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A Tale of Two Professions in Elections: Party Choice Among Diaconal and Social Workers¹

Abstract:

Diaconal and social workers spend their days implementing social policy and exercising discretionary power while being regularly exposed to social inequalities. As an occupational group, they are heavily influenced by official government decisions, which might be expected to shape their political preferences. Our analyses, based on the Street-Level Bureaucrats Survey 2011 ($n = 1,237$) and the Finnish National Election Study 2011 ($n = 1,298$) reveal that more than half of diaconal workers voted for conservative centrist parties – the Christian Democrats and the Centre Party – in the 2011 parliamentary elections, whereas two-thirds of social workers supported leftist or green parties. The work context – the municipality/parish, length of work experience, and primary work duties – also influenced voting behavior. The professional identities and work environments of diaconal and social workers thus differentiate them not only from other members of the same social class, but also from each other in terms of partisanship.

Keywords:

party choice, diaconal workers, social workers, social class, microclasses

Introduction

Research on political behavior has identified certain occupational groups with distinct election interests. Public-sector employees, for instance, are more likely than their counterparts in the private sector to have progovernment opinions, vote in elections, and choose parties and candidates that favor government spending.²

1 The authors acknowledge the funding provided by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland (grant no 312710).

2 Yosef Bhatti and Kasper M. Hansen, "Public employees lining up at the polls – the conditional effect of living and working in the same municipality," *Public Choice*, 156, 3–4 (September 2013): 612.

Such political leanings are motivated by the desire of the public-sector employees to strengthen their own professional status.³

The link between occupation and political behavior has changed over time. As economic globalisation has restructured societies, the traditional links between social classes and parties have weakened, as demonstrated by a growing number of volatile voters.⁴ In fact, it has been argued that the role of the “big classes” (i.e., occupations aggregated into large clusters) is fading, whereas individual occupations or “microclasses” are becoming increasingly important in stratifying political attitudes.⁵ In this study, we combine these two aspects – social class and voting – with a workplace environment by focusing on two middle-class professions, namely, diaconal and social work, and comparing party choice to that of other voters belonging to same social class.

This study was conducted in Finland, where most social workers are employed in the social-service sector, organized by municipalities. Social workers have relatively extensive autonomy and control over their work. Social services include several segments, such as child welfare, support for disabled and elderly adults, activation measures for the unemployed, and social-integration services for refugees and asylum-seekers.⁶ Although until 2016 social workers oversaw the means-tested monetary benefit known as “social assistance,” they currently administer only the most selective component of this income scheme. In an era of permanent austerity, many municipalities are struggling to deliver on their mandate as social and healthcare providers. This means that the social work profession is characterized by a constant battle over scarce resources, followed by contradictory demands and moral distress, all of which may impact these workers’ political party preferences.⁷

Diaconal workers, in turn, have traditionally bridged the gap between public social services and parish work.⁸ Diaconal work is founded on Christian values and

3 Ari Hyytinen et al., “Public employees as politicians: evidence from close elections,” *American Political Science Review*, 112, 1 (February 2018): 70.

4 Dieter Stiers and Ruth Dassonneville, “Do volatile voters vote less correctly? An analysis of correct voting among vote (intention) switchers in US presidential election campaigns,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 29, 3 (2019): 283–298. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2018.1515210>

5 Kim A. Weeden and David B. Grusky, “The three worlds of inequality,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 117, 6 (May 2012): 1723–1785.

6 Helena Blomberg et al., “What explains frontline workers’ views on poverty? A comparison of three types of welfare sector institutions,” *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 24, 4 (October 2015): 324–334.

7 Maija Mänttari-van der Kuip, “Work-related well-being among Finnish frontline social workers in an age of austerity” (PhD diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2015).

8 Raija Pyykkö, “Hengellisen ja maallisen rajalla – kamppailu seurakuntien diakoniatyöntekijöiden sosiaalisesta ja kulttuurisesta toimialueesta” [On the boundary of spiritual and secular: A battle over

a combination of spiritual and material help.⁹ The Finnish religious landscape is dominated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which, together with the Orthodox Church, holds the status of the national church. Diaconal work is defined by the Church Order, which states that the duty of the church is to help those in greatest need who have no other channels at their disposal. Since the early 1990s, economic assistance and direct financial support have become a permanent and important form of diaconal work, and this work has grown in importance since the 2000s.¹⁰ The clients of diaconal work thus constitute an extremely vulnerable group, as they have not received (enough) assistance from the official bodies within the social welfare system.

