieu et al., 1991). Art, as politics, depend on a set of producers distinct from the wider public. Artists and politicians are producers in their respective fields; the wider public observe their products as “laymen”, as outsiders. While laymen do not participate in the production internal to the field, they may be characterized by a varying level of competence in deciphering and appreciating the field-specific products. A strong political competence thus depends on actors’ ability to understand and judge politics by specifically political criteria. Lesser competent actors may judge political objects (such as a specific politician), but by criteria external to the field (the politician’s manner of being – rather than his policy). Such competence is, as noted, highly correlating with educational level and social status. One could argue there is a striking parallel between a lower classed individual’s confusion facing the modern political landscape and abstract modern art (“it doesn’t make any sense”). It is not that the less politically competent is wrong in his judgements, but rather that the *form* of politics tend towards symbolic exclusion, as abiding by its “rules” come easier for the privileged.

Gaxie and Bourdieu’s work has inspired what has now become a strong tradition in the French political sociological landscape, a tradition which this thesis takes its main inspiration from (SPEL, 2016). While quantitative methods are the most common way of studying political behaviour, this tradition has revived the early work of the forefather of American electoral research, Paul Lazarsfeld, who opted for use of qualitative interviews to better understand the political judgements of citizens. Additionally, they have removed themselves from “participatory” contexts, rather turning towards “l’ordinaire du politique”, “ordinary” or “everyday” politics; how social actors interact, judge, and talk about political matters in

contexts of ordinary life, far removed from the hyper-mobilized and specialized activities of elections and partisan mobilizations.

Finally, when dealing with the political competence of citizens it is usually the less well-off who are the object of interest – as they may be both materially and politically disenfranchised. In this thesis I twist the stick somewhat and scrutinize *the upper class' relationship to politics*. More specifically I target the economic fraction of the upper class, whose position in society mainly stem from holding economic capital. While the Bourdieusan political-sociological perspective may be useful as a general theory of political dispositions, it may be especially useful facing the economic fraction of the upper class. Why?

(1): Theories of political competence predict a higher political competence and investment among higher strata of society – but they are less able to explain and contextualize more divergent and complex cases. The analytical distinction between cognitive and statutory competence may fill some of that gap. By such measures, one may expect actors who are more statutorily competent than cognitively – possess a stronger feeling of competence than technical prowess. Rather than attributing a universal competence to every citizen, it acknowledges that politics is both a highly *legitimate* subject matter, and tend toward symbolic exclusion, both regarding technical competence, and an *entitlement* to such.

(2): The economic fraction of the upper class is a somewhat divergent fraction of the upper class, in societies where education is a chief source of power. Whereas educational level may be the strongest predictor of political competence, this fraction derives their position mostly from economic resources (compared to the other fractions, which are characterized by high cultural capital and/or educational level). If modern professionalized politics is closely tied to cultural capital, Bourdieusan perspectives on social class may enable a finer description of an upper class split between different sources of power, of which the *political elite* holds a pertinent kind. One could suppose it is not given that the legitimacy of politics is uniform across the upper strata of society.

(3): Previous research have shown how the economic fraction of the upper class is not particularly publicly politically active. Perspectives of “political participation” thus loose some of their usefulness. A study of the political dispositions of the upper class

could gain more by removing itself from “participatory” contexts, and rather turn to private judgements, conversations among friends and dinner parties, what I have called “ordinary politics”. For exploring such “ordinary relationships” to politics, the method of qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to tap into the respondent’s lifeworld, to measure the respondents’ symbolic dispositions through the actor’s own words.

3.1 The EUC

The final analysis builds on interviews with 12 interviewees who inhabit positions in the economic fraction of the upper class (EUC). The EUC is operationalized according to a Norwegian class schema called ORDC (Hansen et al., 2009; Korsnes et al., 2014). This schema is based on Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of the social space. The social space differentiates between different *volumes of capital*, and between different *species of capital*, where economic and cultural capital are most salient. As such, one can not only single out an upper class possessing high amounts of resources and power, but also differentiate between different fractions of the upper class.

The EUC differ from the cultural fraction and the professional/balanced fraction, in how *their main resource is economic capital and belong to the top decile of the income distribution*. I have operationalized the EUC as individuals working in the private sector, who earn an annual salary of at least 1,3 million NOK, before taxes (SSB, 2018).

The EUC is not a homogenous class (Flemmen, 2012). Between holders of high amounts of economic capital, one can single out groups who have attained their position through inheritance, large capital owners, leaders, and high wage earners. One can differentiate between those who come from less privileged social backgrounds, and actors who have higher cultural capital in the form of educational credentials (Korsnes et al., 2014). The EUC also include individuals possessing *elite* positions of disproportionate economic and decision-making power. Although only a few of my informants can be considered economic *elites*, these internal differences of the EUC should be kept in mind.

By making the very upper echelon of the social structure my object, this thesis strides into the territory of the *sociology of elites* (Hartmann, 2007). While the “elite” is a traditional object of social science, the last decades have marked a reorientation of interest from the *dominated*

to the dominant class. As for the Norwegian context, this reorientation is aptly summed up in the edited work *Elite og klasse i et egalitært samfunn* (Korsnes et al., 2014), which includes, but not limited to, chapters on the social mobility of elites, the internal differentiation of the upper-class, the residential segregation of the upper-class, political positioning, as well as applications of qualitative methods regarding the upper-class' self-understanding and cultural boundary drawing. Later contributions, such as Maren Tofts dissertation on the *Biographies of privilege* (2018) is an example of continuing interest in this *least likely case* of upper-class formation in “egalitarian” Norway. Other recent contributions, with a more political object, are Gulbrandsen (2018) and Engelstad et. al. (2019). Much could be said about the “elite”, and while some of my interviewees could be characterized as of elite position with elite modes of influence, I am not constructing my object as such. Rather, I treat my object as *ordinary citizens*. This is not meant in a *normative sense* but is a specific way of constructing an object attuned to my knowledge interests – ordinary modalities of relationships to the political. As such, while class theory often is concerned with differences in material resources and material inequality, Bourdieu's theory of social class is also a theory of class-conditioned symbolic practice in various fields and contexts, which is the subject of this thesis, with regards to *the field of politics*.

3.1.1 Social class and social practice

Theories of social class draw attention to how social actors are grouped in ways that have consequences for their being in society. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social class holds that social agents of varying capital are predisposed to act and perceive the world in different ways. This is summed up in the abstract, but clarifying formula: “[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice” (Bourdieu, 1984, 101). The structure of society, the social space, aligns with different volumes and species of capital. The EUC is a class of high volume of capital, but a preponderance of economic capital. This is Bourdieu's open-ended theory of class: not static class-schemes, but groups of individuals of similar properties, who *may* be socially similar. It is also a theory of action, where *habitus* serves as the bridge between structural factors (capital) and individual practice. *Habitus* is “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” of social action (Bourdieu & Nice, 1990, 53). Agents of similar position are predisposed to act, think, and classify in the same way, as similar potentials of social action stemming from the individual embodied history. The clause “[(habitus) (capital)]” refers to how individual

habitus to some degree diverge from class habitus. Whereas capital possession (of which occupation may be a measurement, as in our ORDC-schema) refers to economic resources at the time of data-gathering, habitus refers to the sum of the individual's social biography, such as social trajectory and past lived experiences. Thus, individuals of the EUC may originate from different backgrounds, and orient themselves differently, due to discrepancy between present class position and individual history.

In one of his major empirical works, *Distinction – A social critique of the judgement of taste*, Bourdieu applies his theory of social class to variations of lifestyle and cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1984). He shows how the structure of different positions in the social space (f.e. between holders of economic and cultural capital) corresponds to structures in a space of lifestyle – what he calls a homology. The taste for an object of legitimate culture, such as an acknowledged work of art, is not merely reflective of individual taste, but as “improvised strategies” conducted by agents whose habitus and capital predisposes them to judge in some manner. This is not a deterministic theory of action, but an acknowledgment and empirical demonstration of how cultural practices and judgements often are of classed nature, whereby agents possessing some form of cultural or economic resources are inclined to act and perceive the world in a certain way. As certain cultural practices are deemed “legitimate” in society, due to institutionalization and as it may be practiced by individuals of high standing, this tends to perpetuate inequality – not just on the economic market, but as with regards to lifestyles. Actors of similar *class* and *habitus* tend to group around similar forms of lifestyle and worldview. This has been illustrated quantitatively in Norway (Flemmen et al., 2018).

Starting from a Bourdieusian conceptualization of social class and *cultural practice*, the Norwegian middle and upper classes have also been the object of *qualitative* research. Most notable are Ljungrenn's research on the identity-negotiation of the cultural elite (2017), as well as Jarness' concurrent applications of the qualitative perspective across the social space (Jarness, 2013, 2015, 2017). Jarness' work is important, as he through theoretical and methodological reflections has continually faced the challenge for cultural class research in a supposed *egalitarian* country, where strong cultural judgements seem less legitimate. The applicability of Bourdieusian perspectives in an egalitarian context was the object of what has been dubbed “Skarpenesdebatten” (summed up in Andersen and Mangset (2012)). I follow Jarness in his take on the methodological challenges for qualitative class research in an egalitarian cultural context (Sølvberg & Jarness, 2019). Interestingly, there is less research explicitly focused on the EUC. Two recent, notable exceptions is the master's thesis of

Vormedal (2016), who studied the self-understanding of the Norwegian EUC, as well as projects on an upper-secondary school strong in EUC-descendants (Halvorsen & Ljunggren, 2020; Jarness, Pedersen, et al., 2019).

There has also been a resurgence of interest in the relationship between class and politics in its Bourdieusian variation. Through application of multiple correspondence analysis, Jarness Flemmen and Rosenlund (2019b) have shown how political opinion aligns with the structure of the social space in Norway – *from class politics to classed politics*. They thus follow a recent wake of Bourdieusian political sociology, who put the social space approach to the test with regards to class voting (De Keere, 2018; Harrits, 2013). However, *politics is classed in a dual sense*. First in the most obvious meaning: different groups may have different political interests – differences in political opinion. Secondly, politics as a symbolic field and practice may take different shape and meaning according to differences in social position. It is this secondary meaning of *classed politics* this thesis subscribes to. Putting it bluntly, I am not mostly concerned with the political opinion of my interviewees, but *in how the EUC relates to politics and put words to this relationship*.

To my knowledge, the only researcher who have applied this perspective to a Nordic context is Gitte Sommer Harrits in her dissertation *Hvad betyder klasse* [What does class mean] (2005). However, there are some deficiencies to her approach. Harrits utilizes Multiple Correspondence Analysis to describe homology between the Danish social space and “the space of political consumption”. She illustrates her findings by analysing interviews with actors from different classes and class fractions. The qualitative part is severely limited by how she only interviews 2-4 interviewees from each fraction (only two EUC). Secondly, she operates strictly according to Bourdieu’s terminology and conceptual apparatus. My thesis answers to both these deficiencies: It homes in on a specific class fraction with a larger number of interviewees (12), and draw on a wider spectrum of political sociology. While the latter is often steeped in the tradition of Bourdieu, it loosens itself somewhat from the straitjacket of his conceptual apparatus.

3.2 Class and politics

The politics of the economic fraction of the upper class is at immediate glance uninteresting. Why? Because their political behaviour never has been an issue of contention. From the Marxist distinction between owners and non-owners, to John Goldthorpe's notion of the "service class" which would constitute a "conservative element" in contemporary politics, the political views of the privileged of the business sector has rarely been a contested issue (Goldthorpe, 1982). In the debate on the reconfiguration of the class vote, it is rather the working class' split between matters of redistribution ("old politics") and post-material values ("new politics"), and the cultural fraction of the middle and upper class' alignment with the political "new left" which the scientific dispute revolves around (Flemmen & Haakestad, 2018; Jarness, Flemmen, et al., 2019a; Oesch, 2008). While contemporary class researchers argue the upper class is no politically homogenous unit, there is a trend of continuity from the days of Marx, that those who derive their position from economic capital adheres to the political right-wing. As such, a recent work mostly concerned with the working class and its dealignment from the Labour party, will brush past the remarkable stability of the "old middle class" (roughly the EUC) and its adherence to the Conservative Party (and lack of class-detractors favouring Labour) over a 50 year span in Britain (Evans & Tilley, 2017, 196).

By the prejudice of both common sense and the scientific community, the EUC "naturally" votes for the right-wing. As two researchers put it: the "bourgeoisie" seem to be the last class to exist both in-itself and for-itself (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2016). The economically privileged seem subjectively conscious of their "objective interests", and transpose this to political judgements. But as will come clear, this "naturalization" should peek the sociologist's interest, rather than discourage it.

When dealing with political opinion, we are in fact trying to answer three questions: Who?, why?, and *how?* (Damhuis, 2020). Debates on class voting are concerned with the first two: alignment between social position and political opinion (f.e. on a left-right axis of material and value politics). The question of "how", which Damhuis call "political decision-making processes" is rather concerned with the cognitive, dispositional schemata a citizen utilizes to make up his political mind. While research on political behaviour presupposes some form of individual "rationality", for example the economically self-interestedness of the working and

owner-class, such concepts are often left under- or naively theorized. What form of political dispositions are we in fact “constructing” when estimating voting?

3.2.1 The political field

In his early major work, *Le cens caché*, political scientist Daniel Gaxie transposes the Bourdieusan project to the field of politics (Gaxie, 1978). Akin to Bourdieu, Gaxie attempts to account for classed differences of seeing and being, as pertaining to a specific field of symbolic practice, politics. This work is essentially a more full-grown attempt at what Bourdieu put forward in the chapter “Culture and Politics” at the end of *Distinction* (originally published in 1979, one year after *Le cens caché*). Daniel Gaxie presents his theory of the “effects” of the out-differentiation of the political field, against the normative “truths” it is founded on – the rational and politically omnipotent citizen, always capable of discerning and translating his interests to political judgements. Modern representative democracies are the product of a series of historical events wherein politics differentiates from religious and economic matters, into an activity performed by specialized agents (politicians and other agents in the field) in a struggle for power over the state. As such, only a small set of the population is directly engaged in the field of politics. Gaxie thus diverges from traditional conceptions of political participation:

Against the ideology of "political participation" which, describing the hierarchy of forms of political intervention, posits the existence of a sort of continuum going from voting to the exercise of state power, it is important to underline *the cut imposed by the division of labor and the exercise of political domination between the agents of the political field and the other social agents*. Reading political columns in newspapers, listening to specialized broadcasts on radio and television or political discussions do not imply any participation in the struggle for the conquest of leadership positions in the state apparatus. *These are in fact signs of the attention some spectators pay to political events*. The same is true, a fortiori, for voting, which we will see often expresses a desire for social conformity and which in any case only occurs occasionally. *From the moment when certain agents are specialized in the struggle for the conquest and the exercise of political power, others become mere spectators of a competition from which they are objectively excluded*.

(Gaxie, 1978, 42) [My translation and italics]

Taking inspiration from Bourdieu’s research on museum visitors and their role as consumers vis-a-vis the field of artistic production (Bourdieu et al., 1991), democratic citizens participate in politics not as active agents, but as *spectators* or *laymen*, exercising little direct power, apart from the miniscule act of voting, an act which occurs rarely and at fixed intervals. What is deemed political, and as *political* questions is determined by agents internal to the field. Still, the agents of the political field are required to maintain political capital

(*legitimate* power), of which electoral capital is the most important, allowing access to dominant positions in the political field. While politics is a specialized activity of a relatively autonomous field, politicians must “take into consideration the possible reactions of those who do not directly participate in political activities”.

The politically dispossessed social agents do not therefore constitute a "passive" mass. They are occasional speakers and above all spectators whose opinion counts, at least for some. *Understanding the functioning of the political field therefore necessarily leads to questioning their degree of politicization, that is to say the degree to which they pay their attention to political events.*

(Gaxie, 1978, 44) [My translation and italics]

Understanding the relationship between *professionals* and *laymen* leads to questioning *the interest the laymen take in the actions of politicians*. Putting it shortly: to what degree do politics interest citizens? This is what Gaxie calls *politicization*. Rather than assuming an always “participating” citizenry, Gaxie presupposes that the modus operandi of citizens is of *indifference* to politics. The title of the book translates to “The hidden disenfranchement”, pointing towards how inequalities in *politicization* serves as a hidden barrier between the citizens and their expected participation. As such, Gaxie’s “political theory” may be considered a criticism of the normative self-understanding of democracy, at least to the lengths by which we attribute a *universal political competence* to every citizen.

3.2.2 Politicization and political competence

An inquiry into ordinary citizens’ relationship to politics may begin by studying levels and modes of *politicization*. According to Gaxie, politicization is defined as the degree to which social actors pay attention to political events (Gaxie, 1978, 240). This depends on a specifically *political competence*, a competence of twofold character. Firstly, political competence depends on *cognitive* competence. Cognitive competence is the ability to decipher the language and rules of politics, to have “phenomenological knowledge of the political field” (Gaxie 1978, 65). This includes knowledge of central actors in the field (politicians, parties, institutions etc.), familiarity with salient political issues, and ability to classify and construct a political “space” according to divisions (left-right) and ideological differences (Gaxie 1978, 65-95). Secondly, and this is Gaxie/Bourdieu’s critical addition as compared to traditional conceptualizations of political competence: competence is *also* of a statutory nature. One not only has to *know*, but one must also *feel* one knows, and *ought* to

participate and utter statements on political matters. This is called statutory competence (a sense of entitlement). Certain agents feel obliged to take an interest in politics, being empowered by their status, and subsequently by the expectations of their social milieu. This is what Bourdieu means by “noblesse oblige”, nobility obliges (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). Referring to Bourdieu’s *The Love of Art*, Gaxie compares the weakly politicized citizen with the art consumer who lacks the relevant principles of division to appreciate art:

As a particular form of symbolic consumption, politicization presupposes, as we have said, a specific skill. The agents who do not have them are as if overwhelmed by the significance of political events which cannot therefore hold their attention for a long time. As when a work of art "exceeds the possibilities of apprehension of the spectator [... and that this one] loses interest in what appears to him as variegation without rhyme or reason, like play of spots of colors without necessity”.

(Gaxie, 1978, 184) [My translation]

Level of political competence varies with position in the division of labour, and mostly by cultural and educational level (one may say: cultural capital). Gaxie holds that among agents of similar educational level, political competence is higher among those of older age, among men, and once on rises in the hierarchy of occupations, of social status. Cognitive, or competence therefore depends on a statutory, or subjective competence.

Political competence is at the same time attribution and capacity, right to know and knowledge, cognitive competence and social competence. It is because certain social agents are invested with a political authority, that is to say with a socially recognized (and prescribed) aptitude to know a domain of reality (Gaxie, 1978, 240-241) [My translation]

Or succinctly put by Bourdieu, who grappled with the same question of statutory competence:

In fact, we have to ask what it means to be competent. Why are women less technically competent than men? Spontaneous sociology immediately offers a score of reasons: they have less time to spare for politics, they do the housework, they are less interested. But why are they less interested? Because they have less competence, the word now being used not in the technical sense but in the legal sense, as one speaks of a competent court. To be competent is to be entitled and required to deal with something. In other words, the real law that is hidden behind these seemingly anodyne correlations is that technical, political competence, like all competences, is a social competence. That does not mean that technical competence does not exist, but it does mean that the propensity to acquire what is called technical competence rises with social competence, that is, as a function of social recognition of being worthy and therefore called upon to acquire that competence. (Bourdieu, 1993, 160).

For an illustration of the relationship between social variables and political competence, see figure 1.

