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Mapping Euroscepticism Across Occupational Classes: Economic and Cultural Capital in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

Public attitudes towards the EU have fluctuated significantly over the past two decades, with Euroscepticism gaining ground across various national contexts. Previous research indicates that Euroscepticism is most prevalent among the working class and petty bourgeoisie. This article revisits this argument by exploring whether these class-based patterns persist across different national contexts and examining the role of cultural capital in shaping these divides. This study uses survey data from nine European countries to map occupational classes within a two-dimensional framework of cultural and economic capital, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social space and Oesch's class scheme. Principal component analyses reveal that support for the EU aligns with class divisions, showing that sociocultural professionals tend to be strongly pro-EU, while production workers exhibit more Eurosceptic attitudes. Regression analyses confirm the significance of cultural capital, even within broadly Eurosceptic countries such as Serbia and Switzerland. These findings highlight the need to contextualize class-based explanations and to consider how cultural capital shapes EU attitudes across different national settings.

Keywords

class; cultural capital; economic capital; Euroscepticism; principal component analysis; survey analysis

1. Introduction

A substantial body of research indicates that support for European integration is generally higher among individuals with greater resource endowments (Fligstein, 2008; Kriesi et al., 2012; McLaren, 2002). Scholars have proposed various mechanisms to explain this trend, with one of the most prominent emphasizing

utilitarian considerations. Individuals with higher levels of economic capital (e.g., income and occupational skills) and cultural capital (e.g., educational credentials and engagement in highbrow cultural activities) are typically better positioned to leverage the opportunities presented by European integration. Their enhanced mobility and transnational experiences across Europe foster stronger cross-border ties and are associated with more favourable attitudes towards the EU (Kuhn, 2015; Recchi, 2014).

However, recent sociological and psychological research challenges the dominant focus on utilitarian mechanisms, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of support for the EU. These studies suggest that Euroscepticism is rooted in both economic disadvantage and cultural exclusion, as well as the uneven distribution of cultural capital. This perspective shifts the focus from utilitarian concerns to status conflicts, symbolic boundaries, and exclusion, particularly among those with limited transnational experience and cultural consumption patterns that favour popular culture. It posits that cultural capital influences who feels culturally "at home" in transnational and cosmopolitan spaces such as the EU (Flemmen & Savage, 2017; Westheuser, 2020).

While this perspective broadens our understanding of Euroscepticism, this view overlooks opposition to the EU among privileged groups driven by ideological (including left-wing) opposition to the Union's economic orientation (Bíró-Nagy & Szászi, 2024; Guinjohan & Rico, 2018). This phenomenon is analytically significant as it challenges the assumption that individuals with high levels of cultural capital are inherently pro-EU. Moreover, the timing of accession, sovereignty concerns, and elite narratives may generate Euroscepticism that transcends class and cultural boundaries. Despite the growing recognition of the dual roots of Euroscepticism, few studies systematically examine how economic and cultural capital intersect to shape attitudes towards the EU across diverse political contexts.

Against this background, this article addresses the following question: How do varying endowments of economic and cultural capital shape attitudes towards the EU? Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of social space (Bourdieu, 1983), I conceptualize attitudes towards the EU as structured by both economic and cultural capital. Using principal component analysis (PCA), I construct a two-dimensional space that positions individuals according to their capital endowments and examines how these relate to EU support. I also incorporate occupational class using Oesch's class scheme (Oesch, 2006, 2008) to assess how class locations correspond to these patterns and visualize the alignment of party electorates within this space. Therefore, the article contributes to the literature in two main ways. First, it applies the theoretical link between cultural and economic capital and EU attitudes, established in previous research, to a wide range of political and institutional contexts, including both post-socialist and Western European countries, as well as EU and non-EU members. Second, it tests whether higher capital mitigates Euroscepticism and finds only modest (or even absent) context-dependent effects.

The analysis reveals that support for the EU is systematically structured by capital composition: across all countries, both economic and cultural capital are statistically significant predictors of attitudes towards the EU. Sociocultural professionals tend to express pro-EU views, while production workers and small business owners are more likely to exhibit Eurosceptic attitudes. However, the strength of these associations varies across national contexts. Specifically, the effect of economic capital appears negligible in countries such as Croatia, Serbia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, where Euroscepticism is driven more by ideological or historical factors than by material advantage. Descriptive visualizations further indicate that support for

Eurosceptic parties is concentrated among individuals with lower levels of both economic and cultural capital. At the same time, several electorates of nominally pro-EU left-wing parties, according to their programmatic profiles, display high levels of Euroscepticism, even among voters with substantial cultural capital. Finally, the interaction effects between capital endowments and Euroscepticism reveal a small effect among higher-status groups, notably managers, while showing no effect among other occupational classes. This indicates that capital effects operate at the individual level rather than as a class-based cleavage. In other words, capital shapes attitudes, but class boundaries are only weakly politicised in the domain of European integration. Consequently, national contexts and party systems likely influence the expected alignment between capital endowments and class-based support for the EU.

2. Class, Capital, and the EU

2.1. Cleavage Transformation and the Dynamics of Euroscepticism: Utilitarian Explanations

The rise of Euroscepticism in contemporary Europe must be understood within the broader transformation of political cleavages. While 20th century political alignments were predominantly structured along class-based economic divides, where working-class voters aligned with the left and wealthier citizens with the right (Flemmen & Haakestad, 2018; Lipset, 1959, 1981), this pattern has significantly eroded in recent decades (Houtman, 2001). Scholars increasingly emphasize the emergence of a second, cultural axis of political conflict, shaped by structural changes in education, labour markets, and globalization (Kriesi et al., 2006; Marks et al., 2002; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). These developments have led to a new divide between cosmopolitan and traditionalist worldviews, often described using terms such as GAL–TAN or communitarian–cosmopolitan (Beramendi et al., 2015; Lux et al., 2022). Within this framework, Euroscepticism has emerged as a key grievance, structuring contemporary politics and being particularly prevalent among those who feel culturally marginalized or economically vulnerable in the context of European integration and globalization (Häusermann & Kriesi, 2015; Kurer & Palier, 2019).