Although diaconal and social workers rarely feature in the public debate in a Finnish context and are seldom explored in the field of electoral studies, their professions feature aspects that may shape their political attitudes and preferences, causing deviations from the typical political orientations rooted in social class. This is mostly because people in these occupations represent the welfare state at the grass-root level and interact with various disadvantaged groups, holding a great amount of discretionary power in their professional standing as experts.¹¹ Because social workers are responsible for the practical implementation of policies targeting the disadvantaged, their decisions directly influence the lives of clients in vulnerable positions.¹² In addition, diaconal and social workers are exposed to various social inequalities in their work environment, which is likely to influence their views on social justice and shift their political preferences toward a more egalitarian stance.¹³ Because of these close connections to politics, both in terms of legislation and

the social and cultural jurisdiction of the parish diaconal workers] (PhD diss., Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2011).

9 Johanna Kallio and Arttu Saarinen, "Street-level bureaucrats' attitudes toward the Finnish labour market allowance," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 34, 11/12 (2014): 817–834.

10 Heikki Hiilamo, "Rethinking the role of church in a socio-democratic welfare state," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32, 6–7 (2012): 401–414; and Elina Juntunen, "Vain hätäapua. Taloudellinen avustaminen diakoniatyön professionaalisen itseymmärryksen ilmentäjänä" [Financial help alone? Financial help as an exponent of professional diaconal work]. (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2011).

11 Tony Evans, *Professional discretion in welfare services: Beyond street-level bureaucracy* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

12 Lael R. Keiser, "Understanding street-level bureaucrats' decision making: Determining eligibility in the social security disability program," *Public Administration Review*, 70, 2 (March/April 2010): 247–257; and Michael Lipsky, *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

13 Barrett A. Lee et al., "Revisiting the contact hypothesis: The case of public exposure to homelessness," *American Sociological Review*, 69, 1 (February 2004): 40–63.

practical implications, the political preferences of diaconal and social workers may differ considerably from those held by other middle-class professionals.

Despite these shared occupational characteristics, diaconal and social workers also differ from each other regarding their ideological backgrounds, employers, and work environments. Social workers have their own ethical codes and core values, including social justice, human rights, and dignity, but unlike diaconal workers, whose occupation is based on the teachings of the Bible, they do not represent a confessional or religious profession. Most diaconal workers are employed directly by the parishes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, whereas most social workers are employees of social services organized by municipalities. Because of these dissimilarities, diaconal and social workers should also be perceived of as two separate groups, the expectation being that their political orientation deviates not only from that of other members of the same social class but also from that of each other.

In this study, we test these assumptions in the context of Finland, a universal welfare state with an extensive public sector. We address three specific research questions: (1) How does party choice differ between diaconal and social workers as well as from that of other voters in the same social class? (2) Which factors related to the work environment explain their party choices? (3) What is the overall role of the work environment in shaping diaconal and social workers' party choices? Our analyses are based on two different types of survey data: the Street-Level Bureaucrats Survey 2011 ($n = 1,237$) and the Finnish National Election Study 2011 ($n = 1,298$, FSD2653). Besides being a theoretical contribution, this article includes essential knowledge related to professional practice. The party choice and political preferences of diaconal and social workers may shape their professional activity such as use of discretionary power.

The Profession-Related Mechanisms Behind Political Orientation Among Diaconal and Social Workers

We argue that the diaconal and social-work professions are influenced by certain mechanisms that shape political orientation based on the characteristics of the professions, as described above. These mechanisms can be categorized in three distinct layers: *social class*, *occupation*, and *work environment* (see Table 1). Each of these layers encompasses a combination of resources, experiences, and social relations that have political resonance and hence place diaconal and social workers in a unique position as voters. In the following section, we discuss each of these layers separately.

Table 1 Three layers of work-related factors that shape political orientation among social and diaconal workers.