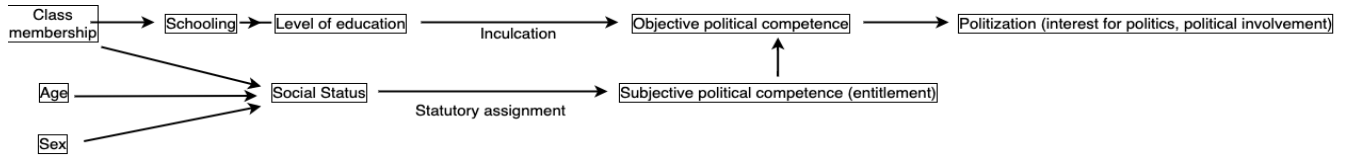


Figure 1: From Gaxie (1978, 161) Translated figure borrowed from Kevin Geays presentation in the Class and Elites seminar (14/10/20)

The relationship between education and cognitive political competence is not direct. As most western schools are “secular”, and politics and political participation to a weak degree is part of the curriculum, education rather facilitates the social actor’s “scholastic” competence, such as proficiency in reading, writing, arguing, and a propensity to acknowledge legitimate culture. This “scholastic” competence can be transposed to political objects once one takes an interest. Again, the probability of mobilizing these culture resources in political matters, or any other field bearing the mark of legitimate culture, increases with social status.

By Gaxie’s theory, one is led to assume an EUC of stronger politicization, due to their high social status (high economic capital and often leading positions in the business sector), as well as mostly of higher education. Regarding my specific sample (see chapter on methodology), we are in fact dealing with doubly legitimate actors: Every interviewee has higher education, most are men, and most are older of age (three factors which could facilitate a stronger competence).

3.3 A politically invested upper-class: but how?

As shown in our exposition of Daniel Gaxie’s theory of politicization, agents of higher education and social status are predisposed to “grasp” the hidden rules of the politics. They have both the cognitive resources and statutory assignment which decoding of the political field presupposes. Central to Bourdieu’s theory of social class and practice is that the upper classes are better equipped to understand the “hidden curriculum” of different fields of legitimate culture. In one of the final chapters of *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984, 397-465), Bourdieu introduces this perspective of politics as “legitimate culture”. He advances the

hypothesis that social position is homologous to political opinion, which has been revitalized in Norway the recent years (Flemmen & Haakestad, 2018; Jarness, Flemmen, et al., 2019). However, not only political opinion, but “taste” for politics is unevenly distributed in society. Social agents have in, in a way, differing “taste”, or distaste, for politics. Politics, as art, operates by certain “divisions” only some have the “vision” to appreciate. The propensity to take an interest in politics is what Gaxie calls *politicization*.

Whereas lower classes’ distrust of politics may be understood by their habitus not attuned to the decoding of the political field, the upper class is rather “strengthened” facing politics, as they are equipped with dispositions more attuned to the “rules” of the field. Bourdieu shows evidence that frequencies of “don’t know”-responses on surveys on political opinion increases among the less privileged classes, a frequency which again increases by the question’s level of political abstraction. This perspective has recently been applied and tested in the Norwegian context by Vebjørn Nordhagen (Nordhagen, 2019, 2021). Practices such as the reading of newspapers is both unequally distributed, and the less privileged classes often read newspapers less concerned with the abstract topic of politics. The list goes on. There are clear inequalities in the access to the world of politics.

However, this thesis is concerned with the politicization of a fraction of the upper class, which most often is designated as the “masters” of politics as a form of legitimate culture. As Bourdieu puts it at the end of “Culture and Politics”:

“Everything combines to reinforce the deep distrust – not incompatible with an equally deep form of recognition – which the dominated feel towards political language, broadly identified, like everything symbolic, with the dominant, the masters of the art of packaging and of fobbing off with words. This suspicion of the political “stage”, a “theatre” whose rules are not understood and which leaves ordinary taste with a sense of helplessness, is often the source of “apathy” and of a generalized distrust of all forms of speech and spokesmen. And often the only escape from ambivalence or indeterminacy towards language is to fall back on what one can appreciate, the body rather than words, substance rather than form, an honest face rather than a smooth tongue.” (Bourdieu, 1984, 464-465)

In contrast to the “distrust” of the lower classes, the dominant are the “masters of words”.

What will be argued in the following sections is that such descriptions of politically “dominated” classes as opposed to the “dominant” tend to overestimate the capacities of those most endowed. This is often the practical conclusion of the perspectives of Gaxie and Bourdieu: Whereas the lower classes are less inclined to vote, produce an opinion, read certain newspapers et cetera, the dominant classes are “competent” and “participates” politically. While this story may be statistically true and may perpetuate the scientific interest

in those dominated, it may also hinder a better understanding of exactly *how* the dominant dominate politically.

While there is little research on classed political practices in Norway, a recent contribution has filled this gap. They show the extent to which different class fractions commit to certain formal and informal political practices, where class is operationalized after Bourdieusian principles (see figure 2) (Moe et al., 2019, 148).

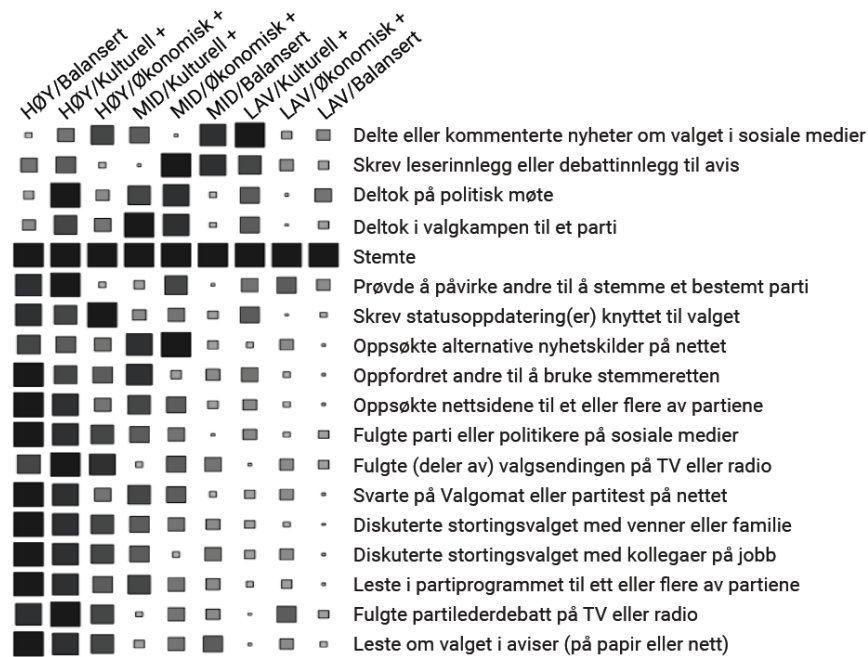


Figure 2: Political practices (Ordered from most invested to least invested class fraction)

As expected, upper-class fractions are most likely *overall* do to various political practices. The lower classes are less likely to do most practices, apart from voting. However, there is heterogeneity among the upper class according to fraction, and heterogeneity in terms of practices across the whole sample. As for the former, the economic fraction of the upper class is *much less likely* to have “Tried to influence someone else to vote a particular party”. As for this practice, the EUC is the second least (!) likely across the whole class structure (whereas the other upper-class fractions are most committed). They are also less likely (compared to the rest of the upper class) to have taken an online “test” for choosing a party. Among the upper class, it is only the cultural fraction which frequent political meetings. Simultaneously, there are practices more common in the lower end of the class structure, such as discussion in social media.

As this illustrates, concepts of “politicization”, “political competence”, and “political participation” are never straightforward. One cannot easily generalize from resources (capital, competence) to forms of practice. What is one in fact talking about when competent and participating classes of citizens? Beneath the most legitimate and formal practices, such as voting, lie fundamentally social relationship to politics, what we may call different *social dispositions of political investment*. While a hypothetical actor may be highly inclined to read newspapers and vote, he may be less inclined to discuss party politics. Another may be less “scholastically” invested (read specialized political columns), while being *practically* engaged in street level mobilization. Whereas education and social status may be a strong indicator of political competence, whereby the upper classes would have a stronger “competence” and a “taste” for politics, such linear propositions may overshadow configurations of political investment among laymen in representative democracies. This may appear more clearly once one shifts the scientific gaze from the most formal and legitimate political practices such as voting and going to political meetings, to more *ordinary contexts of the political*. Such observations call for caution when speaking of a *habitus* which predisposes an agent for stronger political investment. By such observations and reflections, we approach the post-bourdiesian Bernard Lahire, who has put forward a criticism of the concept of *habitus* and field-specific practice. This may enable an understanding of how different class fractions, or actors with the same class, seem to be *contextually invested* in politics.

3.3.1 The plural citizen

Bernard Lahire can be considered one of Bourdieu’s strongest critics and proponents¹. He has put forward a criticism of the Bourdiesian concept of habitus, which is meant to entail how a similar *modus operandi* (habitus) among similarly classed agents produces homogenous practices (*opus operatum*). According to Bourdieu, the structured habitus predisposes actors for similarly classed practices across different contexts. For instance, the upper-class socialized actor gravitates towards upper class practices across a variety of fields of practice. However, through utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques, Lahire has claimed

¹ Generally considered a sympathetic critic of Bourdieu. While working on the same general problems Bourdieu did, he also points out clear difficulties in his somewhat totalizing conceptual apparatus. According to Lahire, researchers should be less concerned with operating strictly according to “la manière du Bourdieu” (the Bourdieu-machine), but rather strive to go beyond him.

that actors with homogenous legitimate practices are a minority in every social class, *also in the upper class*. Thus, while Bourdieusian research often is concerned with inter-class differences of practice (between classes), with differences in habitus as an explanatory concept, Lahire argues the importance of studying *intra-class* (variations between individuals in the same class), and *intra-individual* variations of practice (in the same individual in different contexts) (Lahire, 2006). Lahire holds that the most common cultural disposition across all classes is that of *dissonant dispositions*. Most actors can be characterized by a mix of practices, both legitimate and illegitimate. Actors of *consonant* dispositions, that is, homogeneously legitimate or illegitimate practices respectively, are a minority in every class, but more commonly found among lower classed actors (Lahire, 2008). Lahire thus taps into the observations of Peterson and Kern, who held that the higher and intermediary classes could be characterized as *cultural omnivores* (Peterson & Kern, 1996).

This is a critique of historical and cultural character. Bourdieu's concept of habitus was developed through research in Algeria in the 1950s. Lahire holds that a concept which presupposes relatively homogenous socializing experiences is not straightforwardly transferable to modern, complex, differentiated societies, where socialization rarely is homogenous. As an example: An upper-class agent 50 years ago was perhaps more locked into strictly upper-class milieus (f.i. an exclusionary educational system) than to today. In the 21st century, social influence is more varied, due to increasing mobility (or at least the state's attempt at improving such), increasing role of education (kindergartens, higher education), social mixing, mass media, the internet etc. Not only has arenas of socialization become more heterogenous and varied, but the contexts in which the socialized agent may act have also become so. One could thus assume there are less reasons to believe one form of socialization predisposes one form of practice, in a one-to-one relationship. The social world and the reproduction of its fabric have turned more complex. Lahire by no means disproves Bourdieu in that differences in resources facilitates differing ways of seeing and being, but rather that habitus as a set of "embodied systems of disposition" *transferable to a wide variety of contexts* is seen as a *rare occurrence of the possible* (Lahire, 2011, ix)².

Following Lahire, Kevin Geay has shown how among his sample of executives and intellectuals (two fractions of the upper class), only 9,6% percent of the respondents answered they "*often*" (strongest category) commit to the following practices

² And Lahire asks, in a wonderful turn of phrase: What are the social conditions that predispose an actor towards a homogenous and consonant dispositions of practice? That is only a particular case of the possible.

(simultaneously, in the same individual): “voting”, “monitor news”, and “discuss politics among friends”. Still, this group was also *least likely to be disinvested* in all three categories of political practice (26,59%) (Geay, 2015, 159). Lahire’s point is that cultural dissonance is the rule, not the exception, even among those most often designated as emissaries of legitimate culture. Sociology may thus attempt more nuanced descriptions of dispositions, by showing

[...] that the intra-individual variations of cultural behavior are the product of the interaction between, on the one hand, the plurality of provisions and embedded cultural competences (assuming the plurality of socializing experiences in cultural matters) and, on the other hand, diversity cultural contexts (cultural domain or sub-domain, contexts relationships or circumstances of practice) in which individuals have to make choices, practice, consume, etc (Lahire, 2006)

While demonstrating this quantitatively, Lahire has first and foremost mobilized the qualitative interview to better describe such complex and nuanced dispositions, which often are hidden by variables at the aggregated level. Because not only may dissonance be overlooked, but also the “nature of relations – variable by situation – that respondents have with their practices” (Lahire, 2008). This “turn” is highly similar to Vegard Jarness’ contribution “Modes of consumption: From 'what' to 'how' in cultural stratification research” (Jarness, 2015). Lahire and Jarness ask that the scientific gaze should be shifted from the object to the *meaning* of the object and the way it is “practiced”. For instance, a cultured upper class actor’s consumption of pop-music may mean something else than the lower classed actor’s, on paper, similar musical taste.

A sort of culmination of Lahire’s scientific program may be found in his work *Portraits Sociologique [Sociological Portraits]* (Lahire, 2002). Lahire interviews eight individual actors of varying social position, several times each, and on widely different subjects in each interview (school, family, work, friends, leisure and cultural activities, sport, food, health). By such, he aims to highlight how internal dispositions and external contexts coincide in the singular individual: while a singular organism, the actor is multi-determined and multi-socialized, often in contrasting manners. Modern actors are *plural actors*, maintaining a relationship of higher or lesser intensity to various fields and social contexts. Individuals are thus conceptualized as being *multi-socialized and multi-determined* (Lahire, 2011, xviii).

According to Lahire, Bourdieusian cultural class analysis too often end up with simple distinctions between actors predisposed to acting out the legitimate codes of a field of practice as opposed to those reduced to their “cultural poverty” and symbolic exclusion from a field of practice (Lahire, 2015). Lahire here picks up the baton after Grignon and Passeron, who in their work *Le Savant et Le Populaire* argued against “legitismism” in class research, where the least endowed often is reduced to their “lack” cultivated dispositions. Although this criticism is mainly directed towards research on “popular” cultural practices, Grignon and Passeron also criticize this tendency towards “legitismism” in research on agents in the upper parts of the social space:

Certain descriptions that are a little too edifying of the dominant lifestyle make you want to introduce into sociological discourse libraries full of books never read, museums crossed at a run, concerts suffered by a sleepy ear, buffets taken by storm. (Grignon & Passeron, 1989, 101)

Returning to our object, one can, following Lahire, Grignon and Passeron, expect also upper-class citizens not *fully invested* in political practice. Whereas the *folk theory* of *democracy* in its most caricatured form postulates a universal political competence among the electorate, this may only be the rare exception, even among those most privileged. In fact, Gaxie’s theory of politicization is also accusable of such “legitismism”, by hypothesizing a strong competence among those of high education and status. While the upper class have a stronger statistical tendency towards paying attention to politics, this shouldn’t discourage studying the shape of this politicization.

Lahire should not be read as positing an individualistic criticism of class specific practice. Thus, he speaks of “the social in a folded and unfolded state”. Whereas the social in its aggregate regularities (unfolded) can be discerned by the social researcher, and highlight structural patterns, this shouldn’t discourage studying how society in its plural and differentiated form also exists *in* the singular individual (the social in its folded state). An analytically stringent approach to class analysis may show how social determinants coincide in the singular individual, the plural actor, and not simply refer to the *class habitus*, ending there. Lahire turns the “noise” of the dissonant individual (f.i. an upper-class agent not operating as theoretically “expected”) into an object of scientific interest. But again, contexts and social situations are not individual, but fundamentally socially constituted and structured. As such, “studying the social in the folded state would have no meaning if it could not be based on the study of the social in the unfolded state” (Lahire, 2013, 16) Thus, the sociologist

must be analytically and methodologically sensitive to both the structural patterns and individual variations. In the words of Claude Grignon:

But, for the sociologist, exceptional individuals are not unique; by comparing their respective stories, he can group them according to specific traits they share, putting together case clusters, thereby returning to the collective from the individual. (Grignon, 2017).

Lahire postulates a sociological program more attuned to understanding *individual dispositions of practice*, and their varying activation in *differing social contexts*. As we will see in the following, such an approach is especially novel facing the politicization of the upper classes. The social regularity of a highly mobilized upper class with stable voting patterns is too often left in its unfolded state, *obscuring the specificity of their relationship to politics*.

3.4 A qualitative approach

Returning to the concept of *politicization*, it appears the relationship between social class and political practice is not entirely translucent, as one cannot easily generalize from class to political investment – one must account for dissonant dispositions and different contexts of practice. The disentanglement of such a fine, complex social fabric may require more in-depth methodology – a requirement which may be alleviated through qualitative research. Daniel Gaxie’s research on social inequalities of politicization was first based on quantitative data. As he claims himself, funding for surveys were often hard to find, so he turned towards the use of semi-structured interviews (Gaxie, 2021). While practically motivated at first, this methodological choice turned out to offer newfound implications: the political reasoning, motivations and practices of individual respondents were often far more nuanced than what quantitative data could offer, often stemming from complex *social relationships* (Gaxie, 2002, 2007). Understanding the social constitution of the political behaviour has become the chief occupation of the SPEL-collective in France (SPEL= Political Sociology of Elections) (which includes Daniel Gaxie).

In a recent publication, *Le sens du vote* (The *meaning* of the vote), SPEL revives a classic of political sociological research, Paul Lazarsfeld’s *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; SPEL, 2016). As opposed to *individualistic* and *cognitivist* conceptions of political behaviour, for example the focus on the individual’s “rationality”, knowledge and competence – concepts which usually are illustrated by the empirical relationship of

quantifiable variables, the SPEL-collective wants to construct a *socio-logic of the vote*. The SPEL-collective points towards the fundamentally *collective and social* act of voting, both as the preferences of groups, but also the social interactions of these groups. Whether class voting is more or less salient in Western Democracies has long been a hot issue. Still, less research is directed towards understanding *how* these “groups” actually pay attention to politics, and exploring *how* and *what* (a part from static variables) push and pull the actors in their judgements, of which the (class-)vote *may* be the final act. Paul Lazarsfeld pioneered this field, conducting interviews with the same individuals at three different times during the election process, “to discover the relative effect of various influential factors [on voting]” (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948, 2). As two authors put it, referring to Lazarsfeld:

This work is a timely reminder that voting is also (first of all?) a collective act, carried out in interaction with others; they therefore invite to better take into account the contexts of interactions, exchanges, the discussions, the micro pressures that shape preferences (SPEL, 2016, 13).

This also a methodological issue. The SPEL-collective wants to revive the qualitative tradition of electoral studies, which is dominated by statistical and survey methods. The qualitative interview may shed new light on classed political behaviour, which often is given backseat explanatory value in contemporary electoral research, due to its apparently diminishing effect in modern democracy:

The supposed decline in the weight of memberships can therefore also come under the optical illusion: the characteristics of sociocultural influence would not weigh less on opinions and votes, but their influence, more fragmented, would have become less readable, in particular by a simple statistical recording reduced to coding of social characteristics [...] (SPEL, 2016, 16)

In the first two chapters of the book, the collective studies young people of the working class and the fractions of the upper class, arguing social determinants still play a big role in determining political behaviour, both as socializations of the vote, as well as differing “attention paid to electoral games” – *politicization*. However, they also point to the internal differentiation of these groups, illuminatingly described:

[...] even within the most polarized collectives of the “popular classes” or from the “upper classes” we can distinguish fragmented groups. The little differences in position, capital, origin, make sense and sometimes produce important differences in the way of conceiving one's own identity and to project oneself into politics. It's even these little differences, for example between the attachment to cultural capital and economic capital in the highly educated classes, between the children of migrants and others in the lower classes, which are most likely to explain the heterogeneity of policy choices. Everything happens as if it was the *internal deviations* of these groups, rather than the position in the social space as a whole, which were decisive.

Is it ultimately so surprising, since it is indeed through the experience of confrontation with "others" both close and different that forge the meaning of who we are socially - and politically? This result is, obviously, important because it shows that these are not the social abstract categories which are decisive, but rather the positions occupied *in specific social configurations* - which articulate social and migratory origin, trajectory, relationship to work, heritage and the level of diploma, place of residence, inclusion in social networks of friends, professionally, etc.