Emerging structural divides have increasingly shaped support for new political actors, particularly Eurosceptic and populist parties, that have challenged the mainstream pro-EU consensus since the 1990s. A central debate in this context concerns whether such support is primarily driven by economic insecurity or cultural grievances (Bornschier, 2010; Rydgren, 2013). A key theory explaining Euroscepticism is the factor endowment model, which posits that individuals equipped with the necessary resources (e.g., education or occupational skills) will thrive in a globalized economy and, therefore, tend to support supranational integration. In recent decades, structural changes have given rise to a new culturally dominant segment of the middle class that embraces cosmopolitanism and nurtures international networks (De Vries, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2008). Conversely, these changes have triggered feelings of status anxiety and perceived decline among segments of the older middle class, such as small business owners, who respond by defending more traditional social and cultural hierarchies (Neckel, 2018; Reckwitz, 2019). Multi-country analyses indicate that support for European integration is higher among those with better economic prospects and among citizens in countries that benefit more from EU financial transfers (Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015). De Vries (2018) finds that individuals in the UK expressing financial concerns were less likely to support remaining in the EU. While unemployment itself was not a strong predictor, support for leaving the EU was significantly higher in constituencies with lower wages, fewer educational opportunities, and higher proportions of working—and lower-middle-class voters (Bíró-Nagy & Szászi, 2024; De Vries, 2018).

While structural transformations, such as globalization and labour market changes, have undeniably influenced support for European integration, economic indicators like income have proven to be surprisingly inconsistent predictors of populist support (Westheuser, 2020). Moreover, since the Eurozone crisis in 2008, Eurosceptic attitudes have also emerged among individuals with high levels of education and stable occupational status, spanning both ends of the ideological spectrum (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010; Van Elsas, 2017). Right-wing voters typically reject the EU on the grounds of national sovereignty and cultural identity, while support from the radical left often stems from concerns over social protection and opposition to neoliberal market integration (Carrieri & Vittori, 2021; Van Elsas, 2017). This ideological divergence is mirrored on the supply side: radical right parties tend to oppose the EU as an institution, whereas radical left parties are often critical of its institutional and economic configuration rather than of integration per se (March & Rommerskirchen, 2012; Wagner, 2021). This suggests that material vulnerability alone cannot fully explain patterns of opposition to the EU (Lux et al., 2022).

Recent research highlights the role of symbolic resources and cultural dispositions. The sometimes contradictory effects of income and the cross-class coalitions supporting Eurosceptic parties have led scholars to question the uniform effects of these large-scale structural transformations across individuals or groups and their Eurosceptic attitudes (Flemmen et al., 2019, 2022; Savage et al., 2010; Westheuser, 2020). At the same time, while lower levels of education consistently emerge as strong predictors of Eurosceptic sentiment (Langsæther & Stubager, 2019; Stubager, 2013), previous research has shown that the effect of education operates through both economic and cultural capital (Houtman, 2001; Kalmijn, 1994). Thus, this strand of research moves beyond explanations based solely on material self-interest. Rather than asking who benefits economically from integration, it inquires who "feels at home" in the symbolic space that the EU represents—and who feels symbolically excluded from it (Westheuser, 2020; Westheuser & Della Porta, 2022). In this view, Euroscepticism is not only a reaction to economic dislocation, but also a reflection of perceived symbolic displacement within new hierarchies of value, particularly among those who lack the habits and cultural consumption patterns necessary to thrive in the EU's symbolic space (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015). This perspective offers a bridge between macro-level structural change and micro-level orientations towards European integration.

2.2. The Role of Cultural Capital in Explaining Euroscepticism

A valuable starting point for investigating whether and how cultural capital shapes Euroscepticism is the sociological literature on cultural practices and political identities. According to Bourdieu, an individual's class position is structured by the relative distribution of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1983, 1986, 2001; Cvetičanin et al., 2021). These forms include economic capital (income, wealth, occupational status), social capital (networks and relationships), and cultural capital, which itself takes three forms: institutionalized (educational credentials), objectified (ownership of cultural goods), and embodied (dispositions, tastes, and cultural practices). Crucially, these forms of capital are convertible: advantage in one domain can yield resources or status in another. Together, these forms of capital structure the "social space."

What, then, are the mechanisms of cultural capital that shape Euroscepticism? One prominent theory is the dereification theory (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015), which posits that higher levels of cultural capital enable individuals to critically question established social structures and ideologies, fostering more reflexive

and cosmopolitan political attitudes. Thus, individuals with high cultural capital—whether through education or exposure to diverse cultural practices—are said to have a more dereified worldview; they recognize that their cultural norms represent just one of many approaches to organizing social life. This understanding makes them more tolerant of cultural differences, more open to diversity, and often less Eurosceptic. Thus, both education and cultural consumption—proxies for the acquisition and expression of cultural capital—correlate positively with cosmopolitan attitudes. Hereby, education intersects with economic capital on redistributive or market issues, but also with cultural capital regarding cultural issues (Houtman, 2001). Regarding the latter, education serves as a foundation for what some call "cosmopolitan dispositions"—defined as openness to cultural difference, reflexivity, and engagement with global diversity (Noordzij et al., 2019). Education thus plays a dual role: on one hand, it acts as a resource that facilitates mobility and access to the economic opportunities of European integration; on the other hand, it serves as a symbolic asset that fosters identification with cosmopolitan norms and transnational spaces. Conversely, those with lower cultural capital are more likely to view their own cultural norms as absolute and superior, thereby exhibiting a reified worldview, rather than seeing them as one of many equally valid ways of interpreting the world (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015). From this perspective, culturally conservative positions are less a function of material hardship than of limited access to cultural capital (Polacko et al., 2022).