(SPEL, 2016, 17) [My translation]

As the EUC is expected to be a relatively homogenous as voters, special attention should be made towards those who diverge from this well-trodden path. The qualitative interview may be better equipped to discern such "small" push and pull factors which social agents may knowingly or unknowingly orient themselves by. However, the main perk of the qualitative political sociology of elections is how they enable a better understanding of how *politicization* works, in *ordinary and everyday situations*.

3.4.1 Politics in ordinary contexts

Closely affiliated to the work of the SPEL-collective is the concept of *ordinary politics*. In the work *L'ordinaire du politique*, a group of researchers spell out a programme attuned to understanding the politicization of ordinary citizens, in ordinary situations (Buton et al., 2016). The concept of *ordinary* thus have a double meaning. First, the fundamental insight of Daniel Gaxie in *Le Cens Caché*, that citizens, the laymen of democracy, first and foremost can be characterized by *indifference* (but as we know, to an unequal degree), since the specific activity of politics is mainly performed by specialized professionals. Ordinary citizens are therefore social actors not specifically attuned to this activity. "Politics is where there are politicians, one might say brutally" (Buton et al., 2016, 13).

Secondly, as in *ordinary and everyday situations*, as opposed to the hyper-mobilization of elections, which occur rarely and with fixed intervals, and surveys on opinion, which are usual objects of political scientific research. Researchers privileging these specifically political situations can be accused of legitimism, always focusing on extraordinary social contexts where politics *socially legitimate*, and imposes a *universal capacity* of political competence on the voters or respondents. Rather than these specific contexts, the researcher studying ordinary politics is more "interested in what goes without saying for the social actor, which, already there, is taken for granted" – politics in contexts of ordinary life, of ordinary people, or at least in ordinary contexts of the lives of (extra)ordinary people. However, this is

not some sort of “privileging” of the popular relation to politics as opposed to *participatory activities* or the actions political agents, but more of an acknowledgement of the effect of the out-differentiation of political activity from everyday life:

On the one hand, the ordinary is everyday life, and ordinary relationships with the political refer to what, in everyday life, in the family or in the workplace, by reading the newspapers or chatting at the café, does or (more often) does not make political sense for social actors. On the other, a whole series of events officially stamped as “political”, such as election campaigns, demonstrations, urban riots, televised debates, scandals and affairs, etc., are likely to offer grips to actors and encourage them to take a political position, and sometimes even to summon them to do it. (Buton et al., 2016, 17)

Everyday practices are to varying degree in tune with events in the political field. Citizens may talk about themes of political relevance in a variety of social contexts, such as a statement of a political agent, or a particular social problem, without simultaneously referring to how this tie up to concrete struggles in the political field. Different everyday situations are to varying degree context for political discussion, such as among close family, among friends and in professional gatherings (and different contexts within groups). Different contexts and contexts of interaction in various ways (and strengths) contribute to the political socialization of the individual. Different media outlets, such as newspapers, television, or even the social media of today play different roles in individual’s lives. But such various contexts which facilitates individual political investment are rarely random individual cases but take different shape according to social differentiation.

Studying “true” ordinary situations and interactions is a methodological challenge, which ethnography and participatory methods have as its privileged object. One such approach is Nina Eliasoph and her work on group-styles of political discussion. In the strikingly titled *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*, Eliasoph approaches different lower and intermediate classes in their everyday discussions (Eliasoph, 1998; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). By participating in these natural groups of talking citizens, Eliasoph wants to show how an approach bridging the gap between the “outer” (structural forces) and “inner” (subjective beliefs) can highlight conditions for (de)politicization. By paying “attention to the “in-between” – to the ways people talk to each other about the political world and their place in it” (1998, 231), Eliasoph shows how political engagement is not just a function of political competence, but of different group styles and “ethics” of social-political interaction. In one group, whose style Eliasoph describes as “cynical chic solidarity”, the “ethic” was a one of *competent* but *humorous* treatment of politics, while maintaining distance from explicit engagement:

Cynics were incredibly knowledgeable about politics. Cynical solidarity relied on first invoking the world's problems to show that I recognize the problems and, along with you, am not a "bubba" ["dumb country redneck"]. The second step was to say why the problems do not affect me. Usually, the answer is that I have rendered myself impervious, through laughter. [...] Knowledge of one's own powerlessness was a taken-for-granted prerequisite of conversation but when it became an explicit topic, participants quickly showed that they were not so powerless after all: they were impervious and had somehow exempted themselves. (Eliasoph, 1998, 161-162)

While these people, as individuals, were politically competent, they seemed to downplay the importance of politics *when talking in groups*. As Eliasoph puts it, this «immunity towards politics» was less prevalent when confronted individually (1998, 159). Rather than being an "individual" property, such behaviour seemed to be a function of group-style.

While *ordinary politics* is an interesting perspective, the "popular will" is determined at the ballot boxes and the casting of the vote. The privileging of legitimate definition (formal political practices, such as voting) is important, because although political indifference can be strong in everyday situations, it is the vote, and not the coffee chat or media consumption which determine the distribution of power in modern democracies. A strong analysis of politicization must therefore be attentive to both these sides of democratic life, the ordinary contexts, and the extraordinary situation of the vote, and ideally, must be dealt with in tandem. By this, I approach the narrow end of this theoretical funnel: the ordinary politicization of the upper classes. A class which while strongly mobilized as voters, often seem more ambivalent towards politics in *their ordinary forms of practice*.

3.5 The politicization of the bourgeoisie

In French sociology and political science, two approaches have in recent years tried to capture the upper classes' relationship to politics. The first story is the shorter one. It is based on how the upper class is a mobilized class, a class ready to defend its interests. This is most importantly manifested through the vote. In a social universe where class is assumed to be less structuring of political position (Clark & Lipset, 1991), the economic fraction of the upper class appear to be outstandingly mobilized and stable in their positioning towards the political right. In the sample of this study, most of the interviewees belong to some of Oslo's most economically privileged districts, Vestre Aker and Ullern. In the parliamentary election of 2017, in these two districts, 65% voted for parties considered to be on the right wing³. About 45% voted for the Conservative Party, which can be considered to be the party most

³ The Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and the Progress Party

favoured towards the economic interests of the EUC (NRK, 2017). This is 20% more votes for the Conservative Party than the national average this year. The voter turnout was also around 88%, 10% above the average in the nation. *Such numbers lead to a conclusion of a class both mobilized towards their objective interests, as well as being highly politicized and competent.*

Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot has made a career on studying the capacity of the bourgeoisie for mobilizing their interests. Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot holds that the bourgeoisie express a simultaneous “practical collectivism” and “theoretical individualism” (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2016). The bourgeoisie is highly mobilized at the ballot boxes, votes mainly to the right and centre-right, protecting the conditions which will serve the reproduction of the class’ economic basis, while at the same time expressing this through the ideology of individualism. While they may preach the ideology of individualism, they so as a collective chorus:

The reference to the market, to competition, appears dominant in the discourses of the dominant, even though their practices are far from this theoretical individualism. [...] Because it is a question of the ruling class, the practice can do without theory or, better, can hide behind the ideological screen of a theorization which contradicts the concrete reality of the class. (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2016)

This seems supported by the theory of Daniel Gaxie, as the privileged classes “master” the classification schemes of the political field. The bourgeois seem to recognize themselves in the political platform of the parties on the right, and effectively transpose their interests to the political field. “The conservative vote is, in a way, natural to the bourgeois condition” (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2016, 110). Still, this still begs the question: *how?* As Kevin Geay argues: “This formulation, effective as it is, in fact functions as a black box that discourages investigation, when it should prompt it” (Geay, 2015, 21).

3.5.1 The ordinary politicization of the EUC

While the former research agenda was not specifically targeted at the *politicization* of the bourgeoisie, but at their capacity to defend their localized interests, recent contributions have tried to pin down the specificity of the bourgeoisie mode of politicization. They have conducted surveys and interviews in the 16. Arrondissement of Paris, from 2007 to 2017 (Agrikoliansky, 2014; Agrikoliansky & Collovald, 2014; Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020; Buton et al., 2016). As pertaining to the economic fractions of the upper classes specifically,

this research is summed up in a recent article by Eric Agrikoliansky and Kevin Geay, “The economic bourgeoisie: a “mobilized class”, but how”⁴ (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020). How is the economic fractions of the upper class so stable in their adherence to the political right through a changing social structure, including a reconfigured capitalist economy, secularization, and a less stable political party structure?

Building on and challenging the agenda set by Pincon and Pincon-Charlot, they argue the upper class’ theoretical individualism is not just an “ideological screen”:

It has practical implications; one of them being the distance to partisan mobilizations. Consequently, rather than sticking to its "natural" character, it is necessary to explore the springs of such a naturalization of socio-political identity, to identify the mediations likely to construct the right-wing vote as being in accordance with the interests. of the economic “bourgeoisie” and to grasp concretely how this category is mobilized and is mobilized politically (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020).

Utilizing the perspective of “ordinary politics”, they show how socialization, social interactions, and relations to political agents reinforces this naturalness of the EUC’s support of the political right wing. Geay and Agrikolansky paint a picture of the politicization of an upper class “in a certain shade of grey”. While this class is expected to be comparatively highly politicized, how does this translate to their ordinary social lives and relationship to political categories?

Agrikoliansky and Geay holds the economic fractions of the bourgeoisie can be characterized by a *paradoxical* relationship to politics. They are hyper-mobilized as voters, voting often and stably, while simultaneously expressing a somewhat “distanced” relationship to political practice. While strongly attached to the act of voting, interviewees were often found to disregard ideological and party identification – the act of being represented. When asked to self-position on a political left-right axis, interviewees were often hesitant to place themselves in clearly defined categories. While such behaviour may be observed among lower classed actors, due to lack of political competence (“this is too complicated”), it is here rather the upper class actors’ “feeling of irreducibility” which feeds a mistrust towards political categorization.

Interestingly, this political self-perception is reflected in their behaviour towards popular-political practices, such as electoral campaigns and political mobilizations. Interviewees distanced themselves towards practices such as demonstration with an amalgam of “moral, aesthetic, and psychological terms, which reflects a properly social distance from activism”.

⁴ My translation

While political parties spend loads of resources to “activate” the electorate, the electoral mobilization of the bourgeoisie seem almost non-existent. As such, while the bourgeoisie are more likely to proclaim an “interest in politics”, they are simultaneously comparatively *less likely to report having had contact with political activists preceding an election*. In interviews, respondents report having come across activists, but simultaneously *never having talked with them*. Simultaneously, ethnography of public meetings of the UMP (Centre-right party) revealed a very lacklustre “public”. As such, the politicization of the economic fractions of the bourgeoisie seem to be very little reliant on ordinary partisan mobilizations.

But while scepticism of political agents may be observed elsewhere in the social structure, such “distancing” may take peculiar forms among the upper classes. Comparing surveys from the the 16th arrondissement with the less privileged 10th arrondissement, the citizens of the former were more likely to have met an elected official than the latter. However, the open-ended part of survey showed that while citizens of the 10th usually met politicians in explicit political and public settings, the citizens of the 16th usually listed private and ordinary settings such as “weddings, conferences, school fairs and dinners with friends” (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020). In the interviews, this closeness to politicians is confirmed. As the researchers put it: “the mutual acquaintance is worth proof of the social qualities of the candidate: he belongs to the same world, is “well-behaved” and therefore trustworthy”. In fact, this “closeness” to politicians may be a way of mobilizing voters without appearing to be.

But as Kevin Geay have showed in his dissertation, this closeness to politicians may also be a catalyst for criticism. Interestingly, these often come in form of psychological or moral judgements, stemming from face-to-face meetings with politicians, where one meets as private persons, avoiding reference to political or partisan affiliation (Geay, 2015, 243). The crux is, while such forms judgements of politicians by no means is exclusive to this class, it takes a unique form, mostly to due to the *social proximity* between the upper classes and politicians. This social proximity is one of local proximity, but may also be understood structurally by their occupying positions closer to or in *the field of power*, where agents of differing capital contest for the legitimate vision of the social world.

Interviewees were found to express a certain mistrust towards too invested consumption of political objects. Agrikoliansky and Geay describe this as a “product of competition within the upper classes for the definition of the legitimate mode of accumulation of cultural

capital”. Interviewees were rarely found to practice in-depth reading of political columns and the most legitimate newspapers such as *Le Monde*. They thus distanced themselves from too scholastic means of appropriating political objects, often “grazing” or skipping political columns. In parallel, the profession of politics is often an object of criticism, and for many interviewees seemed to entail a dimension of “service”. Respondents contrast the “courage and entrepreneurial adventure” with “electoral concessions” and “clamping down on the markets” – thus a devaluation of political power vis-à-vis economical. Politicians are perceived as average people whose only job is to be re-elected. Agrikoliansky and Geay deems that this is due to how politicians depend on a cultural capital far from that valued by the bourgeoisie. In her doctoral thesis, Harrits finds a somewhat different conception of the role of politicians among the Danish EUC (Harrits, 2005). The interviewees idealize a certain type of politician, described as effective and result-oriented, with an ability to make decisions and “get things done”. Politics is about finding the correct solutions, without too much talk. Similarly, politics are compared to running a business, an affair which can be solved according to common sense. The politician is not regarded as an elite, but as a holder of a position which is open to the common man, as long as they have “a certain drive and just a certain IQ” (Harrits, 2005)

The politicization of the bourgeois seem to rely more on private interactions than on public participation. In the electoral sociology of Paul Lazarsfeld, the analysis of “interpersonal influence” was a tool for understanding that “voting is a group experience” (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In fact, voters in the 16th arrondissement *report discussing more politics and in more homogenous media than the average citizen*. This finding is reinforced and contextualized in the interviews:

The interviews show how, in practice, primary socialization and adult sociability are mutually reinforcing: embodied preferences begin the selection of circles of relatives with whom we talk about politics; the political homogeneity of these interactions reinforces the choices, that are therefore seen to be taken for granted. (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020)

As such, many report discussing politics, but often stating that “we all agree”.

Simultaneously, they express a norm of avoidance when facing views diverging from their own. There is less exposure to opinions not their own, as the “ethics of bourgeois sociability” disfavour subjects deemed too “personal” or “serious”. Being *too political* is, in a way, being *socially difficult*. As Geay and Agrikoliansky notes, this reminds one of Eliashop’s work on group styles of political-social interaction. Thus, “the desire to preserve an elite inter-self is combined with bourgeois discursive standards (the refusal of conflict), a

group style which favours private gatherings of close family and friends, *and simultaneously leads towards a naturalization of political positioning.*

3.5.2 An ambivalent politicization?

What Agrikoliansky and Geay hypothesize is that not only the lower classes, but *also* the dominant fraction of the upper class can be characterized a certain “l’attention oblique”⁵, an ethos of defence and scepticism, facing politics. The concept of “oblique attention” stems from Richard Hoggart’s work on working class culture. Hoggart shows how working-class culture and values act as resistance facing pressures from outside, whereby legitimate culture and societal demands from “above” is met with scepticism and resistance. Agrikoliansky and Geay thus transposes this concept to the EUC: while highly mobilized as voters, they often seem “sceptical” of organized political action, partisan affiliation, political power struggles and other forms of collective struggle. An “ethic of sociability” which rarely approaches the politically sensitive may also facilitate group cohesion. But, as noted in an earlier section, it is the unique *configuration* of political investment that must be understood. While lower classes may be more inclined to abstain from the whole game of politics, the EUC maintain their power through a strong adherence to the act of voting. Thus, they can be characterized by an *ambivalent politicization.*

In his dissertation, Kevin Geay concluded that the politicization of the upper classes could be fathomed by two ideal-types of politicization, what he calls “scholastic investment” and “relaxed investment”. The former type is a “learned” and strongly invested relationship to politics, which shows goodwill to most categories of political practice. This is more commonly observed among the fractions of the upper class more attached to cultural capital. The latter, “relaxed investment” is more akin to what we have described in the preceding sections, simultaneously invested and released. This is thus more common in the dominant fractions of the upper class, those who derive their position from economic capital. Kevin Geay holds that this *ambivalence* may be understood by a transposition of Daniel Gaxie’s dual notion of competence: political competence is both cognitive (learned) and statutory (a feeling of entitlement to political opinion). The contradictory “relaxed investment” is a sort of

distinction among those most endowed, which signifies a *feeling of competence*, rather than a strict cognitive competence.

3.6 Conclusion

Citizens in democracies, while called out to give their opinion on various issues (f.i. through the vote, in a survey), may be characterized by a varying level of political competence and standing facing politics. Bourdieusian class theory assumes actors of similar social attributes are predisposed to act in and perceive the social world in similar ways. As such, Bourdieu and Gaxie argue both technical political competence, and a feeling of entitlement to take an interest in politics, highly aligns with educational level and social status. As politics is a form of legitimate culture, with a strong expectation of participation, this perpetuates and reproduces inequality, as more resourceful classes are better able to heed their voice politically and shift the balance of power in society.

While by no means disproving such assumptions, there are difficulties with such “linear” propositions. First and foremost, what does political competence mean? What is a “legitimate” form of political competence and investment? While class theory may supply the dimension of a cognitive and technical competence with the importance of statutory assignment, a stricter focus on different contexts of political behaviour paints a more ambivalent picture. Removing oneself from the most legitimate forms of political participation, such as the act of voting, to more ordinary forms of political practice and judgements, one may observe the dissonant dispositions of social classes and individual actors, where legitimate and illegitimate practices coincide. Bernard Lahire holds that cultural dissonance is the norm in contemporary, highly differentiated societies, where socialization influences and contexts of action are more heterogeneous. He asks that class theory must shift its gaze towards understanding the social prerequisites of dissonant dispositions, especially as they apply in different contexts of the same field of practice - both between actors in the same class, and variations of practice in the very same individual. Simultaneously, one must grasp the meaning of a practices and dissonance as seen from the perspective of the actor.

This also begs the meta-level question of “legitimism” in class research. Bourdieusian class research tends to portray classes as winners and losers in symbolic playfields. While not

wrong, this may also obscure the specificity of relationships to the political, as shown in the works of Eric Agrikoliansky and Kevin Geay. While the economic fraction of the upper classes is likely to be interested in politics and highly mobilized as voters, they may also downplay the practice of talking about politics in social gatherings, be critical of political actors and political solutions, have a more private attachment to politicians than being publicly active et cetera. As such, political relaxation and investment may coincide among the upper class, often designated as the emissaries of legitimate culture, as the “competent” class. By such theoretical reflections, one may hope to obtain a better understanding of the specificity of the economic fraction of the upper class’ relationship to politics. Such cultural ambivalences may best be approached by the qualitative interview, which is the subject of the following chapter.

4 Methodology

In this thesis I have taken inspiration from Lahire's *dispositionalist-contextualist* sociological programme. Lahire holds that social practices are generated through the meeting of dispositions and social contexts: (disposition) + (context) = practice. As this is a study of politicization, the relevant context is politics, in multiple facets. What I aim to grasp is the variation of political dispositions in the EUC. A crucial methodological question is thus: how does the researcher "catch" dispositions? (Darmon, 2019). Dispositions crystallize through a plurality of contexts of socialization (f.i. class situation, work-situation, education, social milieu, social origin/mobility etc). However, the dispositions as such cannot be studied directly by the researcher, only the practices, which are *assumed* to be the end-result of the meeting between disposition and context of practice. The dispositions may be regarded as useful "abstractions" which can be reconstructed by the researcher (Darmon, 2019). But this reconstruction may easily fall prey to the "demon of excessive generalization" (Lahire, 2011, 210). There are thus certain interpretative errors the reconstructor may commit. First, one cannot generalize from a single practice to the underlying disposition of the actor or group of actors. The most striking example of this error would be to generalize from the EUC's high voter turnouts to they having homogenously strongly invested political dispositions. This is a sort of scholastic error, in which the researcher attributes too much weight to the single practice with regards to the disposition. Secondly, one cannot deduce a disposition directly from the actor's own account of his practice.

But that does not mean one cannot work on the verbal statements of interviewees, which this thesis does through the analysis of qualitative interviews. The researcher must avoid the interpretative error of simply subscribing to what the interviewee says about herself. Rather, one must stay observant to 1) that which can be identified from their speech but which they do not themselves underline 2) verbal material which, without the knowledge of the interviewee, contradict or qualify the general disposition in question. By studying varied contexts of practice, and following the advice above, one may hope to "catch" the dispositions of social actors. In the following, I describe the method adapted to study the political dispositions of the EUC.

4.1 The semi-structured interview

I take as my starting point a group of individuals belonging to the economic fraction of the upper class. I am interested in their relationship to politics, a possible heterogeneity of their dispositions and how they actualize and “activate” in varying contexts of action and social interaction, especially contexts of everyday life. While ethnography or participatory observation give privileged access to practices of everyday life (Eliasoph, 1998), it is both time-consuming and may have difficulties facing an often private and little publicly engaged upper class (Geay, 2015). For such an endeavour, the semi-structured interview is a fine second choice.

The qualitative research-interview tries to grasp aspects of the interviewee’s everyday life, from *her own perspective* (Kvale et al., 2015, 42). While quantitative surveys are an oft-used technique when studying political behaviour, it usually pre-structures the possible ways of responding. This is useful for comparison among bigger populations, but at the same time deals violence to the social subject and her lifeworld. This is an original sin which all (social) science is guilty of, not least the semi-structured interview. All scientific endeavour is in a way “constructing its object” – every observation is tainted by its gathering. The semi-structured interview is however constructing an object more attuned to my scientific ambitions: grasping different dispositions and contextual application of political action. As Kvale and Brinkmann put it: “trying to gather descriptions free of prejudice, involves a rehabilitation of Lebenswelt – lifeworld – facing the scientific world [My translation]” (Kvale et al., 2015, 46). However, one cannot be fully free of prejudice, the lifeworld studied is not equal to the interview-interaction, and the interviewee faces an interviewer with scientific ambitions. There are no reasons to be overly romantic in favour of the qualitative interview’s ambition of access to the phenomenological lifeworld. As such, some reflexions on the specific construction of the object should be expected.

The semi-structured interview is a technique where the researcher equips himself with an *interview guide*, a set of questions to guide the interview. As for this project concerned with the ordinary politicization of the EUC, my interview-guide included questions of interest in politics over the life course, media-consumption and social media, talking about politics in various contexts, political subjects of interest, perceptions of different politicians, political positioning and the act of voting. However, the interview is *semi-structured*. More than descriptive answers to every question, I am interested in the generative dispositions of these

individuals facing questions of politics. As such, the improvised questions are just as important as those in the guide. The interviewer must be sufficiently knowledgeable about the subject of matter, alert and sensitive to the interviewee's responses, and have a clear understanding of what he wants to know (Kvale et al., 2015). This gives the interviewer space of manoeuvre, but also makes the interview situation seem more like an ordinary conversation, putting the interviewed subject at ease. This plays on the strengths of the qualitative interview as opposed to the structured survey: the interviewer can follow cues and threads of interest and vary his questioning to better capture individual and subjective variations revolving the object of interest.

The technique of semi-structured interview does not submit to positivist fears of "contaminating" the data through the active role of the researcher. Qualitative interviews are, following Holstein and Gubrium, "active interviews", where both parties contribute to constructing knowledge gathered (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Whereas standardized interviews attempt to "strip the interview of all but the most neutral impersonal stimuli", the active interviewer intentionally "attempt to activate the respondent's stock of knowledge and bring it to bear on the discussion at hand appropriate to the research agenda (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, 73). This does *not* mean asking leading questions, but for the researcher being attentive to what is said and engaging the interviewee in ways facilitating stronger and clearer judgements.

As Jarness and Sølvsberg have shown in their research on boundary drawing in the upper classes, different ways of asking and framing questions may very well produce different answers. Whereas abstract and general questions are more prone to "honourable" answers, more specific and concrete questions can more easily "draw out" more "visceral" judgements. As a foreshadowing example: Asking about the interviewee's view on "politicians" may provoke totally different responses than asking about concrete and individual politicians. This is especially important in Norway, where egalitarian sentiments often hinder outspoken cultural or moral judgements. Discrepancy between "honourable" and "visceral" judgements in the same individual is not a methodological contradiction to be "solved", but rather an expression of the contradictory and complex social world, for example between the normative "what we want to be doing" and "what we do in practice" (Sølvsberg & Jarness, 2019). Similar to Jarness and Sølvsberg, I utilize "non-verbal" techniques, such as pictures of politicians and asking the interviewee to draw on a political left-right scale. As noted by Kevin Geay (with reference to anthropologist John Collier), using photographs

mixes up the interview dynamic, making the person photographed the object rather than the interviewee himself. As such, the interviewee may feel he is not disclosing information about himself, but rather taking the role of informant “on behalf” of the person pictured (Geay, 2015, 87-88). Such a dynamic may provoke more “visceral” judgements.

4.2 Sampling and recruitment

One of the challenges of interviewing upper-class agents is to find interviewees. I was looking for interviewees working in the private sector with an income of at least 1,3 million NOK. As such, the sampling is strategic. However, individuals fitting such a description are a small sub-sample of the overall population and may not be easily accessible. One common way of locating such interviewees is through searching the yellow pages or LinkedIn for individuals of high-ranking occupations. However, this is time-consuming and susceptible to self-selection and high non-response rates. As these individuals live hectic lives, and the theme at hand, politics, is sensitive, one could risk a very skewed sample, consisting only of those most interested in politics.

Facing such a challenge I opted for a pragmatic sampling strategy. As I, the interviewer, have grown up in the western part of Oslo, an area generally strong in economic capital, as well as to some degree sharing class background with my favoured interviewee-profile, I tried to utilize my own social network to gather individuals of EUC position. Still, I tried to avoid people I knew personally. Through family and friends, and with the help of an early interviewee, I gathered 12 individuals who supposedly earned 1,3 million NOK and worked in the private business sector⁶. There are pros and cons to this sampling strategy. The main challenge is that such sampling could be susceptible to network-effects, where the interviewees share characteristics due to them being affiliated in some form (people who know each other may often share attributes). Interviewer and interviewee sharing social networks could also be a hindrance against natural communication, as the interviewee could be motivated to cover up or exaggerate statements facing a person they “know”. It may also be possible that me being an “accomplice” in the dominant culture may hinder certain observations. However, I believe the personal connection to mostly be a strength.

⁶ However, I could not be sure that these individuals fit the profile before the interview.

There are many positive aspects to this form of recruitment. First, it may allow me to get hold of interviewees of high quality and of “rarer” nature. As an example, my sample includes two interviewees of high social status and fortunes of 100 mill. NOK. Finding such individuals through “random” searching can be difficult, and even harder to make them accept the invitation. Interviews with individuals of high occupational or social status can be considered to be “elite interviews”. I believe my personal network approach resulted in lower self-selection. Most of those invited accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Had I opted for the more random “yellow pages” strategy, there may have been a higher amount of self-selection. As one of my research interests is varying dispositions, this is of great importance. As an example, one interviewee at first rejected the invitation, explicitly due to him being less interested in politics, but then said he could do it as a friendly favour.

The main challenges of interviewing “elites” is to find them, make them consent, and balancing the researcher’s position facing high status individuals (Mikecz, 2012). Basing my recruitment on personal network thus made all these challenges easier. In interviews with non-elite actors, the interview situation can be considered an asymmetrical relationship of power in favour of the interviewer (Kvale et al., 2015, 51-53). When interviewing an elite, this asymmetry is somewhat reversed. The elite interviewee is often very knowledgeable and is not a stranger to situations where he is the object of interest from other actors. This can be both favourable and dis-favourable with regards to data quality. Favourable as in how the interviewee often is a “good talker”, and not alienated by the interview situation, but dis-favourable by how they may be proficient at projecting a positive image of themselves, and “impression management” facing observers (Goffmann). One can only hope my role as a familiar interviewer may have contributed to downplaying impression management.

The final sample consisted of 12 interviewees. As this is “only” a research project at the master level, I did not opt for any more strategically chosen categories except for EUC-class position. One possible sampling strategy could have been to opt for a more balanced gendered sample. I ended up with 9 men and 3 women. This skewedness does not allow comparing gender, but is generally more representative of the EUC as a whole, as the EUC is overly dominated by males (Hansen, 2009). As of age, 10 out of 12 are between 50 and 60 years old. The similar age group allows me to better compare political views, as most of the interviewees have lived through the same historical conditions and evolution of the political field.

4.3 The interview

Interviewees were invited to participate through an invitation-document which stated the overarching theme of the project, as well as their “rights” as interviewees, such as the principle of anonymity. I opted for full flexibility with regards to the location and time of the interview. I only asked the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and that they put aside at least 1,5 hours. Interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, probably due to personal affiliation, I was in about half the interviews invited to conduct the interview in the leisure of the interviewee’s home, which may be a great arena for interviewing, by putting the interviewee in his “natural habitat” (the rest were conducted at their offices).

The topic of the interview was “politics”, a theme of somewhat sensitive nature. By common methodological procedure, I ordered my questionnaire whereby the least sensitive questions came first, the most sensitive the last, to make the interaction as friction-less as possible. I opened with questions of the interviewee’s educational and work-history, a question which often facilitated long stories of business life success (thus opening on a positive note). Then followed questions of political interest, media-consumption and ordinary political practice. More specific questions on the interviewee’s political beliefs and voting behaviour were ordered last. As I here am interested in class-specific dispositions, I was also interested in asking about parent’s occupational and educational background, as well as the interviewee’s own economic resources. Questions of voting and especially economic resources can be considered “angry questions”, where the latter have proven to be too sensitive to inquire into in previous research on economically endowed citizens (Vormedal, 2016). I framed these questions as “background info”, and asked them at the very end of the interview. Although asking about economic resources may be uncomfortable, I was surprised how successful this was. Through the whole interview process, I believe my own background and my own dispositions facilitated a relaxed and little restrained social encounter. Utilizing such resources should be considered cynical or manipulative, but rather an asset when performing “active interviews”, approaching what Bourdieu called “non-violent communication”.

4.4 Additional methodological ammunition

In addition to the standard semi-structured interview, I utilized two methodological techniques for probing more “visceral” responses, and as talking points by themselves. These techniques include a self-placement on a political left-right axis and a “picture test” of three different politicians. With regards to the political axis, the interviewee was encouraged to conceptualize this as he liked (apart from the distinction between left and right side), and explain his reasoning.

In the picture test I presented portraits of three prominent politicians. These were the leader of the Labour Party, Jonas Gahr Støre, secondary leader of the Progress Party, Sylvi Listhaug, and leader of the Socialist Left Party, Audun Lysbakken. I asked the interviewee to name the person pictured, the person’s belonging, place the person on the left-right axis, and give her opinion on the politician. While useful as a talking point, this picture test also serves as a “test” of cognitive political competence. While it’s difficult to argue for what an “adequate” level of competence is, I would argue a highly politicized person should be able to recognize and name these three politicians. Jonas Gahr Støre is the leader of one of the nation’s biggest parties. Sylvi Listhaug is one of the Norwegian political landscape’s most controversial figures, and often frequent the headlines. Audun Lysbakken is less prominent in the media, but is the leader of the Socialist Left Party, which could be considered the political right’s main enemy. While the reader must judge himself, I would argue this is not a difficult test, and failure to name one of these could signify a weaker cognitive political competence. While an individual may be perfectly capable of producing political opinion without knowledge of these actors, a failure at the test would at least mean the person *is not strongly invested in the Norwegian political field and its events*.

The inspiration for these techniques came from the methodological extravaganza of Kevin Geay’s dissertation on the politicization of the Parisian upper classes (Geay, 2015). On a reflectionary note, I regret not taking more inspiration from Geay (or rather, the realization of the methodological importance of his techniques came too late). While Geay also utilized a form of self-placement on a political axis, he intentionally made distinctions between 7 mutually exclusive categories of the axis (very left, left, somewhat left, centre, somewhat right etc.) (Geay, 2015, 228). He found that interviewees were hesitant to place themselves in distinct categories, which he argued is due to the upper class’ feeling of “irreducibility” and distancing to partisan categories. This is a clever method as compared to my “open” axis, and

I regret not following his version. Geay also utilized pictures, but of a much broader array, for example of political events. With regards to his thesis of an upper class with a stronger *feeling of competence*, than *cognitive competence*, Geay asked his interviewees about “fake” political events. If the interviewee claimed he had heard about the event (an impossibility), this would signify a preponderance of *feeling of competence* – what Gaxie calls *statutory competence*. While I did not follow this “brave” method, it is an interesting example of methodological prowess which may enable newfound observations.

4.5 Analytical strategy

My analytical strategy is theory-driven. This project began from two “assumptions”, which have guided the “knowledge interest” over the interview process and the data coding. As should be clear from the section on theory, these hypotheses go as following: 1) Following Daniel Gaxie’s theory of politicization, the EUC is expected to be a comparatively highly politicized class. 2) Kevin Geay and Eric Agrikoliansky have shown that while the upper classes generally, and the EUC specifically may be politically competent, they often express scepticism towards politics, and may not be very engaged in ordinary political practices. As such, I try to “twist the stick the other way” and pay specific attention to all behaviour that does not fit with the image of a politically competent and invested class.

The interview transcripts were coded using the NVivo coding software. My initial coding strategy was shallow. I coded the material according to a set of codes describing forms of practice and judgements, such as “interest in politics”, “judgement of specific politician”, “talking about politics among friends”. Later, I paid specific attention to the social attributes of each interviewee. As I had data on (self-reported) on the background, economic resources and educational capital of each interviewee, I attempted to analyze each interviewees political judgements and practices by reference to their social attributes. This allows me to explore the assumption of *structured social practice*, with reference to their *embodied social history*, what we may call *habitus* or *dispositions* and their *contextual* expression. The analysis includes a table of interviewees, social attributes, and forms of political practice and judgements. I attempt to categorize similar dispositions of politicization, which allows me to analyse the *intra-class variation* of politicization in the EUC. I thus take some inspiration from forms of “categorical analysis” *intra EUC* (Johannessen et al., 2018, 122-152).

4.6 Ethics

In qualitative interviews the researcher constructs his own data, a process which involves ethical challenges. First, the procedure of data-gathering and data-storage was approved by the Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD). As recordings of individuals' political beliefs are classified as sensitive data, there are strict rules to how this data should be handled. This includes storing it on a secure, institutionalized storage centre, and deleting the sound files as soon as they are transcribed and anonymized. One of the main ethical challenges when interviewing individuals of more "elite" class position is the process of anonymization. The relationship of confidentiality is at the heart of the contract between interviewee and researcher. This is an interesting methodological challenge, where concerns of scientific rigor and ethical norms must be balanced (Kvale et al., 2015, 106). As some of my interviewees inhabit top positions, they are more prone to be identifiable through ordinary social characteristics such as field of work, education et cetera. However, such characteristics may be necessary in the the analysis. What to include and what not is a process which needs serious evaluation, but I have opted for being very strict in my presentation of interviewees, and even stricter in especially sensitive cases (f.i what specific field of education or work). The reader may have wished for more clarity, but the anonymization of my interviewees' is of priority.

Finally, I may report that every interviewee seemed to have a positive experience with regard to the interviews. Many exclaimed they found the interview fun, that they were able to reflect on things usually passed by unnoticed, and that they were happy to contribute to research. Such responses are important. Qualitative researchers are nothing without their objects, and the overall scientific community is dependent on a population positive towards their inquiry. A positive experience is also an ethical matter.

4.7 Historical context

Sociology is a *historical* discipline, always sensitive to the societal, cultural, historical context at hand (Passeron, 2013). As such, the scientific value of sociological research is dependent on contextual factors, both the interviewees' embodied history (the series of individual trajectories and lived events), as well as the present context. When I try to the study the politicization of the EUC, two historical aspects should be kept in mind. First, my

EUC interviewees are mostly 50+ years old. Their conceptions of politics is thus more or less shaped by events over the last 50 years. Secondly, any findings on the “politicization” of the EUC at time of interview may not be simply generalized to any time period, any historical context. At the time of the interview, the EUC’s own, the Conservatives, are in government. As such, politicization and dispositions must be analysed according to political context. One may for example hypothesize a higher level of agitation and political interest if socialists were in power. In an interview, when questioned on Kevin Geay’s hypothesis of a “distanced” upper class, Daniel Gaxie claimed that the politicization of the upper class often may be characterized as a “sleeping interest”: while they are politically competent, certain political situations will tend to “activate” their competence (Gaxie, 2021).

4.8 Overview of interviewees:

While this is a thesis on a single class-case, the EUC, I also asked my interviewees about their parents’ background, the interviewees educational background and economic resources. While these social attributes, at least the latter, could be considered “angry questions”, I believe it has been enormously helpful to the project of this thesis to be able to more specifically pin down the variations of class-situations and dispositions intra-EUC. This is also a call-to-arms for researchers interviewing members of the upper class. As an example, a previous thesis on the EUC refrained from asking these questions, due to feelings of “rudeness” (Vormedal, 2016). In my experience, most interviewees were fine with reporting income and wealth. But it may presuppose warmup and methodological reflection to make such interactions as smooth as possible. It may also be my own background and familiarity helped such interactions pass more smoothly. Be brave!

As such, the social attributes of my interviewees are mostly based on self-reporting, and my own interpretations of interviewees’ accounts. While this may be inaccurate, it should at least give some indications. In table 1 (next page), you see an overview of all interviewees, and an explanation below. In the final section of the analysis, this table will be repeated, but with some additional “variables” discerned through the analysis.

Name	Social origin	Capital (intra-comparison)	Education (non business)
Charlotte	++	++	++
Nina	++	++	++
Anders	++	++	-
Sander	+	++	-
Aksel	+	+	-
Line	-	-	-
Bjørn	-	+	+
Stian	++	+	+
Eva	++	-	++
Finn	+	-	-
Per	++	-	-
Fredrik	+	-	-

Table 2

Social origin:

++ = upper class,

+ = middle class,

- = lower class

Capital:

++ = 50-100 million fortune.

+ = Higher wage group 2 million – 5 million,

- = 1,3 – 2 million.

Education (non-business):

++ = non-business

+ = business + non-business courses

- = only business school.

5 Analysis

This analysis proceeds by four chapters. The first revolves around the question of an “ambivalent” take on politics among the EUC. While they are expected to be “competent” and “entitled” to handle the subject matter, do they also express forms of distancing towards politics? The second chapter revolves around ordinary forms of politics, with special attention to modes of talking about politics in ordinary contexts. The third chapter revolves around the picture-test and the cognitive competence of the EUC. The fourth chapter “ties” together the findings from the preceding chapters and try to explore the intra-class variations of politicization among the EUC – thus pointing towards differing political dispositions in the EUC. Finally, I discuss some of the findings from the analysis and point towards some implications.

5.1 A distanced relationship to politics

In this first section of the analysis, I aim to explore how interviewees of EUC class-position may show signs of “distancing” or even scepticism facing politics. A central claim by Geay and Agrikoliansky is that while the class is politically competent and mobilized, they simultaneously seem to profess a somewhat *ambivalent* take on politics (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020; Geay, 2015). As such, while this privileged class is expected to be highly *competent* with regards to voting, I aim to look for cues as to such “distancing”. The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, the interviewees “interest” in politics, a central indicator for mode of politicization. Secondly, their judgements of specific political agents. Finally, ways in which they criticize the “importance” of the Norwegian electoral game.

5.1.1 Political interest

At the core of the concept of *politicization* is that social actors pay attention to events in the political field. However, we also hypothesize there is a certain *ambivalence* to this political

interest. Interestingly, many interviewees confirm this hypothesis at the very introduction of the interview, when asked about their interest in politics⁷:

I: If I ask you generally, an open question: would you say politics interest you?

L: [hesitating a bit] Yes, one has to say yes. But not like politically engaged... I don't think I would be labelled politically engaged.

(Line, executive)

Line, a younger executive, says “one has to say yes”. Politics, a highly legitimate subject, is not a subject one can easily dismiss. In Line's short worded answer we can discern a sense of statutory competence – a feeling of entitlement to handle political matters, and of *expectation* – “one has to”. This is somewhat fleshed out in Stian's account:

I: Would you say politics is something that interests you?