Another mechanism through which cultural capital shapes attitudes towards the EU lies in its symbolic function. In this view, cosmopolitanism operates as a form of embodied cultural capital, a status marker used by the culturally dominant middle class to distinguish themselves from those perceived as "lower" in status (Noordzij et al., 2019; Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015; Westheuser, 2020). These symbolic hierarchies shape both cultural preferences and the perceived proximity or distance to political elites (Weisstanner & Engler, 2025). Such lifestyle distinctions reinforce symbolic boundaries: practices associated with the upper classes gain legitimacy and prestige, while mass culture is devalued (Katz-Gerro, 2017). In this sense, cosmopolitan dispositions help explain why support for the EU is strongest among educated urban segments of the middle class (Gerhards et al., 2013; Meuleman & Savage, 2013; Savage et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2013). These lifestyle-based cultural distinctions have tangible political consequences. Different types of cultural capital influence both class identities (Guzman et al., 2025) and voting behaviour (Debus, 2021; Westheuser & Zollinger, 2025)—echoing Bourdieu's argument that the social hierarchy of class positions is mirrored in patterns of taste, lifestyle, and political orientation (i.e., the "homology of spaces"; Bourdieu, 1986, 2001). Political preferences reflect an individual's position within a social space, shaped by habitus, the internalized dispositions formed through class-specific life trajectories (Bourdieu, 1984; Flemmen & Haakestad, 2018). Studies have consistently found that individuals with lower levels of cultural capital—indicated by limited educational attainment or minimal engagement with highbrow cultural activities—are more likely to express culturally conservative and welfare chauvinist views, such as perceiving immigrants as a threat (Manevska & Achterberg, 2013; Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015; Van der Waal & Houtman, 2011). Indeed, recent efforts to explain voting behaviour through Bourdieusian concepts treat class-based divides not only as structural, but also as expressions of symbolic boundaries. Political conflict lines, and by extension, political behaviour, arise when structural inequalities are culturally reproduced through shared moral and symbolic boundaries, and/or when political actors activate these distinctions within national contexts (Westheuser, 2025). Naturally, cultural capital is closely tied to economic resources. Highbrow cultural consumption, such as attending the opera or theatre, is more prevalent among higher social strata, while those with lower socioeconomic status tend to engage with more popular forms of culture (Gerhards et al., 2013). Indeed, those with both high cultural and economic capital are more likely to engage in

international cultural consumption and to hold favourable views of European integration (Meuleman & Savage, 2013; Rössel & Schroedter, 2015). Conversely, populist and right-wing actors often draw on popular symbols to mobilize boundaries between "ordinary people" and cosmopolitan elites (Weisstanner & Engler, 2025).

To summarise, cultural and economic capital are expected to play important roles in shaping attitudes towards the EU, whereby their effects are unlikely to be uniform across all occupational classes or national contexts. Country-specific factors—such as national welfare regimes, party systems, and historical relationships with the EU—can influence how capital configurations relate to political preferences. The following hypotheses guide the analysis:

> H1. Individuals with higher cultural capital tend to exhibit lower Eurosceptic attitudes than those with lower cultural capital.
>
> H2. Individuals with higher economic capital tend to exhibit lower Eurosceptic attitudes than those with lower economic capital.

3. Data and Research Strategy

I utilize original survey data collected between May and June 2021 as part of the INVENT Culture Project, financed by the Horizon 2020 programme of the EU. The dataset was gathered through a combination of methods, covering nine countries: Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK. Table A1 in the Supplementary File provides information on the fieldwork period and mode of data collection for each country. The country selection follows the consortium design, including countries with varying institutional ties to the EU, addressing the common methodological bias in European integration research that primarily focuses on member states (Petrović et al., 2025; Rössel, 2012).

To explore how capital configurations relate to Euroscepticism, the analysis proceeds in two steps. First, I employ PCA to map the space of capital composition and plot the positions of occupational classes within it. The goal of PCA is to reduce the dimensionality of the data by identifying a smaller number of components that explain the maximum amount of shared variance in the correlation matrix (Kestilä, 2006; Lebart et al., 1984). To ensure comparability of country-level results, I centred the PCA scores by subtracting the country-specific means. In a second step, I conduct regression analysis to examine how these dimensions, along with occupational class, relate to Euroscepticism and how this relationship varies between countries. The primary predictors in the regression analyses are the two extracted PCA dimensions—cultural and economic capital—as well as occupational class. These variables are used to investigate potential interaction effects between different forms of capital and occupational position. In addition, the models include standard socio-demographic controls that have been found by previous literature to covary with the outcome, such as age, gender (0 = female, 1 = male), and type of residence (0 = rural, 1 = urban, defined as a city at/or above 80,000 inhabitans; Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Other potential controls discussed in the literature, such as satisfaction with democracy in the EU (Gherghina et al., 2025), are not available in the dataset; this limitation is acknowledged in the discussion in Section five.

3.1. Measuring Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is a multidimensional concept encompassing both general support for European integration and dissatisfaction with the functioning of the EU or its policy performance (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002; Taggart, 1998). Hard vs. soft Euroscepticism was initially measured by looking at party positions. This article examines attitudinal Euroscepticism among citizens, measuring diffuse support for European integration rather than policy performance or party ideology (Leruth et al., 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2011). I constructed a single index that combines trust in the EU, perceived threats or opportunities, and support for EU membership, excluding cases with missing values. A reliability analysis confirms that these items form a consistent scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Supplementary File). All items are measured on a scale from 1 to 5, except the trust variable, which ranges from 1 to 7. A score of 1 indicates *strong agreement* (or complete trust), while a score of 5 indicates *strong disagreement* (or complete distrust). Consequently, higher values reflect lower support for the EU and, correspondingly, higher levels of Euroscepticism. Figures A1 and A2 in the Supplementary File illustrate that support for the EU is highest in Croatia, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Spain, while France, Serbia, Switzerland, and the UK exhibit relatively high levels of Euroscepticism, with Switzerland standing out in particular. This pattern largely aligns with previous research on EU support in these countries (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Diez Medrano, 2003; Sarasin et al., 2018a; Stanojević et al., 2023; Taggart, 1998). The final sample comprises 13,519 cases, ranging from 1,169 cases in Finland to 2,372 cases in the UK.