S: Ehm, absolutely! But, you will probably get to it, that does not mean I am like very active.. But the thematic, as a general subject, yes! I think that's important.

I: How, why are you interested, would you say?

S: Well, it's about the dynamics of society, and how it's shaped, so... You become engaged in... Most subjects. But, of course, some subjects are of course more important than others, but, the way I follow is... Media, ehm. More than anything else, and maybe through discussions among friends and such.

(Stian, investor)

The formula [positive + reservation] is repeated here. While Stian says he's “absolutely” interested in politics, this is not due to “active” engagement, but a general interest in the “dynamics of society”. Before his master's in finance, Stian took a bachelor's degree which included political science. His wording of “dynamics”, and later in the interview, “holistic”, may stem from such a form of educational capital. What should be noted here is Stian's highly abstract response. Whereas politics in its pure form may be tied to a “struggle of interests”, Stian describes it as a “theme” of interest, a “general subject”, and that “most subjects” are interesting. While both Line and Stian show what we may call “goodwill” towards politics, through their adherence to it being a legitimate object of interest, other interviewees more or less indirectly *excuse* their lack of political engagement through a *critique* of politics. Anders, an investor, and one of my sample's wealthiest, gives a highly interesting response:

⁷ It should be mentioned, as said in the chapter on methodology, that in the invitation letter, the project was described as being about “political interest and political *participation*”. Some of the interviewees' hesitation and form of response could be due to this lack of explicit “participation”.

I: Would you say that politics interest you?

A: Politically or generally?

I: Yes, or politics in general, its an open question.

A: What I have is, with the school system, right. It is that... I used to be in the schoolboard, in the operational board there. And there you get exposed to systems and frameworks and such. So I'm sort of interested in that. And I established a foundation, some years ago, where we financed, among others, [name of philanthropic project], and. What I learned is how to help these countries that are in bad shape, right, in a purposeful way. And what you learn is that international aid is completely idiotic [hø I hodet], it works against its purpose.

[Anders now talks at lengths about the difficulties of private philanthropic projects]

A: It is extremely difficult to implement and do, what you could call pragmatic measures, due to inefficient, political, bureaucratic systems. And I think that's tragic, that it is so stiff [firkantet], you can't do anything, everything is too expensive.

(Anders, investor)

One could analyse this excerpt at lengths (we will however meet Anders several times in the following sections, so more will come). First and foremost, Anders, to the interviewer's surprise, asks: "politically, or generally", as if there was a difference. Anders, in a response which I had to cut down due to length, gives some hints to what this "difference" amounts to. When questioned on his political interest, Anders gives an account of his commitments, first to the board of his children's school, but more importantly to his philanthropic projects, which noble intentions and "pragmatic measures" were hindered by "inefficient" systems. One could interpret this difference between "politically" and "generally" as the difference between commitment to societal matters (Anders commitment to the school board and philanthropy) and the way such matters are *solved politically*. To Anders, politics and bureaucracy often seem a hindrance for pragmatic intentions. However, this criticism of politics go beyond "unwieldy systems". Anders is also highly critical of professionalized politics, which we will deal with in the next section. The statements of Anders must be analysed according to his social position. Anders, who has a fortune of around 100 million NOK, has the material opportunity to commit to philanthropy. His often economically founded political analysis is a product of an upper class background, a successive entry into a business school in the US, and a life-long commitment to the field of finance. Like Harrits showed in her qualitative illustration of "political habitus", the EUC seem to apply the "logics" of the field of economy when judging politically⁸ (Referanse). What she did not

show was how this may be a source of distancing towards politics among certain dispositions. In a similar vein, Per, a financial analyst, “excuses” his lack of political engagement with a criticism of politicians:

I: Politics, is that something that interests you?

P: Well, everyone does. Now, primarily in form of economic analysis and foresight. Economic conditions for businesses that we invest in. We invest globally, so I’m pretty interested in that. There’s an election in one month [US election], that’s pretty exciting really. But... From your point of view, I should perhaps tell you about my life, because I was engaged in the Conservative youth and the Progress Party youth for a period.. In the 80s and 90s, so not like the Progress Party is today, it was more harmless then. And I was very interested in politics, and I had huge respect for politicians, right up till [year]. At that time I was ranked as the best [occupation] in Europe. And then came an [event] in Norway, where all of these politicians I had such respect for, discussed a subject area which I was an expert on. And then all my belief in politicians went up in smoke, because they knew so little, and said wild things, and then I started thinking.. What if they know just as little about education and health services, as they seem to know about [field] and finance. So then I somewhat lost my belief in politics. The way I participate now is mostly voting, of course, I believe in... I’m a capitalist, as you probably have guessed.

(Per, financial analyst/executive)

The same ambivalence is discerned here. While, according to Per “everyone” is interested in politics, he argues according to “economic analysis”, which for him also marks a distance to politics. While Per is the only of my interviewees to have been active in youth politics, he claims to at one point having “lost all my faith in politicians” following politics on a field which he himself was “an expert on”. Per’s account illustrates a crucial point about upper class politicization. While criticism of politicians and politics may be observed in other corners of the social space, it may take a special form among the EUC. Whereas less privileged agents may distance themselves from politics due to self-exclusion and feelings of powerlessness (Harrits, 2005; SPEL, 2016), this is not the case with certain actors of the EUC. As actors with powerful positions of in the field of economics (Per being an “expert”, Anders as wealthy firm owner) these actors hold that politicians are incompetent, as seen from the role of expert, empowered by their privileged economic position. One can thus say there is a *simultaneous distancing and closeness* to the field of politics. Politics may be deemed with scepticism due to the closeness of the field of politics and the field of economics in the *field of power*, where these actors reside. It comes as no surprise that such distancing seems stronger among actors such as Anders who founded his own company, rather than in the accounts of f.e. Line, who has had fluctuating positions in several companies, but never as an owner. Hence, while my interviewees mostly seem interested in politics, this apparent

interest is not without reservations. We see this fleshed out in the following section, on criticism of specific political agents.

5.1.2 Political agents

While the last section dealt with politics in abstract, many interviewees give the strongest, most visceral judgements when giving their take on specific politicians. Sander, another wealthy interviewee, presents an interesting opposition between two political agents, Jonas Gahr Støre of the Labour Party, and Trygve Slagsvold Vedum of the Centre Party:

S: Take Jonas Gahr Støre as an example. I think he does everything he must just to get in power, even if he doesn't believe in it, or mean it deep inside. He say's stuff which he may persuade himself to believe in, in the end. I'm not sure where he comes from, really, what he really feels... I think it's the road to power.

[a bit later in the interview]

S: No but he [Trygve Slagsvold Vedum] is an honest guy! Ok, maybe not the best environmental policy, but he has much positive, an honest guy. I understand that he's more of an idealist than doing whatever to get in power.

(Sander, executive/owner)

Sander opposes Støre, who is *only* concerned with power, with Vedum, who is “honest”, and more of an “idealist” (a term which surfaces at several points in the interview with Sander).

In a strikingly similar vein, Anders, also one of my sample's wealthiest, says the following:

A: What I'm saying is... There are probably good people, a lot of good people. The problem is that we have a system error, in my opinion. And the system error is that we vote for these politicians, right? Because that means, when there is an election, there are two reasons to become a politician. Either you're an idealist and wish to make your country or the world a better place to live, or you're a power-hungry fucker, you do whatever to get power. And as I say, these idealists, they're elbowed out on Labour Youth-level, they never survive youth politics, there are only these narcissistic that go on and up, right. And that's a problem. It means they have the wrong structure of incentive. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with them as humans... Or many are, actually. But that's why I don't believe in, engage... It's a system error. And what I'm a huge proponent of, and which I have thought a lot about, is that it would fair, instead of choosing these politicians, we would have drawing lots. You could have a jury, it's good enough for the courts. Because then you could make a structured scheme where you draw from groups, so and so many from the dentists, so many from the carpenters...

[a bit later]

A: Yes of course they do. They do whatever to sit in, keep that position of prime minister. Think about that prince of mist [tåkefyrste] that has to go to bed with the Centre Party.

I: You're thinking of Jonas Gahr Støre?

A: Yes. Think of what he's willing to do to get in position. It's pure prostitution.

I: With the Centre Party? What do you think of them?

A: I have to say that he, Slagum [Trygve Slagsvold Vedum], I almost said, what's his name... Ve...

I: Slagsvold Vedum.

A: Yes. He's Norway's best politician, in my book. There's none that are even close. [...] Because you understand what he's saying. That prince of mist, in interviews... What is he really saying? Lots of pretty words, but did he say anything, he says nothing. That other guy is so clear, he talks in a way that people understand. He uses anecdotes, because he was there, and such. Very good.

First, both interviewees contrast the electoral game and struggle for power with “idealism”. Whereas Jonas Gahr Støre's concessions to the left and right could be understood as a simple fact of multiparty representative democracy, these interviewees essentially describe this as “prostitution” (Anders), and in reality, that Støre works “against his own beliefs” (Sander). It seems clear that they present a quite cynical view of politics. Anders even claims that this starts at Labour Youth-level, where “idealists” are weeded out, and only the “narcissistic” remain.

Secondly, there is a peculiar nerve of “populism” in their accounts. Sander opposes the “power-hungriness” of Støre with the “honesty” of Vedum. Anders claims Vedum is Norway's best politician, as opposed to Støre, who is only a “talker”. Vedum speaks clearly, and with anecdotes, because “he was there” [close to the electorate]. Anders even opts for a system change, where a people's jury would replace the elected official. There is in these two interviewees' accounts a *moral critique* against politics. However, this moral, semi-populistic critique should not be simply taken at first hand. While these two individuals give strong judgements on the deficiency of power-hungry politicians as opposed to “honesty” and “idealism”, they are also life-long Conservative voters, and both finance right-wing parties and institutions. Sander supports the Conservatives with several tens of thousands, and Anders supports the liberalistic think-tank Civita (unknown amount). While they may seem cynical at first, these are politically mobilized actors, ready to defend their objective interests. To these actors, there does not seem to be an opposition between their “populistic” critique of politics and moneyed interests.

The criticism of Jonas Gahr Støre takes a different shape in the account of Aksel, an intermediary wealthy interview. Aksel, who votes for the Liberal Party, contrasts Liberal Party politician Abid Raja, whose manner of being and personality attracts Aksel, compared to the “untruthful” Støre:

I: Are there any specific politicians you feel that represent you well?

A: Yes, Abid Raja [Liberal Party]. His style. He's all arms and legs, and I think he represents a lot of what I've been for, rather well, I think.

I: His personality?

A: Yes he... You could say he's more flashy than me and wears yellow suits and such, but I think he's cool, I like him. Jonas Gahr Støre is, to me, not believable at all. Sitting there talking about the working classes and being such a super-intellectual, Sciences Po, wealthy guy. I don't understand how he can do that.

(Aksel, shipping)

Similar to Anders and Sander's preference for the "style" of Vedum (his honesty), Aksel first and foremost points to particularistic and not specifically political traits when judging a politician. It is Raja's "personality", his "arms and legs", his fun "yellow suit" and "coolness" which attracts Aksel. When judging Støre, Aksel gives a visceral judgement of his "untruthfulness", how he as a *wealthy and highly educated* politician tries to portray as a Labour representative. Aksel is quite specifically drawing boundaries towards Støre as a "superintellectual" and "Sciences PO" (top tier French university). While the discourse of "untruthfulness" is repeated here, it is done so in a different manner than Anders and Sander. While the latter was critical of Støre's "power-hungriness", they did not specifically target Støre's social background.

While these latter interviewees were mostly concerned with "power-hungry" politicians, as opposed to "idealists", which essentially amounts to a critique of politics, other interviewees refrain from the judging the game of politics, but rather defend it. What we can observe is that this seems more common among those with a different species of educational capital. Whereas those distancing themselves from politics typically have strong economic capital, and are "only" business-educated, interviewees of non-business education seem to judge differently. Nina, who has a master's in economics from a university, and comes from a family of high cultural capital, as well as having inherited a fortune, is mostly concerned with the *political form* of Sylvi Listhaug and Trygve Slagsvold Vedum:

N: Listhaug... Because she's... If there's one.. She and that Centre Party leader [Vedum]. They're only after, I think, scoring... I almost put them in the same bag. Because it's like, trying to win the debate by technique, and not by subject, understanding of subject. So I think that she's... She's standing there with a grin, and may seem very provocative, poor thing. But, I am also fundamentally in disagreement with her. Most deeply, that's her... And I think her form contributes to polarization, and we don't want that in our society. So both her and that Centre Party-guy, they contribute to polarization. They try to create disagreements where there is none. [continue next page]

For example between countryside and cities and... In her case, it's a lot on immigration and such. So I think they have a form which is not only positive.

(Nina, executive)

Nina's claim that Listhaug and Vedum (who she bags together) tries to win debates only by "technique" and "polarization" stands in stark contrast to Anders and Sander's conception of Vedum as an "idealist", "honest", and "great politician". While Anders and Sander enforced a moral critique *against* politics, Nina essentially enforces a moral critique *for* politics.

Listhaug and Vedum's polarizing form is essentially in opposition to "what we want in our society". We can also observe that Nina backs up her at first "moral judgements" with political arguments – that she is fundamentally political disagreement with Listhaug. This is not something Anders and Sander does (Sander in fact says that Vedum has "bad" environmental policy, *but* is an honest guy). Nina also argues that they try to "create conflict where there is none". While Nina appears to be one of my sample's more politically competent interviewees, she appears to be somewhat rejective of political conflict (a theme we tap in on in the next section). In a similar vein, Eva, a younger commercial lawyer will deem Listhaug little trustworthy:

She's very opinionated [Listhaug]. I'm not a huge fan. I think she's rather uncharming, and little trustworthy, and she speaks before she thinks, that my.... My impression. I think she has come up with so many blunders, and provoked people, that there's not many people that trust her anymore, unless you're such a Progress Party voter, very.

(Eva, commercial lawyer)

Eva, who deems both Støre and former Labour prime minister Jens Stoltenberg as politicians who "are wellspoken, very trustworthy", sees the opposite in Listhaug, who is "uncharming", and "little trustworthy". There are two takeaways here. First, both Nina and Eva present quite strong judgements of Listhaug (Nina at one point calls her "almost the worst I know"). While they may be at political odds with her, they mainly argue against her form, which is seen both as immoral and as not "trustworthy". To these interviewees, trustworthiness is the yardstick the political agent is measured against. Secondly, they both vote Conservative, which electoral success depends on Listhaug's Progress Party. While Nina may be strongly critical of Listhaug, it does not seem to shoo her away from voting Conservative⁹. This is also a testament to how strong the tie between the EUC and right-wing voting is. One can hypothesize these interviewees' more positive views of Støre, and the opposing disapproval

⁹ Sylvi Listhaug is of May 2021 the leader of the Progress Party.

of Listhaug, which stands diametrically opposite to the views of Sander and Anders, can be understood by differences in dispositions and capital, where Nina and Eva have a more balanced capital portfolio, first and foremost from their social science and law educational backgrounds. As Bourdieu puts it, taste for something is often distaste for something else, in this case, the *form* of politicians. Across my sample, it seems like a favourable view of Støre often goes hand in hand with a disfavouring of Listhaug and Vedum.

Another central fact about upper class politicization is that their view on politics may also be shaped by first-hand access to politicians. Kevin Geay shows how the bourgeois' judgements of politicians may refer to private meetings, formal and informal, when judging politicians. Politicians of the left could be judged by referring to their private manners, which were judged as contradicting the way they portray themselves politically. Sander, who gives quite strong judgements of Jonas Gahr Støre, in fact frequents a dinner party where Støre is a guest. He may thus tell (from a dinner party where he wasn't present):

S: I was supposed to be in this 60 year birthday, which I couldn't go to because I was ill or out travelling. So I just heard the story, but there's a friend of ours who's a very successful businessman in the US. He's to the point, strong, and a great name, and he put Støre in his place. And then he [Støre] got offended, and left the dinner party. I was not there, but I was supposed to be there.

(Sander, executive/owner)

Sander's claim that Støre fronts political views he does not believe in thus gains support from private knowledge of Støre, from an occasion where he was overpowered by a more competent opponent. But, Sander *refrains from judging Støre's private* character, and simply states that "privately he's a nice guy". One can claim there is a discrepancy between Sander's claim that Støre does "whatever he can to get in power" and that he is simply "a nice guy". Many interviewees inform that they have met political agents in private gatherings, but very few judges them according to private character. As compared to Geay's France, this may be due to the "cultural repertoire" of Norway, which is more akin to an "egalitarian morality", where strong cultural judgements seem less salient and the notion of "equality" more so. It is therefore not surprising that one of the few who judges a politician by first-hand private character indirectly refers to this "egalitarian morality". At the end of the interview with Stian, who at several times have judged politician Trond Giske negatively, it comes clear he

got a very negative impression of him at a fellow-friends party (and he reassures the interviewer this was long before the scandal of Trond Giske¹⁰):

I: Why did you meet him, where?

S: Some mutual friends. No, my impression of abuse of power, self-important, and talk about differing between King Salomo and Jørgen! Add a bit of alcohol and it was absolutely horrendous! I remember I left the place and told my wife: “He’s directly destructive for his party”.

I: But, King Salomo and Jørgen Hatmaker, was it something he said at that party?

S: You noticed he was only interested in talking to people... In layers of society who had power of influence. He was a sucker, I think. And now I’m being mean, but I remember I got the impression, and discussed this with the other people there, how intolerable he was. Maybe he had a bad day, but it was just striking.

I: Was he like, being condescending?

S: He was a world champion at a venue where he should have acted like everyone else. It just struck me how pompous he was. No, that wasn’t good.

(Stian, finance)

Interestingly, Stian refers to the difference between “Jørgen the hatmaker” and “King Salomo”¹¹, an expression filled with “egalitarian” sentiment. He claims Giske was only interested in talking with people who “had influence”, and was acting like a “superstar, in an occasion where he should have behaved like everyone else”, a behaviour which Stian deems very negatively. While he excuses his strong critique (excusing strong judgements is a common trope found in Norwegian cultural research), it is interesting to see this fusion of a politician failing to abide by sociability standards and an egalitarian cultural repertoire. The notion of “behaving like everyone else”, and how Stian, who earns several million a year, essentially gives himself the role of “Jørgen the hatmaker”, may be understood by how Norwegian upper-class agents often identify as “middle class” (Skarpenes, 2007; Vormedal, 2016).

What we finally may note, is that it is rarely politicians of the Conservatives which are the object of critique. In fact, while I did not include questions on any specific Conservative agent in the interview guide, very few interviewees judge politicians of this party. This only appears in the account of one of my least politicized interviewees, who has abandoned the right-wing parties for the Centre Party Vote:

¹⁰ The accusations of Giske’s sexual harassment, which made him leave politics for two years.

¹¹ A classic norwegian song by Alf Prøysen, which lyrics are straddled with egalitarian sentiment

[Talking about Fredrik's self-positioning on a left-right political axis]

F: No, because that parties have changed, only the last thirty years I've been an adult, right. So, I don't give a shit in where they are, as long as I can recognize myself in.... The Centre Party is really the only party I feel I can recognize myself in.

I: And where's the Centre Party [on the left-right axis]?

F: Like I know! [laughs] Its probably in the centre, in the middle somewhere. So I'm there then, even though I'm really more over there [points to the far right of the axis]. I feel I'm... The Progress Party, that's just humbug. The Conservatives... Erna [leader and prime minister] is only interested in one thing. And that's getting a job, after she's done here. So I think it's difficult...

(Fredrik, stockbroker)

Fredrik says he votes for the Centre Party as he “feels he can recognize himself” in that party. Fredrik is thus one of few interviewees (3/12) who does not vote for a right-wing party, and does so according to a reasoning signifying a weaker political competence – a vote of feeling rather than political argument. His former political adversaries are now deemed negatively: The Progress Party is simply “nonsense” (a common way of viewing the PP among the EUC), and Erna (Solberg, leader of Conservatives), is simply interested in “getting a job after she's done here”. This latter statement, that a political agent is only “interested in a job”, taps into the discourse of our wealthy individuals on the “power-hungry” politicians. The difference is that this is extended to the EUC's own – the Conservatives (7/12 interviewees vote C). Why is this important? Because in comparison to Fredrik, it shows the *limited disillusionment* of our wealthy individuals, Anders and Sander. While these interviewees may *seem* critical of professionalized politics, they are still highly mobilized as Conservative voters and even finance right-wing institutions. They are thus simultaneously “distanced” and strongly invested. In Fredrik's case, this disillusionment extends to the broader political landscape, where even Erna is only “in it for the job”. In Fredrik's case, Centre Party vote seem more like a negation of what he sees in the political landscape of the day, than a heeding of own interests. But, this difference between the “relaxed investment” and the disinvestment of Fredrik should also be analysed according to the social distance between Fredrik and Sander/Anders. Whereas they all are similarly educated (business-school), Fredrik is in fact my lowest income interviewee, barely making it into the class bracket (top tenth income decile). One can hypothesize that it is not arbitrary that an interviewee of “lower” social position (intra-EUC) is also the one that seems lesser politicized, and who maximises the disillusionment we have discerned among other interviewees. In fact, this “social distance” is even subjectively felt by Fredrik:

F: No, I have gotten so old and weird that I don't care, and I'm not trying for a career in that bank. So they cannot push me lower down in the system. So it's a pretty safe place of work in that regard. But you have to be careful about giving you political opinion if you are to make a career in that bank, it's impossible. And I think that's sad, that it is so.

[a bit later]

F: [talking about far-right alternative media] Because it's all about immigration, it's so narrow and not interesting, really. Even though I'm also afraid of "Swedish conditions" and all that. And when you approach that stuff, then it gets really difficult, and if you talk about that at work, or what's your opinion on it, then it gets all.... I'm at the bottom, I work at the bottom line, to put it that way. But if you are to make a career in the bank, then it's impossible.... I find it so provocative, that it's gotten to this point. If you call and poll an American, he wouldn't even tell his family what he tells those who polled him, right.

(Fredrik, stockbroker)

To Fredrik, making a career in the bank (which he works in) seem highly dependent on holding specific political views. Fredrik, who is highly critical of "globalization", a typical question of "new politics", feels such views are deemed highly illegitimate in the upper hierarchy of the bank. While Fredrik seem hesitant of giving voice to his political views in the workplace, he also states he "doesn't care" as he's not interested in making a career. The case of Fredrik is really a limit case between the economic fractions of the upper class and the middle class. Whereas most other interviewees are executives, owners or more independent investors, Fredrik is, in his own words, "on the bottom line" of the EUC. The distance between the "relaxed investment" and the more completed cynicism of Fredrik, is also a *social distance*, between the firm owners of high social status and the stockbroker. Fredrik's story teaches a hypothetically important lesson about social status and politics: First, high social status may limit what political views are deemed legitimate. In fact, almost every interviewee positions herself in the centre-right, and *almost always to the left of the Conservatives*, marking a distance to the more conservative value-politics of the radical Right. In Fredrik's account, voicing immigration-critical views seem to be socially sanctioned, and even career-defining in the banking milieu. Secondly, Fredrik's strong political disillusionment – what he describes as a general "contempt for politicians" (a stronger mode than found elsewhere), may also be illegitimate among these actors of the upper right echelon of the social space – it is only observed in a more limited fashion elsewhere. One can here utilize a thought-experiment: Can a individual of high social position be totally dismissive of politics, this most legitimate subject? While it is certainly imaginable as a figment of the universally possible, it seems *socially difficult*. Noblesse oblige, nobility obliges, as Bourdieu says of the "power" of status, an empowerment both

enabling and disabling (the difficulty of total abstention). In a peculiar fit, the least privileged interviewee also seem to be the most distanced to politics. In fact, Fredrik almost declined the invitation to participate in this research project due to his “lack of interest” and contempt for politics. Luckily, participation from outliers such as Fredrik enables important teachings of upper-class politicization¹². The EUC is not a homogenous class – there is certainly a long stretch from the owners and executives to the stockbroker, a stretch which also manifests as different relationships to politics.

5.1.3 Not real politics

We have discerned how certain interviewees, predominately those attached to economic capital, may both excuse their lack of political interest and be critical of political agents. In the following, I elaborate on this as with regards to the Norwegian “political game”, which by some interviewees is deemed “unimportant” and lack “true” political dilemmas.

Aksel will compare Norwegian politics to a “duck’s pond”:

A: You’ve got to remember that Norwegian politics is so similar... I have friends down in Germany, and a few elections ago, there was a report on German TV. And there was talk about the fiscal policy guidelines [Norwegian], and about the great issue of... Are we going to spend 4 or 5% of the profit from the oil fund each year. From an European perspective, it’s like... The fact that people... Manage to get upset and make issues out of such things. And the framing in the German report was that: They don’t have many concerns. They are discussing if they are to spend 4 or 5%, not from the whole oil fund [talks in a higher pitch] but of the profit each year! That’s what they sit and spend their time on. [...] Yes, but putting it in perspective, European world-perspective, then it’s like: What the hell are they talking about. Putting it in perspective, Norwegian politics is a duck’s pond. And we are so lucky! We are so lucky!

(Aksel, head of sales)

Compared to Germany and the “European perspective”, Norwegian politics is nothing to be “worked up by”. While Norway may be a “consensus democracy”, such views appear in several interviewees’ accounts, and must be analysed according to the other facets of such political “distancing” we have discerned: Such statements are not “descriptive” accounts of the Norwegian political situation, but tells something about the political dispositions of the EUC. In a similar vein, Anders refers to the Norwegian oil fund and its fiscal policy guidelines when arguing against the wealth tax:

¹² Which again draws attention to problems of self-selection. Had I not gotten hold of Fredrik due to personal network, such individuals are likely to self-select out.

A: And then I think that a lot of stuff, politics, that people were more engaged, because I think people get tired of... You know that politics... You cannot see the difference anymore, and see, if that one is chosen, or that one, they don't have any leeway really. One thing is being in opposition, but in position, you cannot do anything at all. Look at the state finances, 97% is locked up, it's 3% they can adjust. That's why the wealth tax is so important, it doesn't matter at all, a 13-15 billion NOK, it doesn't make a difference in the state finances. But it's something they can, it's money they can use to attract voters, right. And I think that's the reason, both with the passing of time and that everything's melting together, it's getting more and more... With all the small parties, and swing stuff.

(Anders, investor/owner)

According to Anders, the limited political room of manoeuvre in Norwegian politics makes politicians create "political" questions to attract voters. Interestingly, Anders ties this to his disillusioned take on modern democratic politics – he in fact tries to explain his own take on an electorate of weak political interest. We again observe this strange nerve of "populism" and popular sympathy from the wealthy, right-wing financier. In his view, the political question of the wealth tax is construed by political elites to attract voters in a party landscape where little seems to be at stake. Of course, Anders is highly critical of the wealth tax itself, from a standpoint of economic analysis (it also hits him).

In other cases, the discourse takes another shape. Finn, who works in a consultancy firm, states the following when I question his political interest:

F: Yes. I am... I'm not party politically active or anything, but I'm paying attention. But these days I'm very... I hear a lot about the US election, as there's an election next week, so I follow that a lot. Usually I am... In Norway I am... Yes, I'm paying attention to what's happening... But I am not engaged, neither party politically nor... It's been a long time since I've discussed politics with anybody, to put it that way.

I: But why, is it a reason you're not...

F: Noooo, I don't know... [hesitating] Why... Like.. I think we're governed just fine, the way it is now, there are no big differences if there's a conservative government or if there is a Labour-government, or a socialist government. And I don't think there are so... My life is not really affected by party politics in Norway... It is... I think that... We're all social democrats, someone said. It's a lot of truth to that. Here it's like... I think there's only nuances. So... It's okay, in many ways, I think. In how there are few clear lines of conflict, it's really... There are few big differences, so I don't think it's so exciting. The US on the other hand... Very exciting right now. We have to see...

(Finn, economic consultant, 50s)

Finn, who is very interested in the US Election (interviews were conducted the month preceding the election) does not find Norwegian politics as interesting. Whereas the former interviewees referred to the "limited" political possibilities of the Norwegian electoral game (an "analysis" which signifies a stronger cognitive competence), Finn describes Norwegian

politics as bereft of conflict, where “we are all social democrats”, and that there are no “real differences”, only “nuances”. Similarly, Per, the financial analyst, will explain why he doesn’t discuss politics with his Labour-voting friend:

P: But really... Take my best friend. Really, he has the exact same opinions as me. Only he has concluded that he votes for Labour. So it’s just small nuances and nerdy interpretational differences. Between who stands for what, and what’s really the differences... That’s hard to elaborate upon..

(Per, financial analyst)

To Per, who is a self-proclaimed capitalist, the differences between Labour and the Conservatives is only about “nerdy interpretational differences”. Per, similarly to Finn, downplays the importance of Norwegian politics.

5.1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted accounts from interviewees who profess an ambivalent take on politics. This seem to be in line with the overall argument of Geay and Agrikoliansky. While most interviewees claim to be interested in politics, this interest seem mostly to be *abstract*, but also to signify a form of *statutory competence* – an entitlement to handle political objects, as politics is a legitimate subject, hard to dismiss. However, among interviewees of predominately economic capital, this interest (or in some cases disinterest) is accompanied by forms of *scepticism*. Such forms of scepticism tend to take the form of “criticism of political solutions” to societal issues, and “the competency of political agents”. I argue that this must be analysed by the interviewees’ position in the field of economics, from which they may take on the role of expert. Harrits (2005) have also argued that while the EUC have a “political habitus”, they tend to argue politically according to the logics of economy. What I have aimed to show is that this is not only a “logic”, but actually give heed to an “oblique” relationship to the political – an upper-class form of scepticism. However, this is not just a theoretical uneasiness between the EUC and the political logics. Interviewees also profess quite strong criticism of professionalized politics, sometimes according to a “populist” discursive repertoire. They also downplay the importance of the Norwegian electoral game, which seem either too “petty” or to be bereft of conflict. Especially among my wealthiest interviewees, there seem to be an amalgam of cynicism towards politics, and a cynical heeding of self-interest through economic resources. What I also observe, is that

while some interviewees have had private interactions with politicians, they seem hesitant to judge their private character, which in some cases (Sander) lead to discrepancies of judgement. Interestingly, the only interviewee to judge a politician by private characteristics do so by reference to an egalitarian morality.

5.2 Depoliticized political talk

In this chapter I take inspiration from the perspective of *ordinary politics*, how politics disseminates into contexts of ordinary life, with special interest in modes of talking about politics in everyday situations. According to theory and previous research, the EUC is expected to facilitate politics as a topic of talk. What I am interested in is their “mode” of talking about politics. As Nina Eliasoph has showed, “talking about politics” is no unitary practice, and might aswell produce apathy as engagement – *talking about politics* is something else than *talking politically*. Geay and Agrikoliansky observes an EUC which talk *about* politics, but rarely approach *sensitive* and too personal topics, such as party politics. What modes of political talking do I observe among the Norwegian EUC?

We may begin by the account of Stian, who also introduced the last section with his somewhat “abstract” but positive interest in politics:

I: Would you say you talk about party politics?

S: It’s more like subjects than exactly what party supports what point of view. But there haven’t been any hot potato topics which have made it very loud. That doesn’t mean one agrees on everything, but just that one discuss in a different way, maybe..

I: But is it a natural topic to talk about when you are together?

S: Politics? Yes, I would say that, at the same rate as much else, if you divide it, it could be local events one discusses, to talking about summer vacation, or discuss lobster fishing. It could be everything, but that there’s politics in that bucket, it is every time. But I don’t like labelling it politics, because there is a lot you can discuss without really thinking you’re discussing politics. Daily affairs, topics or current affairs, we discuss that all the time, but if that leads to proper discussion? That’s not all the time. But as stuff we talk about? Yes, I think so.

(Stian, investor)

First, Stian’s account of his practice of *ordinary political talk* support the assumption that political talk is “natural” to actors of this class. As Stian puts it, politics as a topic stands toe to toe with “lobster fishing” and “summer vacation” (almost in a humorously upper-class tint). Still, Stian says that its more of a general “theme” than connecting it to party politics, and that there has *not been any* “hot potatoe topics” making it “loud”. And crucially, he says

that “it doesn’t mean we agree on everything, but I think we just discuss in a *different way*, maybe”. What Stian illustrates, which I will argue is typical for the EUC mode of political talk, is that “political talk” is both *natural and depoliticized* among the EUC. This means that this class, which is equipped with both the cognitive resources and the statutory competence facilitating a natural appropriation of political objects, has a symbolic mastery of politics. But this doesn’t necessarily translate into *specifically political debate – where individual and collective interests are heeded with reference to the distribution of power* (f.i, party politics). This seems supported by the somewhat reflexive interaction with Aksel:

I: But do you talk a lot about politics and societal matters?

A: Yes, a bit... But that’s probably more societal matters, not very.... It’s rare that we sit and have pure party-political discussions, I don’t think that ever happens. I support the Liberals, and try convincing my friend who votes Conservative that he should support and vote Liberal? Doesn’t happen.

I: Why not?

A: I don’t know. It’s just not like that. We rather discuss events or persons, or stuff that’s happened. There’s rarely agitation for, I could claim something, and connect it to my political opinion. And say: “Therefore you should..” Saying, “that’s why you should vote liberal”. Neither does my friends. Doesn’t happen. It’s very little...

I: That’s a bit interesting, that one is so little...

A: Yes.. [seems surprised] It’s a bit interesting, strange, it’s interesting that you’re asking about that, I haven’t thought about that before. It’s very little political... And I didn’t say this: I never observe... Like, right before the election, we’re eating dinner, and we discuss politics based on party belonging? I cannot remember ever doing something like that. Never happened. But we discuss events... Like we had group here in easter, we went for a hike, and we discussed the cabin prohibition¹³. Because someone thought that it was idiotic. No one links stuff to party political standpoint. I cannot remember anyone doing that. Do you do that?

(Aksel, shipping)

While an electorate frequently discussing party-politics is a probable figment of the “folk theory of democracy”, it is nonetheless striking that Aksel claims he has never(!) discussed politics based on party-belonging, not even before an election. In a very similar abstract vein to Stian, he claims that they discuss “societal matters”, but never “try to persuade” one another. We may also observe another mode of this depoliticized political talk among interviewees comparatively strongly politicized, for example the social sciences educated Nina:

¹³ Prohibition to use cabins and secondary homes during COVID-19 pandemic.

N: Yes. When I'm with friends, we run, or go to Yoga, or go for a walk, or eat dinners. And, of course we discuss a lot of politics. It could be everything, I would say I'm above averagely engaged, it could be everything from the hospital, were the Ullevål hospital should be, that issue, to taxes, to wealth tax, to... All such things. Also, literature, film are classic topics, to the more trivial stuff, how's the daughter doing abroad stuff.

I: Are you often in disagreement?

N: A little too infrequent, maybe? It happens from time to time, then it's much more fun, really. Because you are challenged, and may test your arguments. Because there's always someone who must take the opposite argument, and that's fun, but usually we're quite [agreeing]... Even though we have a lot of different friends, so... I would say most are in the centre, plus minus centre. There are no huge capitalists, or very on the other side.

(Nina, executive)

While Nina's account gives hints of a stronger political competence, in how she recounts specific and abstract political topics, she admits (almost to her disappointment) they rarely disagree, and that they all are much alike politically. We may also note that Nina claims it is "more fun" when they disagree, which while it gives support to the assumption of "natural mastery" of political talk, seem somewhat bereft of seriousness. Politics seem more like a natural topic of talk than a *struggle of power*. The reader may think Nina's account seem somewhat at odds with the first two quotations, but Nina's more "engaged" mode is in the minority. Only two interviewees admit to frequently talk about specific political themes (Nina and Charlotte), whereas a total of three interviewees admit to rarely talking about politics among friends at all (Per, Finn, Bjørn).

Finally, I will shortly note how little my interviewees have to say about political interest and discussion during their formative educational years. The responses are strikingly similar across business school alumni. In the example of Line:

I: At [business school], were people engaged in politics?

L: No... There was very little...

I: Was it a topic of talk?

L: No, very little.

I: Very little?

L: Yes, no, very little, it was more about courses and exams and such.

(Line, executive)

While Line is from a working-class background, most responses are just as stark, while the clause "courses and exams" may be swapped out for "sports" or "girls". Such overtly

negative and short worded answers stand in stark contrast to the specific remembrances of one of our few non-business, university-educated interviewees:

I: If you think about student years, around that time. Were you engaged by politics then?

N: No, but... I don't think I've ever been super-interested in politics as such... But in political questions, we talked about that. And of course, at [university], you get much more exposed. And I noticed that I had certain gaps, when you meet someone who is more informed and updated than I had managed to become from [home in western Oslo] and down to [business oriented upper secondary school].

I: The political spectrum was a bit broader maybe?

N: Much more.

I: I do recognize that story [references to own background]

N: And there were so many things I hadn't thought about, everything from... There were these posters around, what did they call it, there was a club for empowerment of women! Where did that issue come from? I had grown up with a mother who was [occupation], who had always been discussing and toughening up. So there was a part where you realize that there are people that come from different backgrounds, who have different needs of learning, to resist, to argue for their case.

(Nina, executive)

Nina reflexively contrasts her entry into the university with her own upper-class upbringing, reminiscing how posters for a “women’s club” took her by surprise, as she herself had a highly educated, economically successful mother. I think this difference between Line and Nina’s account is very important for understanding the ordinary politicization of the EUC. While very few interviewees have much to say about political interest during business school years, business schools are still highly politically homogenous (while I don’t have any strong data to back this up, see Studvest (2017)). While there are strong political differences between business school and the university milieus, one could also argue there may be *strong differences in politicization, for example the extent to which politics are discussed and engaged with*. We will return to this in our final discussion.

What I have argued thus far is in line with the findings of Moe and Hovden et. al), who show (although uncommented) that the EUC, compared to the other upper-class fractions, *but also* compared to the whole class structure, rarely “Try to persuade someone to vote a particular party”. They are also much less likely than the other upper-class fractions to have “Taken an online party choice test”. While this may also be analysed by “supply-side” factors, where the supply of right-wing parties is less fractured than on the left, which facilitates less room for persuasion, one is led to reflect on the *interactional* consequences of such a supply. This may

mean that certain parts of the electorate have a “natural” and *non-discursive* attachment to a political wing. Again, it is the *ambivalence* which is the key here, the simultaneous “naturalness” and “depoliticizing” effect of this mode of political talk. In a programmatic statement on research on upper class politicization, Pincon and Pincon-Charlot characterises the French bourgeoisie by a *simultaneous theoretical individualism and practical collectivism*. Their “theoretical individualism”, in our case the lack of discussing own political views (and lack of “testing” them according to outside factors such as party choice tests), may in fact be a form of practical collectivism, which increases political group cohesion. As Geay and Agrikoliansky put it in their elaboration on the former thesis:

[The theoretical individualism] of the bourgeoisie is not just an “ideological screen”. It has practical implications; one of them being the distance to partisan mobilizations. Consequently, rather than sticking to its “natural” character, it is necessary to explore the springs of such a naturalization of socio-political identity, to identify the mediations likely to construct the right-wing vote as being in accordance with the interests of the economic “bourgeoisie” and to grasp concretely how this category is mobilized and is mobilized politically.

While I have not given space to other modes of *ordinary politicization* in this analysis (but was included in the interview-guide), mostly due to how negative and descriptive most responses are, I would argue one can observe the practical implications of this “theoretical individualism” in many facets of their ordinary lives. Interviewees are found to rarely have approached any form of “collective” political practice, such as political meetings and demonstrations. They are also rejective of talking to door-knocking political agents and talking to people on street-level stands. While such preferences may be observed elsewhere in the social space, it may take a special meaning among the EUC, which must be analysed according to the wider set of behaviour I am describing here, for instance with regards to *mode of political talk*. As such, an interaction with Anders is illuminating, following my question of talking to agents doing political campaigning:

I: Do you have any experiences with people coming to your door talking to you, politically or on behalf of parties?

A: Yes, they come to my door, but I don't care.