3.2. Constructing the Social Space: Measuring Cultural and Economic Capital

To develop the social space, I utilize six items to construct a measure of cultural capital and three items for economic capital. Cultural capital is assessed through self-reported engagement in various cultural practices that differentiate social classes (Gerhards et al., 2013). Respondents were asked how often they engage in the following activities: (a) visiting a museum or opera, (b) playing a musical instrument, (c) reading a book, (d) creating other forms of art, (e) attending a popular music concert or festival, and (d) listening to music in various languages from different parts of the world. The final item addresses cosmopolitan cultural consumption, which is often associated with higher social status (Katz-Gerro, 2017; Meuleman & Savage, 2013; Savage et al., 2010). All items are measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*almost daily*) to 5 (*rarely*), and were reverse-coded where appropriate, so that higher values indicate more frequent cultural engagement. Economic capital is measured using three indicators: household income (measured in deciles, from 1 = lowest to 10 = highest percentile), material possessions (ranging from 1 = lowest to 6 = highest), and the respondent's education level (operationalised as an ordinal variable ranging from primary or less, to secondary or tertiary education). Although questions regarding parents' education were included in the survey, they had a high rate of missing values (30%) and were therefore excluded from the analysis. The PCA shows education loading on both dimensions, more strongly on the economic one (see Table 1). The same PCA and regression analyses were run with education as a standalone predictor, to disentangle the specific contribution of cultural capital from the broader effect of educational attainment. The results, presented in the Supplementary File, show that including education separately does not substantially alter the coefficients for cultural or economic capital.

In addition, to address potential measurement concerns, I tested two alternative operationalisations of cultural capital. The first follows a strict Bourdieusian understanding of "highbrow" culture, including

museum visits, opera attendance, book reading, and education as indicators of cultural capital. The second reflects a more recent interpretation that captures cosmopolitan openness, measured through four items related to learning about, exchanging with, and appreciating other cultures. Both indices were tested separately, and results are presented in the Supplementary File (see Table A6, Figure A7–8, and A10). While the magnitude of coefficients varies slightly, the overall patterns remain consistent (for a recent application, see Katz-Gerro et al. 2024). All items were z-standardized prior to analysis. Missing values for income and material possessions were imputed using multiple imputation by chained equations with 20 imputations, applying predictive mean matching (PMM) based on respondents' education, occupation, age, gender, and urban or rural residence. PMM was selected to avoid assuming normality and to better preserve the original distributional characteristics of the variables (Allison, 2002). Trace plots of means and standard deviations across iterations reveal no concerning trends or convergence issues. I also examined kernel density plots to visually compare the distributions of observed, imputed, and completed values for the imputed variables (Eddings & Marchenko, 2012). While PMM helps retain observed distribution properties, I acknowledge that some smoothing of the tails in the imputed distributions is visible (Eddings & Marchenko, 2012).

To map occupational classes within the social space, I position respondents using Oesch's class scheme (Oesch, 2006). Open-ended occupations were recoded into Oesch's eight-class schema: large employers, small business owners, managers, technical professionals, sociocultural professionals, clerks, service workers, and production workers. By mapping these occupational groups onto the social space, I can visually examine whether class positions align with the expected distributions of cultural and economic capital (i.e., clustering of sociocultural professionals in high-capital areas). Although Oesch's class scheme is more differentiated than the class structure outlined by Bourdieu, there is substantial overlap in their underlying logic. According to Bourdieu, the propertied bourgeoisie, primarily comprising self-employed individuals, possesses substantial economic capital but comparatively less cultural capital. In contrast, among academic professionals, cultural capital is the dominant form of capital. The lower middle class, represented by clerks, includes mid-level professional positions, such as middle management, while the working class, comprising production and service workers, is expected to exhibit both low economic and low cultural capital (Houtman, 2001).

4. Empirical Results

4.1. PCA Results: Euroscepticism by Economic and Cultural Capital

Table 1 presents the loadings on the principal components, revealing two underlying dimensions. Orthogonal rotation was applied to maximize the distribution of loadings within these components. Positive values on both the cultural and economic capital dimensions indicate higher capital resources. The first component is primarily associated with cultural capital and lifestyles. The second component captures economic resources, alongside education. Income and possessions exhibit the highest loadings, while education shows a lower loading compared to the other two economic indicators. The PCA results confirm that education is an ambiguous variable, loading almost equally on both dimensions. This suggests, in line with Houtman (2001), that education may reflect either economic mobility or cultural distinction, depending on the political context (for regression results with education as a standalone predictor, see Figure A9 in the Supplementary File). Figure 1 utilizes the two extracted dimensions from the PCA (cultural capital and economic capital) to construct a social space and map occupational classes across all nine countries (see Figure 1). Red dots represent more Eurosceptic positions, while purple tones indicate stronger support for the EU.

The distribution of classes largely aligns with theoretical expectations, supporting the validity of the PCA-based dimensions. As expected, sociocultural professionals are positioned at the upper end of the cultural capital axis, whereas production and service workers exhibit the lowest values for both economic and cultural capital, along with the highest Eurosceptic attitudes. While country-level averages suggest a shared pattern, disaggregating by occupational class reveals notable cross-national variation (see Figure 2).

Table 1. Principal component loadings.

	Loadings	
Variable	1	2
Visit Museum	**0.73**	0.03
Visit Opera	**0.73**	−0.04
Make other art	**0.54**	−0.29
Read books	**0.52**	0.05
Play Instrument	**0.47**	−0.31
Education	**0.42**	**0.45**
Listen to world music	**0.39**	−0.25
Income	0.24	**0.75**
Possession	0.21	**0.74**

Notes: Communalities in bold indicate values > 0.3. The cumulative percentage of variance explained is 43.2%; *N* = 12,441.

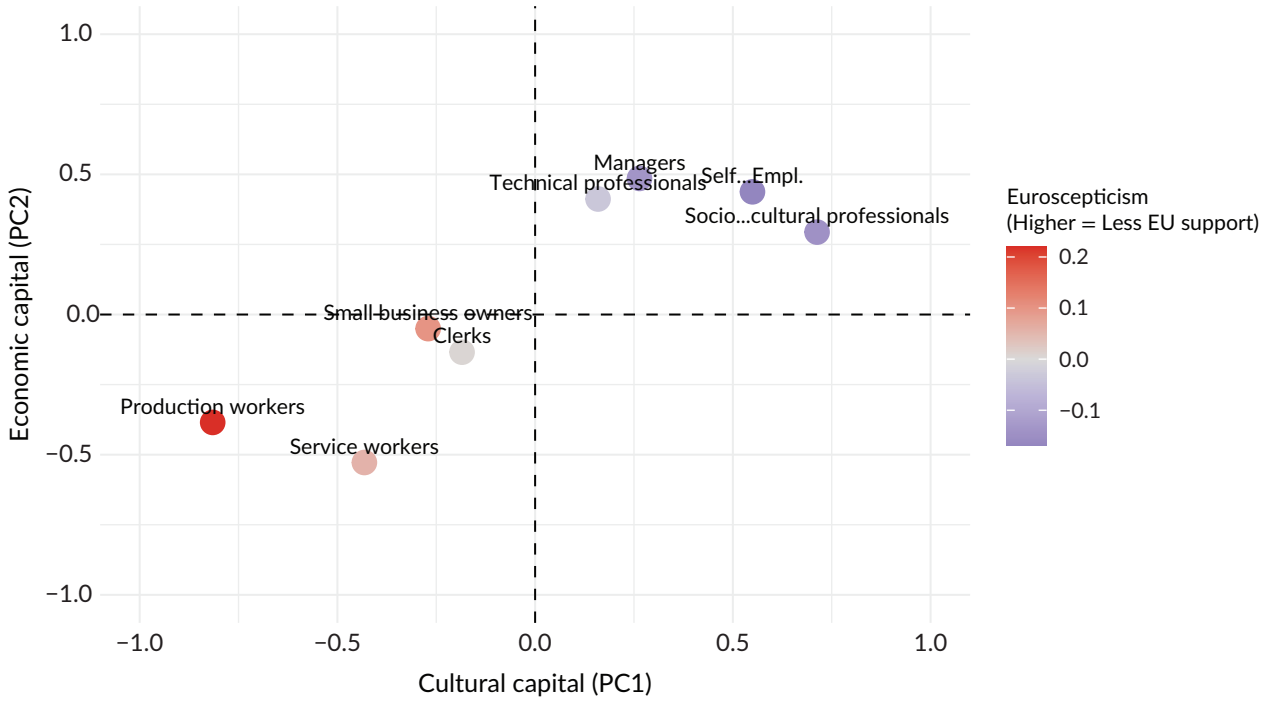

Figure 1. Occupational classes and Euroscepticism in the social space across nine countries (2021).

The "usual suspects" as the most EU-supportive group are sociocultural professionals, who appear in the upper-right quadrant, indicating relatively high levels of both economic and cultural capital. There are, however, two exceptions: in Serbia and Switzerland, sociocultural professionals display more scepticism, yet

they remain among the least Eurosceptic within their respective countries, alongside the self-employed in Serbia. Turning to classes commonly associated with Euroscepticism—production workers and small business owners—we observe several deviations from expectations. Production workers in Croatia and Spain demonstrate pro-EU attitudes despite their lower capital endowments. A similar pattern is observed among small business owners in Croatia, Denmark, and Spain.

Self-employed individuals and managerial classes, typically associated with high economic capital, are mostly pro-EU. However, Switzerland, Serbia, and the UK diverge: these groups display comparatively higher levels of Euroscepticism, although Serbian self-employed individuals remain the most pro-EU group within Serbia.

The remaining classes—technical professionals, clerks, and service workers—exhibit greater heterogeneity. Technical professionals tend to occupy the upper-right quadrant and lean pro-EU, with Switzerland, Serbia, and the UK as exceptions. Clerks are the most internally diverse, spanning the full range of capital endowments and EU attitudes. Service workers, often grouped with production workers due to their similarly low capital endowments, are generally more Eurosceptic; however, those in Denmark, Finland, Croatia, and Spain tend to hold more pro-EU positions.

Overall, high economic and cultural capital systematically correspond to pro-EU attitudes across all nine countries; however, important national variations exist. Swiss managers and self-employed individuals (representing high economic capital), as well as Serbian and Swiss sociocultural professionals (representing high cultural capital), express significant Euroscepticism. Conversely, sociocultural professionals in most other countries remain supportive of the EU, while production workers and small business owners, who tend to cluster at the lower end of the cultural capital spectrum, lean towards Euroscepticism. Again, there are country-specific variations, with production workers in Croatia and Spain exhibiting pro-EU attitudes. Previous research indicates that Croatian and Spanish citizens are among the highest supporters of the European project in Europe (Diez Medrano, 2003; Petrović et al., 2025). However, while cultural and economic capital can shape opposition to the EU, their relative importance varies across countries. For instance, Serbia and Switzerland—both broadly Eurosceptic—frequently deviate from expected class-based patterns. This suggests that national trajectories of EU integration and elite contestation likely influence public attitudes.