A: What we... Who it is... Not... The Conservatives, the local Conservatives, we know the guy who is the leader for [city district], but when, when we are to vote, they are the only ones that stay until the place [voting] closes up here. But they never come to our door. But who has been here... There may not have been any political parties, maybe some religious...

I: Almost the same? [both laugh]

A: Yes yes.

I: So it's not like you talk....

A: No, and if they had come, I wouldn't bother, I wouldn't bother...

I: Why not?

A: No, why? Right. Why. No.

I: I understand. This may be in the same vein, but if you're out in the city, there may be political stands, could you stop there and...

A: [interrupts] Don't care. I wouldn't bother. It's a waste of time.

I: Because? Due to time, but...

A: No, what, what are these people supposed to tell me? Not to be arrogant, but I don't bother with that.

While not every interviewee replies as briskly as Anders, the outcome is the same: none of my interviewees see any value in talking to street level-political agents whose aim is to mobilize the electorate. There are really three lessons to learn from this interaction. First: Anders first replies that he personally knows the local Conservative politician. To Anders, his relationship to political agents is first and foremost private (which is most likely more common in the upper classes than elsewhere). Secondly, his response to “why” he would not have talked to door knocking political agents: “No why? Right. Why. No”. What Anders essentially says is that the interviewer’s question is stupid and *answers itself*. Why should he, a competent individual be persuaded by anyone else? What we are dealing with here is probably a stroke of *statutory competence* – a *feeling of entitlement of own opinion*. Anders’ rejection of partisan mobilization is not out of a direct lack of interest, but due to a feeling political self-sufficiency. As he puts it: “What should *those people* tell me? *Not to be arrogant, but I am not interested*”. Thirdly, a fact which seems both banal and of huge importance: Anders says he hasn’t really had many political agents knock on the door of his home, a claim which is supported by most interviewees. While I don’t have any statistical data to back this up, it may seem like political parties spend a huge number of resources on campaigning, *but not for the electorate of this class*.

5.2.1 Conclusion

I argue my findings regarding ordinary modes of political talk among the EUC seem highly aligning with those posited by Agrikoliansky and Geay. I argue that there are three pertinent attributes to this mode of political talking. First, there appears to be few strong political

disagreements among the interviewees and their friends. Secondly, their social milieus seem rather politically homogenous. Thirdly, and most importantly, they rarely seem to approach more “sensitive” and “personal” topics such as party choice and discuss party standpoints, thus avoiding tying up to politics as a struggle for power. While these three attributes may seem like three sides of the same coin, I argue they’re not. For instance, one could perfectly imagine a politically homogenous group who approached more “sensitive” topics. One could thus say they talk more *about* politics than they talk *politically*. This also seem supported by the findings of Moe et. al. (2019), where this specific mode of talking seem very specific for the EUC, both compared to the other fractions of the upper classes, but also compared to the overall class structure. There are of course variations to this mode. Especially the more highly educated, non-business alumni seem to approach more specifically political topics. Still, they often seem mostly bereft of conflict. What we may also note is that this latter group is smaller than the one *that does not talk about politics among friends at all*. While I gave little space to other modes of ordinary politicization, I also argue that such political talking seems even less salient in the interviewees’ educational years (as far as they can remember), and they seem highly rejective of talking to street-level politicians, illustrated by the case of Anders. As such, while the EUC seem to have a sort of *natural mastery* of talking about politics, they do this in a specific group-style, which have a *depoliticizing* effect – similarly to Nina Eliasoph’s work on group-interactional styles of political talk: *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. However, “apathy” is not describing of the EUC. As such, political competence and/or mobilization, and practical disengagement may very well coexist, as a *configuration of political investment*, as dispositions both mobilized and restrained.

5.3 A competent class?

While we have observed peculiarities in EUC-actors’ political dispositions, they seem to handle the subject matter in a “natural” way, with a sense of ease. This may be an indication of a higher *statutory competence* – a feeling of entitlement to handle the legitimate subject of politics. However, the ambivalence discerned may also hint towards that the EUC is not overly invested in the Norwegian political field and its peculiar struggles. As such, their level and form of *cognitive competence* should be put to question. This is the object of this chapter. My methodological arsenal included a “test” (both meant as a test of knowledge and as a conductor of visceral judgements), where interviewees were invited to look at three portraits

of three different politicians, and then answer if they recognized them, knew their name, their position, and what the interviewee herself thought of the politician pictured. These politicians were Jonas Gahr Støre (leader of Labour), Sylvi Listhaug (recent minister and coming leader of the Progress Party), and Audun Lysbakken (leader of the Socialist Left Party). Although measuring “adequate” competence is a hairy subject, I would argue knowing these prominent political agents is at least not a difficult task (see section 4.4).

However, when confronted with the picture of Audun Lysbakken, *6 out of 12 interviewees failed to fully name him*. This failure was often followed by excuses, promises that they obviously knew “who it was”, that it was a simple occasion of “mental block” and spur of the moment forgetting. It should be mentioned that many of those who failed naming Lysbakken, still remembered that he belonged to the Socialist Left Party. How should one interpret such failures?

This calls for some meta-reflections on the social game of upper-class research. At first round of analysis, I was in fact opting for giving my interviewees the benefit of the doubt. As these were individuals of high social position, interested in politics, who daily monitored news, why shouldn't such a mistake be a simple spur of the moment mental blockage? The qualitative class researcher could ask himself how he would treat such “data” if the objects were of lower classes. What if we in fact treat these as examples of lack of cognitive political competence?

The mistake of failing to name Audun Lysbakken does not stand alone: interviewees mispronounce names (Sylvia, instead of Sylvi), call Centre Party leader Trygve Slagsvold Vedum by “the Centre Party-man” (Nina) or doesn't remember his name (Anders) et. cetera. Most interviewees also fail to know Sylvi Listhaugs present position (secondary leader of the Progress Party), although this is a much more difficult task¹⁴. This is of course not a representative sample, and not an extensive test of cognitive competence. But it gives indications and is in line with the analysis thus far: The EUC, while somewhat interested in the topic of politics, often incorporating it as a natural talking point, and mobilized as voters, entail a somewhat distant attitude towards politics. While electorally invested, it is striking that these upper-class individuals who in most cases proclaim an interest in politics, fail to name such a prominent political actor.

¹⁴ She has swapped positions a lot over the last years

Before continuing, I want to draw specific attention to the *configuration of investment* found in one interviewee's account, who in a sense *maximizes* the ambivalence I am arguing exist more broadly across the sample. This interviewee also illustrates a possible explanation for such cognitive failures I just described. He in a way illustrates the concept of "relaxed investment", where strong political mobilization coexists with a "relaxed" take on politics. Anders originates from an upper-class background, where politics were frequently discussed. Now he is one of my sample's wealthiest. If a higher social position is an indicator of stronger political competence, Anders should be a typical representative of the politically competent upper class. At the beginning of the interview, Anders strikes the interviewer as a highly politically competent person. While he does seem critical of political solutions and often argue according to an economic "logic" (see section 1), he appears as very knowledgeable, and is highly opinionated on various political subjects, which he handles with natural ease (examples: international aid, climate policy, immigration, tax policy) However, faced with the cognitive test, Anders not only fails to name Audun Lysbakken, but even fails at naming Sylvi Listhaug (he even asks if she belongs to the Socialist Left Party(!)). Under the sheen of a competent individual lies a weakly politically invested person. One source of this weaker cognitive competence (failing to know and recognize prominent political actors) is his total lack of reading national newspapers:

I: Do you read a lot of newspapers? How do you follow politics?

A: We, I, have different, news outlets, which makes me.. I rarely read newspapers, because everything is old news to me, it has something to do with my work. There's rarely that there is something, something peculiarly Norwegian. And I do read a lot of news, mostly web-based..

I: For example?

A: Bloomberg, Reuters, there's different... "Chewed" stuff, views, something called 13D. Ant that's... But it costs, a yearly subscription, it costs a quarter million NOK [he informs that his workplace pays for this], it's released once a week, and it covers a broad array. The main publication is "What I learned this week", right, and it's everything from COVID to the US election. There's 20 people who sit there and chew everything and spit it out at the other end. And that's work related.

[A bit later in the interview]

I: I understand, but you could say that there is a sort of expectation in society that you are supposed to follow events... What do you think about that?

A: That there is an expectation... Of course I know... What I'm saying: I have grown out of that. Do you understand? Because I cared about that earlier, in dinner parties and such, but now I've gotten older, so..

I: When would you say that transition was?

A: No, maybe around 30 to 40 years old. But I know, when you say it, there was a period where you, typically, a few years after my studies, where you tried to be very intellectual. All such things were important, but when time passes... Can't do anything about it anyways [politics].

(Anders, investor)

Anders has almost fully abandoned reading national newspapers, which he distances himself from through claiming that “it’s all old news to me”: But, he reads a lot of news in relation to his field of work (investing), which are rather internationally and business-oriented. It comes clear that this individual lives in a different sphere of media than what *could* be expected of the Norwegian citizen. When I pressure him on this, he claims that he doesn’t care about being “intellectual” anymore. Anders distances himself from what Kevin Geay has called “scholastic investment”, more commonly found in the more cultured fractions of the upper class. As such, Anders seem simultaneously politically competent while clearly being very “relaxed” in his form of investment. While he may give a grand analysis of climate policy, he seems simultaneously little committed to the more “petty” Norwegian electoral game (although he is strongly committed to the Conservatives and finance the liberalistic think tank “Civita”). Anders seem to have a very strong sense of subjective competence, what we have called “statutory competence”, but seem comparatively less cognitively invested. We may also note that there are various forms of cognitive investment. While Anders is technically competent, first and foremost from an economical point-of-view, he is not competent with regards to the peculiar Norwegian electoral game. Anders took the interviewer by surprise when asking if Listhaug was a member of the Socialist Left Party. Why so? Had the interviewee been of working-class background, such a finding would be less surprising. It is first and foremost because Anders *displays* competence. While a lower-class interviewee’s ignorance could be labelled as a symbolic exclusion from the events of the political field (by lack of political competence), Anders is heeding himself *above* the events of the Norwegian political field, as a form of symbolic *distinction*.

While few interviewees give as “visceral” judgements as Anders, who actively distance himself from Norwegian news, many interviewees mostly read business newspapers, so one

could guess that failures of cognitive competence may stem from a weaker anchorage in the peculiar Norwegian political news-world.

5.3.1 Conclusion

This chapter specifically targeted the *cognitive political competence* of the EUC. While I as a researcher was rather surprised by the extent to which interviewees failed at fully naming Audun Lysbakken, it may teach an important lesson about EUC-politicization. As I have underlined earlier, the EUC often seem to express a form of *statutory competence*, that handling political objects seem natural and easy-going to them. While I will return to this in the final discussion, the extent to which interviewees failed at this cognitive test *may indicate that the politicization of the EUC depend, to a stronger degree, on a feeling of competence than an actual cognitive investment in political objects*. Interestingly the failures were spread quite evenly across the sample (a table will be presented in the following chapter). We may also note that “naming a politician” is an indicator of a very specific form of competence. While the EUC may be very competent as regarding specific issues, such as economic policy, they seem less invested in the specific electoral struggle of the Norwegian electoral game.

5.4 Variations of dispositions

In this chapter I attempt to generalize some of the findings from the preceding chapters across the sample. As such, I want to draw attention to *intra-class* and *intra-individual* variation of politicization in the EUC. At several points during this analysis, I have pointed out that some practices and properties seem more salient among certain social actors – for example a “distanced” relationship to politics among those of predominately economic capital, *intra-EUC*. I have also argued that certain actors seem simultaneously strongly politically mobilized, while at the same time profess such distancing. As such, we are also paying attention to *intra-individual* variation, whereby some individuals seem more *dissonant* than others. As such, I follow Bernard Lahire’s reinterpretation of the Bourdieu. I try to point out individual variations of dispositions, before returning to the *social regularities* of such variations.

Below is a table describing each individual interviewee by social attributes and investment in political practices. Some of these are familiar from the preceding sections. I also add some categories which were included in the interview guide, but which I have not dealt with yet. While I cannot go into every detail and variation, I in the following try to analyse some pertinent patterns found in table 1 (explanation is found below the table).

Table 1

Name	Social origin	Capital	Education	Pol. upbringing	Discussion	Read newspapers	Cognitive test	Legitimacy of politics	Vote
Charlotte	++	++	++	++	++	+	+	+	Conservatives
Nina	++	++	++	+	++	+	-	+	Conservatives
Anders	++	++	-	++	++	-	-	-	Conservatives
Sander	+	++	-	+	+	-	+	-	Conservatives
Aksel	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	Liberal Party
Line	-	-	-	-	++	+	-	+	Labour Party
Bjørn	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	Liberal Party
Stian	++	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	Conservatives
Eva	++	-	++	+	+	+	-	+	Conservatives
Finn	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Conservatives
Per	++	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Environmental P
Fredrik	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	Centre Party

Social origin: ++ is upper class, + = middle class, - = lower class (this is mostly based on interpretation of accounts of origin)

Capital: ++ 50-100 million fortune. + = Higher wage group 2 million – 5 million, - = 1,3 – 2 million.

Education (non-business): - = only business school. + = business + courses non-business, ++ = non-business

Pol. upbringing: Politics were discussed in interviewees' families during upbringing

Discussion: Extent to which interviewee and her friends talk about politics (not mode of talking as in section 5.2, but the practice of talking at all)

Read newspapers: Every interviewee read some form of business-oriented newspaper (Dagens Næringsliv and/or Finansavisen) and Aftenposten. "+" means deviation from this norm (Examples: International newspapers (f.i. New York Times), Klassekampen, Morgenbladet, Dagsavisen)

Cognitive test: Interviewee failed at fully naming at least one of three politicians (see section 3)

Legitimacy of politics: "-“ = interviewees who distance themselves from politics (see section 1)

Vote: Party interviewee would have voted for if the election was tomorrow (at time of interview)

Taking a first look at the table, some theoretical and methodological facets of social class and social practice should be recalled. When dealing with a class operationalized according to an occupation-based class schema, we are essentially bundling together individuals of varying properties. Looking at the table, some differences of social position strike out: There are great differences in economic capital, from the wealthiest with fortunes up to a 100 million NOK, to those with comparatively lower wages, down to 1,3 million NOK. Among the group of highest volume of economic capital, we are also facing different “class situations”. Sander has made a fortune from founding and owning a company, whereas Nina has had various executive positions in different companies, but never as an owner. She has comparatively moderate wages, but has inherited a fortune. While of similar volume of economic capital, they have attained their fortunes in dissimilar ways, and have dissimilar work-situations. Another pertinent variation is form of education. While 9 out of 12 are business-school educated, 3 interviewees are non-business educated (law, social sciences, natural sciences). This latter group have at least a master’s degree worth of educational capital and is of another *species of educational capital*. Without other strong indicators, we can use this as an indicator of cultural capital. Interestingly, all non-business educated interviewees are also of upper-class social origin. As such, one cannot “single out” the effect of educational capital – we are in these cases dealing with a simultaneous “effect” of upper-class origin and species of educational capital.

Secondly, the different political “practices” recorded here are essentially different “contexts” of ordinary political practice, and discursive judgements. As such, we follow Bernard Lahire in taking note of *intra-individual* variation of practice – *variation in the same individual, across contexts*. Whereas the most common form of the class-politics nexus deals only with voting behaviour, we are here dealing with various contextual applications of politics. What we thus observe looking at this table, is that *dissonance is the norm*, and that there is only one interviewee who is invested across all contexts (Charlotte). This is on par with Kevin Geay’s findings, that when dealing with three categories (voting, discussion among friends, monitoring news), only 9,6% of “intellectuals and executives” are strongly invested in all categories. But, simultaneously, they have the lowest chance of being simultaneously disinvested in all categories (see also chapter on theory).

Analyzing the relationships between social attributes and political practice amounts to certain reflections. These are of course not statistically generalizable findings, but may hint towards certain hypotheses.

1. There seems to be an affinity between species of educational capital and the “legitimacy” of politics. Actors of strong economic capital (they are of EUC-position) and only business-school education seem to profess a stronger criticism of politics. While “legitimacy of politics” is a strong wording, interviewees marked with “-“ in various ways profess a criticism of political solutions, criticize the competency and integrity of politicians and the Norwegian electoral game – what I in the first section called “distanced relationship to politics”. Actors of non-business educational capital, where we have 3 interviewees with full degrees, and 2 with supporting courses in political science, do not seem to profess such judgements. While their political interest may be variable (see next section), they seem to be more invested and show more goodwill towards politics and its categories. One may also note that among this latter category, we find all the women of the sample. While this should be noted, there may also be serious network effects among the female of my sample, as two of them were recruited from an early female interviewee (making a network of 3).
2. We are here dealing with complex relationships. While the distinction in “legitimacy of politics” is important, this thesis is concerned with politicization – a broader concept. For example: it is perfectly possible to profess a critical take on politics, while being strongly politically mobilized and politicized. As such, I want to argue one can observe four different types of dispositions across the sample. In table 1, these are coded with different colours.

First, the red category, which are our most politicized (Charlotte and Nina). We may again note it is only Charlotte which seem homogenously invested across all categories, as Nina somewhat surprisingly made a failure in the cognitive test. These are 2 out of 3 interviewees of non-business educational qualifications. They are also both of high volume of economic capital. To add to this: they are also close personal friends. As such, there is no reason to overgeneralize this form of strong politicization.

Then the blue category. These interviewees are of similar strong volume of economic capital, but are only business educated, and stand out as more critical towards politics

and its agents, as well as having a more mixed investment than the red type. The crux is that this category should be contrasted with the yellow type, which is a type simultaneously critical of politics, and much strongly disinvested in politics overall. While the blue type may have a somewhat “distanced” relationship to politics, they are still politically invested: in the case of our two firm owners and most wealthy interviewees, Anders and Sander, they profess a “cynical” view of politics, but are just as cynical in their strong political support for the Conservatives, f.i. through financing parties and institutions. The yellow category on the other hand, show lack of politicization, for example through *low statutory competence*. Interviewees such as Fredrik and Per explicitly claim a lack of interest and political competence, which also is reflected in the table, where they seem overall less invested. This yellow type is of similar educational capital as the blue type *but has the lowest volume of capital across the sample*. While their capital composition is similar to the blue type, they thus differ drastically from the blue type in their volume of capital.

Finally, the green type, which is more of a mix. Neither strongly invested (as the red), but not critical as the blue and yellow. We may note again that we here find three out of four with some form of non-business educational capital (2 of them only supporting courses), but with a more intermediate volume of capital (which thus differs them from red in class situation).

3. The table also includes voting behaviour, where we can observe the three interviewees who votes for non-right wing parties (Line, Fredrik, and Per). One of the founding “theses” of research on upper class politicization is that they vote often and stably. In the case of the EUC, they vote often and overwhelmingly for right wing parties (9 out of 12 in my sample). The starting point for this project (and Geay and Agrikoliansky, see theory), is that high status, educated, strongly mobilized voters implies a *politicized and politically competent class*. Looking at the table, we observe that 2 out 3 class-detractors are of the yellow-type, our overall least politicized type. While this may be a coincidence, it seem to be in line with previous research. Carpini and Keeter have shown how “political knowledge appears to facilitate a closer linkage between group interest and political attitudes” (Carpini & Keeter, 1996). While Fredrik passes the cognitive test, both him and Per are the only two interviewees to

give heed to explicit lack of statutory competence. Fredrik is dismissive of politics in general, and Per express nervousness and feelings of insufficiency facing the subject at hand. It may just be that these individual's lack of political investment in part explains their class vote detraction. I may also add that the last detractor, Line who votes for Labour, may be analysed by her working-class background, whose parents also voted left-wing. As such, she appears as somewhat of a limit case of the EUC left-wing vote. The only other working-class originating interviewee votes for the less common right-wing option of the Liberal Party.

4. Finally, which I will only note shortly: It appears that individuals who grew up in homes where politics were discussed are overall more invested in politics. While not surprising, it is a testament to how political inequalities tend to reproduce themselves, which among the yellow type gravitates towards lesser investment and a more sceptical take on politics – even among actors of present upper-class position.