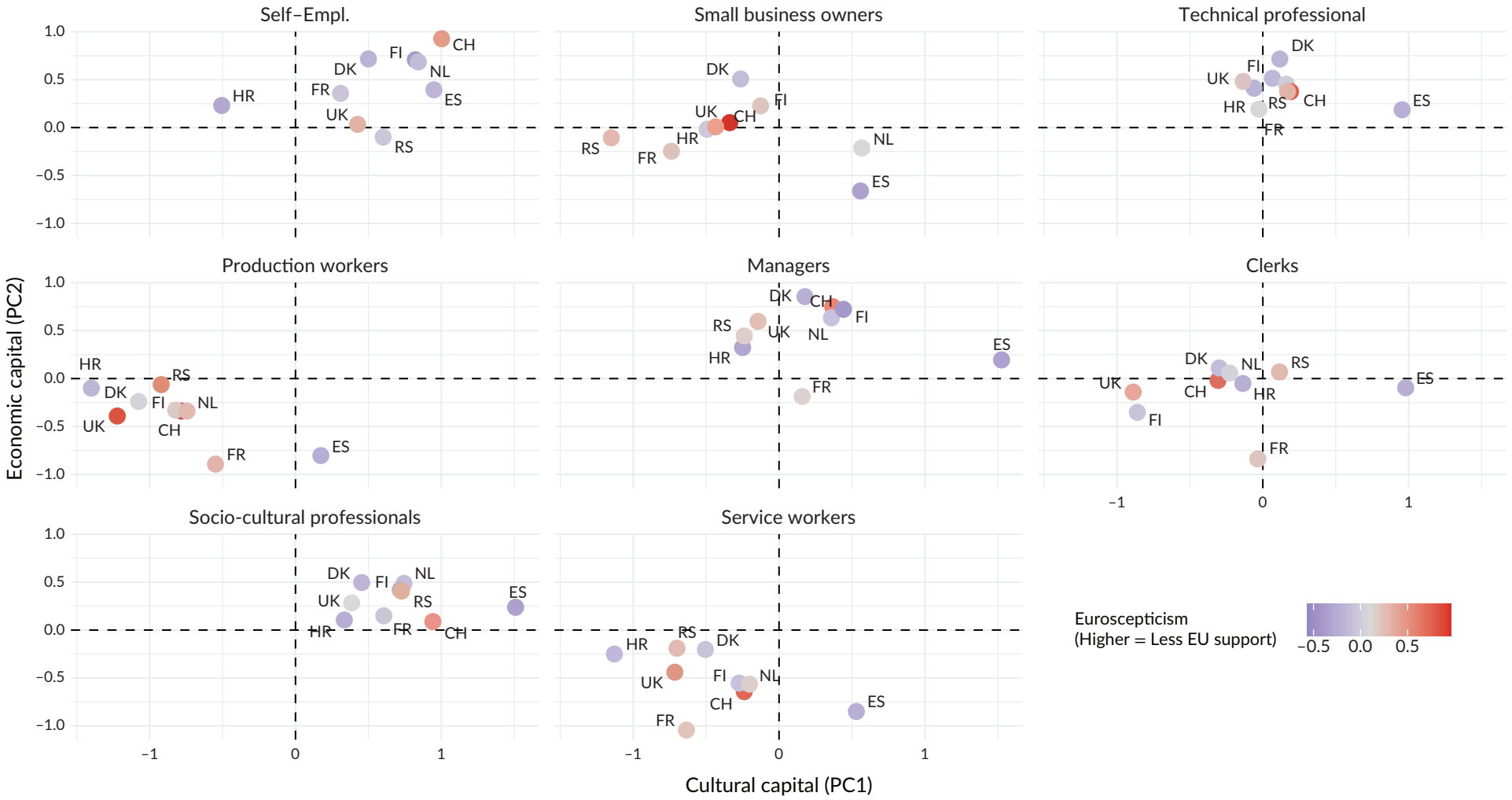

Figure 2. Mapping Euroscepticism—Average positions of occupational classes by country in the social space (2021). Notes: CH = Switzerland, DK = Denmark, FI = Finland, FR = France, HR = Croatia, NE = Netherlands, RS = Serbia, SP = Spain, UK = United Kingdom; *N* = 10,889.

4.2. Regression Results

To assess how economic and cultural capital relate to Euroscepticism—and whether their effects vary by class—I estimated OLS models with country-clustered standard errors (see Table 2). Additionally, I estimate country-specific models to examine how these associations vary across different national contexts (see Figure 3).

Table 2. Regression results—Euroscepticism, nine countries (2021).

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)
	Euroscepticism	*Euroscepticism*	*Euroscepticism*
Cultural Capital (CC)	−0.11***	−0.09***	−0.11***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Economic Capital (EC)	−0.08***	−0.07***	0.06**
	(0.07)	(0.0328)	(0.06)
Small-business owners (SBO)	0.17*	0.19*	0.17+
(Baseline = Self-empl.)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Technical prof.	0.02	0.02	0.03
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Production workers	0.11	0.17*	0.11
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Managers	−0.02	0.02	−0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Clerks	0.01	0.02	0.01
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Sociocultural professionals	−0.07	−0.04	−0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Service Workers	0.02	0.04	0.03
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Age	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Gender	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Urban	−0.19*	−0.19*	−0.19*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
SBO #CC		−0.02	
		(0.02)	
Technical prof.#CC		−0.02	
		(0.03)	
Production workers#CC		0.02	
		(0.03)	
Managers#CC		−0.05**	
		(0.02)	

Table 2. (Cont.) Regression results—Euroscepticism, nine countries (2021).

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)
	Euroscepticism	*Euroscepticism*	*Euroscepticism*
Clerks#CC		−0.02 (0.03)	
Sociocultural professionals#CC		−0.04+ (0.02)	
Service workers#CC		−0.00 (0.02)	
SBO#EC			0.03 (0.04)
Technical professionals#EC			−0.02 (0.03)
Production workers#EC			−0.01 (0.0701)
Managers#EC			−0.00 (0.02)
Clerks#EC			0.03 (0.03)
Sociocultural professionals#EC			−0.03 (0.03)
Service workers#EC			0.03 (0.04)
Constant	−0.03 (0.19)	−0.03 (0.19)	−.03 (0.19)
N	10,652	10,652	10,652

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Model 1 examines the effects of each covariate separately, while Model 2 tests the interaction between cultural capital and occupational class. Model 3 includes the interaction between economic capital and occupational class. The regression models reveal that both cultural and economic capital are associated with lower levels of Euroscepticism, and these effects remain robust across all three model specifications. In Model 2, among occupational groups, small business owners and production workers exhibit a higher likelihood of Euroscepticism compared to self-employed individuals. For managers, the interaction term suggests that cultural capital reduces their level of Euroscepticism, though the effect is relatively small. Sociocultural professionals also become statistically significant in Model 2 (at $p < 0.10$), remaining pro-EU compared to self-employed individuals. This result may be attributed to the interaction effect revealing latent variation within sociocultural professionals—those with lower cultural capital are less supportive of the EU, which slightly reduces the group's average support once this heterogeneity is taken into account. In Model 3, no statistically significant class interaction emerges for economic capital. Finally, living in urban areas is statistically significant across all three models.

The effects of cultural capital on Euroscepticism are statistically significant and meaningful compared to economic capital, with a one-unit increase in cultural capital reducing Euroscepticism by approximately 0.11 standard deviations. Defining whether an effect is "meaningful" or not is dependent on the variables being studied (McCloskey & Ziliak, 1996; Ziliak & McCloskey, 2004). Following Bernardi et al. (2017), I use informed benchmarking and report confidence intervals to assess both precision and substantive significance. The effect of cultural capital (−0.11; 95% CI: −0.16 to −0.07) exceeds a conservative threshold of substantive relevance (i.e., 0.05 SD), even at the lower bound. In contrast, the effect of economic capital is smaller (−0.06; 95% CI: −0.10 to −0.02) and remains around the threshold, making its substantive relevance less clear. Moreover, across all models, the effect for urban residence remains statistically significant and substantively meaningful (i.e., a shift from rural to urban areas is associated with a 0.19 decrease in the Euroscepticism scale). How do the variables' effects vary across countries? Figure 3 illustrates the effects of cultural capital, economic capital, and urban residency on EU attitudes across nine European countries, focusing on selected key variables for clarity. Given that significant interaction effects between capital and occupation emerged only in a limited number of countries, full interaction models are reported in the Supplementary File (Table A10). Notable findings are integrated into the country-specific discussion in the next paragraphs, where relevant.

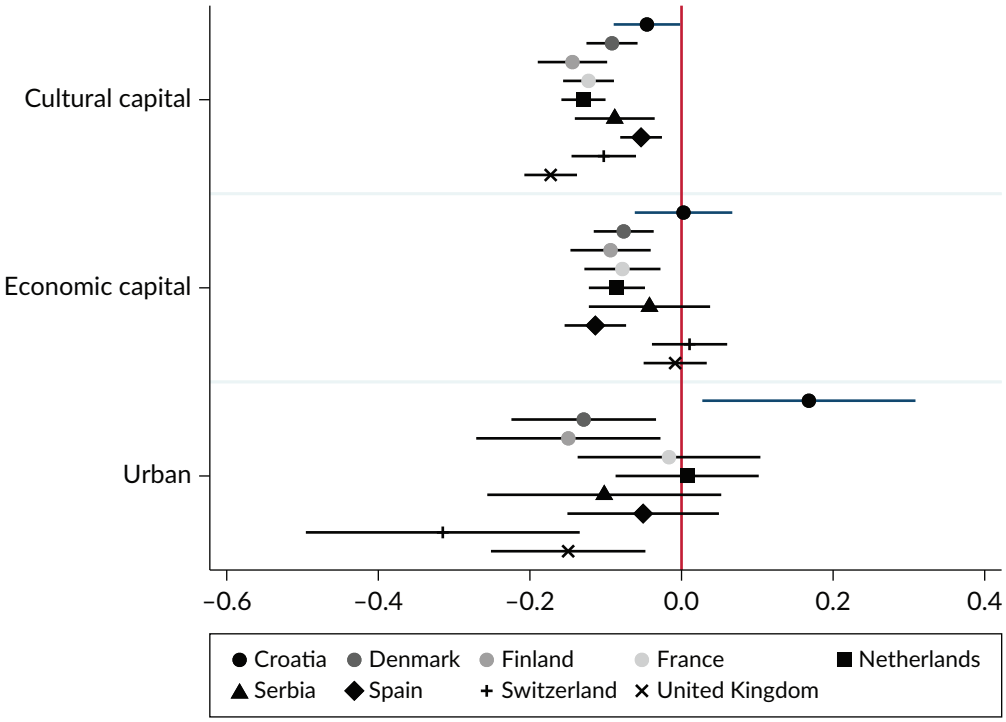

Figure 3. The effect of cultural and economic capital across countries (2021).

Figure 3 shows that higher cultural capital is negatively associated with Euroscepticism across all nine countries. This general pattern aligns with previous research that links cultural capital to support for supranational institutions, such as the EU (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015). Therefore, while the descriptive PCA plots suggest that support for the EU cuts across class lines in countries like Serbia and Switzerland—where even culturally advantaged groups express considerable Euroscepticism—the regression analyses tell a more nuanced story. When controlling for other socio-demographic characteristics, cultural capital remains a statistically significant and substantively important predictor of pro-European attitudes

in all nine countries, including Serbia and Switzerland. This indicates that even in broadly Eurosceptic contexts, individuals with higher levels of cultural capital are relatively more supportive of the EU than others within the same occupational class. Thus, while absolute levels of EU support may be low across all social classes in these countries, the relative positioning within the national context still aligns with broader cross-national patterns.