5.4.1 Conclusion

Across my sample, there appears to be four types of politicization. The intriguing part about this is the combination of political practices and overall relationship to politics, whereby some are inclined to be more cynical and “distanced” facing politics. As such, the minority group of my sample is the one most invested and who show more goodwill towards politics. This group, the red, is also some of the few interviewees who have non-business educational capital – and as such have followed other socialization patterns than the rest, and as such may have a different kind of *habitus*. Among those more “distanced” towards politics, I believe it is crucial to distinguish between the holders of high amounts of capital, and those relatively less economically endowed. These differences in position seem to facilitate different position-takings. While the most endowed (Sander, Anders) show strong signs of distancing and scepticism, perhaps some of the strongest modes across the sample, they seem strongly invested in the political project of the right-wing, as opposed to the more completed disinvestment of the yellow category.

5.5 Concluding discussion

This thesis comes from a strange place. In France, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in upper class politicization. However, this resurgence is drawn on a backdrop of scientific interest in the less privileged. In Norway, the subject of this thesis is somewhat unprecedented. There is no strong tradition for research on social inequalities of politicization and political competence, and even less of *qualitative nature*. As such, my findings and arguments are painted on a blank canvas and lack material for comparison according to a Norwegian context. With lack of comparative material, I am left observing the internal distinctions among the EUC. Had the situation been different, other aspects may very well have struck the analyst as being salient. With such reservations, what can be said about the politicization of the EUC?

In the preceding sections I explored the following questions:

1. One may suspect the EUC is more interested in politics than average citizens, due to high social status and often higher education. But may we also observe forms of *distancing* and scepticism in their accounts of politics?
2. Adding to the former, how do the EUC talk about politics in ordinary contexts, for example in ordinary social settings?
3. While the EUC is expected to be interested in politics, may we observe signs of lack of political knowledge in their accounts?
4. Building on the last three questions, is there any patterns to variation of mode of *politicization* among the EUC?

Regarding the first question, we can observe that a fraction of my interviewees, especially those predominately strong in economic capital, are found to frequently express various forms of criticism towards politics and its agents. Whereas the other fraction may express a positive, although abstract interest in politics, this fraction explicitly state *reservations* facing politics. Among my sample, this seems to take two forms, which one may argue actually is two sides of the same coin: political solutions are often impractical and political agents incompetent. Such judgements must be analysed according to the EUC's privileged position. In fact, we are here dealing with an intersection of the political field and the field of economy

in the field of power. As such, we may observe Anders, who has the material possibility to commit to philanthropy (an economically privileged position), but argue that political and bureaucratic “logics” are a hinder to his *pragmatic* (economical) intentions. Parallely, other actors, such as Per, may generalize the incompetency of politicians due to their failing at a *financial topic he was an expert on*. The EUC may be actors strong in economic capital, but they are also in some occasions, taking the role of expert in economic matters due to their privileged position in the field of economy. We are here building on the argument of Gitte Sommer Harrits, who argues that while Danish interviewees of EUC position seem to support her thesis of a “political habitus”, they also argue in an economical tint, and are concerned with the boundaries between the economy and politics (Harrits, 2005). I take this argument further and argue that the economic logic of the EUC may also be a *source of scepticism facing politics*. But, as we have seen, this extends more broadly than a “theoretical” discrepancy between politicians and the EUC – as a struggle of imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world. It also has practical consequences, as for the EUC mode of political investment.

One of my analysis’ most striking findings was the perceptions of specific political agents and what seems to be the patterns of judgement. Those interviewees who showed goodwill towards Labour leader Jonas Gahr Støre was generally disfavoured towards less “legitimate” actors such as Sylvi Listhaug and Trygve Slagsvold Vedum and visa-versa. These politicians can be considered less legitimate as they often utilize a “populistic” political logic in opposition to professionalized political culture. I here want to highlight the accounts of two of my most privileged interviewees, Anders and Sander. These interviewees have earned fortunes of 100 million NOK through firm ownership. These are simultaneously the interviewees who are most critical of Støre, and most favourable towards Vedum. While such horizontal “boundary drawing” towards other upper-class actors have been shown elsewhere (see f.i. (Jarness, 2018)), it is the way this is done that is striking.

While one in Bourdieusan manners could expect these actors in the very top right corner of the social space to draw boundaries towards the highly educated and privileged Støre, for example by describing him as “caviar left” (Geay, 2015, 237) (and which is observed in the account of Aksel), their critique rather amounts to a criticism of politics. In a strikingly similar wording, they contrast the “idealist” politician Vedum, who works for *what he believes in*, with the *power hungry* Støre, who is only concerned with power. As such, these interviewees do not only draw horizontal boundaries towards Støre as a representative of

what's wrong in representative democracy, but does so *in favour* of a politician type generally considered to be an adversary of those in the lower parts of the social space. While surprising, it is in line with what Flemmen, Jarness and Rosennlund have claimed:

Moreover, the economic fraction of the upper region of the social space are united with the lower regions in their contempt for the intellectual radicalism, liberalism and 'know-it-all' attitude of those regarded as 'the cultural elite'. This particular type of anti-elitism, it seems, is an integrated part of the lifestyle and worldview of both regions of the social space. *This suggests that it is not the cultural but the economic fraction of the upper class that is symbolically closest to the lower region [...]* (Jarness, Flemmen, et al., 2019) (My italics)

It may also be that there is a certain affinity between the “pragmatism” of economic logic and the “populist” valuation of honesty and straightforwardness, opposed to the “know-it-all of the cultural and political elite”. Such observations may help understanding the peculiar modern constellation of the moneyed classes and the working classes on the political right.

While criticism of political agents by the Parisian upper classes has been highlighted by Geay and Agrikoliansky, they do not seem to observe such “populist” tendencies among their interviewees. We may in fact be dealing with a peculiar Norwegian phenomenon, an effect of the discursive repertoire of egalitarian Norway. But truth be told, such *discursive* statements should not be accepted at first hand. Both Anders and Sander, while drawing on a *discursive repertoire* of populism, seem *practically* distanced from their so called “idealism”, through putting considerable money into heeding their political interests, knowing Støre privately, and are strong, life-long supporters for the Conservatives (these two are of the few who have never ever voted for another party). Such observations are really a hallmark of qualitative interviews.

As Lahire has argued, the qualitative researcher studying class studying dispositions must be wary of the differences between *dispositions to act (practical) and dispositions to believe (discursive)* (Lahire, 2003)¹⁵. One could for example argue there is a discrepancy between the discursive idealization of “honesty” and “idealistic” politicians (and the reflection of “power-hungry” Støre) and the act of putting considerable money in heeding their political interests. As such, there seems to be a discrepancy between *what these actors say they do/feel/perceive*

¹⁵ This is also treated in an upcoming paper by Vegard Jarness.

(*discursive*) and *actually do* (*practical*). We may contrast these two with interviewees with a more diverse capital-portfolio, of both strong economic *and* cultural capital (Charlotte, Nina), who denigrate the populist Vedum and Listhaug as in *opposition* to legitimate politics. What may again be noted is that an interviewee such as Nina may name Listhaug “the worst she knows”, while still voting Conservative. What really strikes the analyst is how, while drawing on a whole spectrum of discursive judgements, they *are still practically committed to the right-wing project*. One could perfectly imagine Conservative voters who would abandon the right-wing coalition project facing a coalition with Listhaug’s Progress Party. This is not the case here.

As for the second question, the assumption of a form of depoliticized political talk (Geay, 2019) seem supported. The crucial point is that most interviewees of this class *do talk about politics*, but not in a very political way. While subjects of political character may be a natural part of the EUC’s subject-rotation, this does not mean they discuss party politics, which home in on a conception of politics as a *struggle for power*. As noted, this behaviour is also observed by Moe et.al (Moe et al., 2019) (see chapter 3.5), and seem more frequent among the EUC than the other fractions of the upper classes. While a hypothetical quantitative data set may contain data on how often a person talks about politics in informal gatherings (there seem to be very little research on *ordinary* politics in Norway), one does not necessarily know what this “talking about politics” mean.

This is the crucial finding of the ethnographic work of Nina Eliasoph, who show how talking about politics may very well coincide with lack of explicit engagement, and may even produce apathy (Eliasoph, 1998). While her title says “Avoiding Politics: Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life”, “apathy” do not seem a fitting description of the EUC mode of political talk. Eliasoph focus on the lower and intermediary classes, and while the EUC does indeed talk about politics in a depoliticized way, they by no means seem apathic, but seem strongly mobilized towards the political right-wing. The EUC seem more to approach a form of *casual mastery*, indicating a stronger political competence, while rarely approaching sensitive and specifically political topics of discussion. It is, again, the specific *configuration of political investment* that is striking, the simultaneous electoral mobilization and ordinary depoliticized mode of talking.

As for the third question, the observation of cognitive failures should be analyzed with regards to the overall argument: The EUC, while possessing a strong statutory entitlement to

the appropriation of political objects, is not overwhelmingly invested in the Norwegian electoral game per se. In the individual portrait of Anders (see section 5.3 and 5.1), I drew attention to how his disposition seemed to be one of strong statutory feeling of competence, but somewhat secluded within the realm of business news and political self-sufficiency. I will discuss some possible explanations for this in the following.

As for the fourth, I argue there appears to be clear patterns as with regards to the *variations of political dispositions*. It seems as if those with non-business educational capital generally show more goodwill towards politics and its agents. Regarding stronger investment over all categories, this seem to only be found among two interviewees who had their full education outside business-school– and to add, there is only one interviewee who seem to be invested among all categories (Charlotte). Dissonance is thus the rule. Interestingly, but not surprisingly according to my theoretical discursion, the only interviewees who seem politically disinvested over all contexts are those with the least amount of overall capital. It is also only among this category I observe explicit statements signifying a lesser statutory – subjective felt competence (Fredrik, Per). Interestingly, is also here I observe most of the class-vote-detractors. It is just as if the “natural” mode of right-wing voting seems to be disturbed among those lesser political invested. In a highly paradigmatic case, the sample’s only self-proclaimed “capitalist”, Per, is the one who surprises the interviewer by voting for the Environmental party. In light of Agrikoliansky and Geay’s research, this is ultimately not surprising. The EUC seem to avoid clearly delineated ideological labels – Per’s political disposition and ideological self-proclamation is thus an outlier, by which his class vote-detraction may be understood. As such, while the EUC does not seem to be an *overly* politicized class, one may assume a form of political competence and investment strengthens the class vote, as illustrated by our outliers. On the other hand, it is simultaneously striking how robust the EUC right wing vote appears to be among the majority of the sample, despite a strong variation of dispositions (Nina’s very strong dismissal of Listhaug, Anders valuation of populist honesty and idealism).

In a peculiar fit, my findings seem very highly aligning with Daniel Gaxie’s conceptualization of politicization. It is those with the highest volume of capital, and a composition of *both cultural and economic capital* who seem to be the most highly politicized overall (the red type). Daniel Gaxie’s theory of politicization – the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics, hypothesizes that politicization depends on a twofold competence. A cognitive political competence, which increases by *cultural level*, where

educational level is a strong predictor, and a *statutory competence*, which increases by social status. In Gaxie's conceptualization, the cognitive competence is given chief explanatory value.

The somewhat underarticulated point thus far is that the EUC occupies a somewhat ambivalent position according to such a conceptualization. Compared to the other fractions of the upper class, they are expected to have less and a different form of educational capital. Simultaneously, many hold positions of high social esteem, which are both hierarchically privileged and economically prized. As such, one may expect their competence is more dependent on social status than cultural level – what seems to be the case for our blue type. One may recall our short exposition of Anders, a seemingly competent individual, but who failed the cognitive test dramatically. His form of politicization seems more dependent on a *feeling of competence*, than an actual cognitive investment into the Norwegian electoral game. Hence, what I have tried to show here is how this *ambivalent position translates into an ambivalent form of politicization*.

One chief source of *ambivalence* could be business school education. We may also note that many of my interviewees have their education from facilities in the US and Europe. This is a point which too often is left undertheorized when speaking of cultural class. When one deals with a variable of “educational level”, what is one in fact measuring? Regarding politicization, research has shown there are differences between different fields of education – different species of educational capital. Sebastian Michon has shown that among the highly educated classes, different forms of education serve as different forms of “skill pockets” facing politics, which may produce different forms of political competence (Michon, 2006). As Kevin Geay puts it: “cultural capital is only a fulcrum of politicization under certain conditions, and even in the higher intellectual fractions, the competence and incompetence coexist”

One may thus wonder: what does business school education mean for level and mode of politicization? Norwegian business schools seem to be overwhelmingly right wing, and more politically homogenous than universities (Studvest 2017). When questioned on political interest and discussion in student years, most interviewees respond negatively (see chapter 5.2). While left-leaning academia is a common trope, one seems to hear less about right-leaning business schools. Or rather, the right-leaning of the business school is seen as more self-explanatory and “natural”. The crucial difference between these educational milieus, may

not be simply differences in political opinion and voting behaviour, but differences in politicization and modes of political investment. There may be a sort of non-discursive attachment to the right wing among the business school students. In a society where there is an enormous boom in applications to such “mercantile education”, the consequences of this simultaneous political mobilization and depoliticized mode of being should peek future researcher’s interests (which also has been drawn attention to by others, see Tangen (2020)). Simultaneously, a growing popularity also means an influx of and variation of students with different backgrounds, which may modify the business school political configuration, similarly to how Agrikoliansky and Geay questions what the degradation of the traditional catholic private school means for the political socialization of the Parisian bourgeoisie (Agrikoliansky & Geay, 2020).

There are many variations of social mobility in our sample, but in some of our cases, we are dealing with individuals of upper-class origin, who went to mostly right-oriented business schools, read business-oriented newspapers and have ended up in upper class social position. Eric Agrikoliansky have put this succinctly: When dealing with the politicization of the economic fractions of the upper class, we are often dealing with the *laissez-faire* of the habitus: “coordination strategies without orchestrated relations”. The EUC does not need to be mobilized from the outside, because their habitus, their embodied dispositions naturalize party choice and political behaviour – which we have seen with regards to practices of “talking about politics”. Kevin Geay and Eric Agrikoliansky have shown how the inhabitants of the 16th arrondissement of Paris seem mostly absent and rejective of all forms of partisan mobilization. While I don’t have as broad data as them, my qualitative research gives no indices that this is any different in Norway. The point is: The EUC do not need to be politically mobilized from the outside, as their various forms of socialization structures a habitus of a peculiar sort. While their dispositions often seem dissonant, it appears the EUC can bear the weight of political ambivalence, which takes on the role of distinction, rather than a vehicle of self-exclusion (which limit case one may observe among the least privileged of my interviewees). As Kevin Geay describes the “relaxed investment” of the bourgeoisies of the 16th arrondissement:

“[...] [they] maintain a relationship with politics at first sight paradoxical, because at the same time invested and released. If they too are attached to the vote, they only follow the news with neglect, and despise those who too actively seek political discussion in society. But this paradox is not. This is because the best endowed maintain a unshakeable sense of competence that they allow themselves more casually in political practice. In this sense, their political releases are not failures, but distinctive practices. We cannot therefore oppose invested and relaxed relations with political, like so many mutually exclusive ideal-types.

Thus, it seems important to raise our heads and look outwards from this privileged corner of the social space. While I have taken inspiration from Kevin Geay and Eric Agrikoliansky in trying to paint a picture of a resourceful class “in a certain shade of grey”, forms of scepticism and a varying level of investment and competence does not mean this class is not masters of the electoral game. A look at the voting patterns and turnout in the national election (2017) paints an alarming picture of political inequalities. In the electoral district of Vestre Aker, where most of my interviewees live, 88.7% of all eligible citizens vote (42,4 % for the Conservatives, actually a decrease of 8% from last election). In the eastern part of Oslo, in the district of Stovner, only 70,8% vote (44,2% for Labour). The whopping difference of 18% is a difference which amounts to an inequality of voice, and a perhaps skewed distribution of power.

It is thus highly symptomatic that no matter what signs of political scepticism and distancing that can be observed among my sample, every interviewee votes, have always done so, and do so mostly with confidence. While scepticism and lack of technical competence may be just what disillusion lower classed actors from conceiving themselves into politics, this does not appear to be the case here. No matter the dissonance, the power of high status seems to be the vehicle of the politicization of the EUC. Symbolically, the EUC can afford ambivalence, which perhaps is just what throws off less privileged actors. Zooming out from the peculiarities I have drawn attention to, they in most ways overcome the “hidden disenfranchisement” of democracy and remain strongly mobilized towards their “objective interests”.

6 Ending

So, what about this configuration of political investment among the EUC? We seem at once to approach the Weberian nexus of class, status and party:

Whereas the genuine place of classes' is within the economic order, the place of "status groups" is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of honor". From within these spheres, classes and status groups influence one another and they influence the legal order and are in turn influenced by it. But "parties" live in a house of "power". (Weber et al., 1991, 194)

One of the hallmarks of Bourdieu's work is the tying together of class, a market-phenomenon, and status: "principles of consumption of goods as represented by special "styles of life" (Bourdieu, 1984, xii; Weber et al., 1991, 193). In this thesis, we have approached this "bridge" of the class-politics-nexus – a form of political lifestyle. The EUC, while comfortable handling political categories, and being highly mobilized, simultaneously express forms of "distancing" facing politics, which is also mirrored in their mode of political talk and lack of cognitive investment. What are the consequences of the existence of such political status groups – groups of people who seem to graduate towards specific *configurations of political investment*? That's hard to tell. But one could claim downplaying the importance of politics and political divides, and rarely approaching politics "as a struggle for power", both facilitates political group cohesion – intra EUC –as well as symbolically perpetuating the social order, by act of "naturalization", not consciously orchestrated, but by a practical logic. While not wanting to see the forest for only trees, there are clear dispositional differences among the EUC. While I have not here been able to paint nuanced portraits of individual dispositions (mostly due to lack of space), the strongest dispositional variation is that between those showing goodwill towards political categories and those less so. Among the most privileged this distancing coexists with a strong mobilization, among the least privileged it gravitates towards disinvestment. However, beyond these trees, the forest is one of strong statutory entitlement, and a strong attachment to the act of voting.

The crucial aspect of Bourdieu/Gaxie's conceptualization of politics as a symbolic practice is that it is not just a matter of technical competence, and that it is not explicitly taught in the public educational system. It is also, perhaps foremost, *a right to know and act – a feeling of entitlement to handle the political*. This entitlement seems strong among the EUC, and with

regards to voting, it almost always favours the right wing. Why is it so that the “objective” interests of the EUC is so easily translated to political decisions? Almost as if there was an affinity between the upper most divisions of labour and lay political decision-making processes, the EUC seem to be *practically fluent* in voting. While the EUC may not always be so overly and homogenously politically invested, they are representatives of a business ethos, which seem to be well represented in the political field. If there exists an empirical constellation of class – status – party, it seems to be found here. *However, there are few strong indicators of this mobilized class in their lifestyle.* They are masters of the act of voting, which putting it bluntly, is the only *true* mode of political influence among laymen.

What one really is led to ask is: What is politics, really? It is a subject that may gain in power by being hushed down. It is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. It permeates every sphere of society, every field, as a sort of master “logic”. It frequents the headlines, has the “people” as its subject, who is called to vote as election time comes. Simultaneously, it seems to be nowhere – the modus operandi of the laymen of the day is *indifference*: politics is always happening elsewhere. That is the crucial insight of Daniel Gaxie. But *indifference*, or more peculiar forms of “distancing”, does not mean the same for every social class. Whereas the less privileged classes have everything to gain by overcoming indifference, the upper classes have less so. As such, while *indifference* is a classed phenomenon, it is also a symptom of the societal formation of modern representative democracy, a function of the differentiation of the political field, far from the demos of ancient Greece. An electorate of highly politicized citizens, always interested, engaged and ready to defend their interests is perhaps a figment of imagination, a phantasm of the politician, the professor, the journalist. Maybe one can only hope that each social group and class have their representatives, who take on them to abridge the class-status-party-nexus, which the EUC seem to do naturally, with ease.

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