What stands out, however, are the weak or non-significant effects of economic capital on Euroscepticism in Croatia, Serbia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The limited role of economic capital in shaping attitudes towards the EU in these countries can be partly attributed to their distinct relationships with the organization. In these four countries, support for or opposition to the EU is often not structured around material or economic interests, but rather around cultural identity (in the cases of Croatia and Serbia) and/or distrust in supranational organizations due to concerns over sovereignty (in the UK and Switzerland). This observation aligns with the long-standing scholarly debate on Swiss Euroscepticism (Sarasin et al., 2018b) and the more recent debate surrounding Brexit (De Vries, 2018; Hobolt, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In the Swiss context, the interaction between cultural capital and occupational class reveals a notable pattern (see Table A31 in the Supplementary File): technical professionals and clerks with higher levels of cultural capital express elevated levels of Euroscepticism. Two potential mechanisms may help explain this finding. First, these groups are often situated in sectors that are increasingly exposed to globalized and internationalized labour markets, where EU integration may be perceived as intensifying competition and threatening job security. As such, EU integration may be perceived not as an opportunity for mobility or cooperation, but as a source of external pressure. Second, despite their educational qualifications, these groups may not enjoy the same symbolic status or cultural legitimacy as socio-cultural professionals. This suggests that cultural capital alone does not automatically translate into pro-EU attitudes; its effects are mediated by occupational position and recognition within the broader status hierarchy.

In Serbia, even individuals with the highest cultural capital remain largely Eurosceptic, with only those at the top of the economic hierarchy expressing more neutral or pro-EU views (see PCA results in Figure 2). In contrast, Croatia exhibits unexpectedly high EU support among groups with low economic and cultural capital. These differences suggest that national narratives, historical trajectories, and elite discourses can override structural predispositions, underscoring the importance of contextualizing class effects within country-specific political contexts. Elites in Croatia—particularly the Croatian Democratic Union—have promoted a national identity that links Catholicism and sovereignty to EU integration, fostering a broad pro-EU consensus even among conservative and low-income groups (Petrović et al. 2025; Stanojević et al., 2023). Conversely, in Serbia, EU membership is framed as a threat to sovereignty and Orthodox identity, with Serbian Progressive Party leaders employing selective pro-EU rhetoric while simultaneously reinforcing nationalism and rejecting liberal norms (Swimelar, 2019). Thus, while all classes in Serbia and Switzerland appear broadly Eurosceptic in the PCA, regression analysis reveals that within these generally sceptical contexts, individuals with higher cultural capital are still relatively more supportive of the EU than their peers.

Finally, within the "old" EU member states (Denmark, Spain, France, Finland, and the Netherlands), both higher cultural and economic capital correlate with lower Euroscepticism. Yet, studying the Nordic countries, Raunio (2005, 2007) shows how structural predispositions are not directly translated into political outcomes, but depend on political supply. At the same time, older studies on the Netherlands support the relationship between higher education levels and lower Euroscepticism, but emphasise the activation of anti-immigrant

attitudes (Lubbers & Jaspers, 2011). The stratified effects found in this article for France complement older studies demonstrating that social structuring of EU attitudes requires elite activation through broader value conflicts (Cautrès, 2012). Lastly, unlike other older member states, Spain's recent rise in "soft" Euroscepticism reflects frustration with domestic politics rather than capital-based opposition to the EU (Real-Dato & Sojka, 2024). Thus, cultural capital (and, in older member states, economic capital) shapes Euroscepticism, but the lack of strong interaction effects and the uneven results of occupational class show that their political relevance depends on country-specific EU trajectories, institutions, and party mobilisation.

5. Conclusion

This article has addressed how different endowments of economic and cultural capital shape attitudes towards the EU. The analysis confirms that individuals with higher cultural capital tend to be less Eurosceptic across all nine countries examined, although the effect is moderate in size. Two potential mechanisms could help explain this relationship. First, drawing on dereification theory, individuals with higher cultural capital—acquired through education and highbrow culture—may be less likely to perceive the social world or their own national culture as superior, making them more open to supranational integration. Second, cultural capital may function as a symbolic resource: cosmopolitan orientations serve as markers of distinction among culturally dominant groups, reinforcing social boundaries and shaping political preferences accordingly. Importantly, there is little evidence that the effect of cultural capital varies significantly across class positions: interaction effects are weak and even where statistically significant (e.g., among sociocultural professionals or managers), they remain substantively small. Country-specific regression models do not reveal generally significant or consistent patterns of interaction effects. At the same time, higher economic capital is also associated with reduced Euroscepticism; however, this relationship does not hold in Croatia, Serbia, Switzerland, or the UK. Clearly, these countries have very specific EU integration trajectories, where contested relationships with the EU and national narratives likely override the effects of structural positions. Thus, while the results lend support to H1 and H2 by showing a systematic relationship between capital endowments and Euroscepticism, this article does not directly test the underlying mechanisms—such as dereification or symbolic boundary drawing—but points to them as plausible interpretations grounded in existing theory.

The study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, while occupational class serves as a useful heuristic, it may obscure important differences within class categories. For instance, the composition of sociocultural professionals in Serbia may differ from their counterparts in Northern or Western Europe, due to differences in labour market structures and education systems. A more nuanced approach to class composition, one that is sensitive to national trajectories, would enhance our understanding of cross-contextual variations. Second, the dereifying effects of cultural capital are likely context-dependent, fostering either critical reflection or aligning citizens more closely with dominant elites (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003; Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015). Lastly, while this article has focused on attitudes, this analysis highlights a promising direction for future research and my future contribution to the political activation of these divides. Past research has shown that while voters of right-wing Eurosceptic parties tend to be resource-poor, Euroscepticism has also increased among left-wing voters, who are comparatively resource-rich, particularly in terms of cultural capital (Wagner, 2021). Structural divides matter only when parties mobilize them (Marks et al., 2002) and Euroscepticism can also arise without them (Gherghina et al., 2025). Future research should also examine when parties activate or ignore these divides.

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Data Availability

Data is not yet publicly available and is restricted until the end of 2025. Researchers interested in the data used may contact the author.

LLMs Disclosure

A large language model was used for minor language polishing and proofreading.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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