Work-related factors		
Social class	Occupation	Work environment
Level of education → political sophistication	Personal characteristics (selection)	Interaction with colleagues → political interest, opinion formation, political mobilization
Social status	Field of education	
Employment relations: sharing certain work conditions and types of risk with other white-collar professionals	Exposure to policy-making outcomes	Level of resource scarcity
Labor unions	Link to policy-making Interaction with clients → awareness of social conditions among the disadvantaged	

Social Class

Rokkan and Kriesi et al. remarked that the European political space was originally characterized by religious, center/periphery, rural/urban, and labor/management schisms.¹⁴ These four axes were later merged into two: the socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions. Within the former, social class played a pivotal role in organizing political views and mobilization. In the Nordic countries, the link between social class and politics has traditionally been highly pronounced because of consensual decision-making procedures and corporatism, active membership in labor unions, and a relatively high level of class voting.¹⁵

This study follows a broadly Weberian conceptualization of social class that has become hegemonic, at least in the literature concerning social stratification.¹⁶ Social classes refer to groups of occupations that differ from one another in terms of their employment relations. Both diaconal and social workers are considered

14 Stein Rokkan, *State formation, nation-building, and mass politics in Europe: The theory of Stein Rokkan, based on his collected works*, edited by Peter Flora with Stein Kuhnle and Derek Urwin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Hanspeter Kriesi et al., "Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared," *European Journal of Political Research*, 45, 6 (October 2006): 923–924.

15 Åsa Bengtsson et al., *The Nordic voter: Myths of exceptionalism* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014); and Oddbjørn Knutsen, "The decline in social class?" in *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 457–480.

16 Robert Erikson and John H. Goldthorpe, "Intergenerational inequality: A sociological perspective," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16, 3 (2002): 31–44.

middle-class professional occupations, the latter group possibly enjoying a slightly higher status based on their educational requirements. The work tasks of both diaconal and social workers are characterized by a high degree of human assets, such as specialized skills, relatively high autonomy, and a low level of approachability for external monitoring. Such traits, in turn, are among the central definitional criteria in many of the widely used social-class models, such as the Goldthorpe scheme and the European Socioeconomic Classification *ESeC*.¹⁷ These shared work conditions and risks may also constitute shared political interests among social and diaconal workers and other white-collar professionals in many relevant policies, including work and unemployment protection, education, and retirement-related issues. Finnish social workers hold a higher university degree, which by international standards confers upon them a relatively high professional status.¹⁸ Diaconal workers represent a religious profession: They hold a lower university (bachelor-level) degree in social sciences or nursing. The development of political sophistication, namely, opportunity, ability, and the motivation to acquire and process political information, may be aided by the relatively high level of education among members of these professions.¹⁹

Other aspects of an overall middle-class culture with fairly high status and education include engagement in a culture with less authoritarian values.²⁰ In terms of economic values, white-collar professionals generally hold a more right-wing orientation than the general population.²¹ However, as we will discuss more thoroughly in the next section, there are strong grounds to expect that diaconal and social workers may deviate from this pattern.

17 John H. Goldthorpe, *On sociology. Vol.2, Illustration and retrospect* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); and David Rose and Eric Harrison, "The European socio-economic classification: A new social class schema for comparative European research," *European Societies*, 9, 3 (September 2007): 459–490.

18 E.g. Anna Meeuwisse and Hans Swärd, "Social work programmes in the social democratic welfare regime," *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18, 3 (October 2009): 365–374.

19 See Robert C. Luskin, "Explaining political sophistication," *Political Behavior*, 12, 4 (December 1990): 331–361.

20 Tak W. Chan and John H. Goldthorpe, "Class and status: The conceptual distinction and its empirical relevance," *American Sociological Review*, 72, 4 (August 2007): 512–532; Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, *The new politics of class: The political exclusion of the British working class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Daniel Oesch, "The changing shape of class voting: An individual-level analysis of party support in Britain, Germany and Switzerland," *European Societies*, 10, 3 (September 2008): 329–355.

21 For the Finnish context, see Jussi Westinen, "Cleavages in contemporary Finland: A study on party-voter ties" (PhD diss., Åbo Akademi university, 2015), 182–183.

Occupation

Although social class plays a pivotal role in organizing modern party formation, especially in countries with a large public sector such as Finland, there has recently been an active debate on the alleged decline of the political significance of social class.²² Regarding voting behavior, this claim gained empirical support in several analyses.^{23–24} The overall picture of the decline in class voting might change when social class is disaggregated into smaller occupational clusters. Weeden and Grusky argued that the declining relevance in different noneconomic outcomes mainly concerns the “big classes,” such as the “routine manual,” “self-employed,” and “professional/managerial” groups.²⁵ Their empirical analysis in the United States suggests that, out of seven dimensions of social outcomes, political attitudes represent the one in which the trends between (big) social class- and occupation-based structuration deviated the most. Whereas the role of the big classes in stratifying political attitudes has declined, the opposite holds for the occupation-based “microclasses.” This leads us to the second relevant layer in the diaconal and social workers’ profession – the occupation.

In the case of diaconal and social workers, the division between macroclasses and microclasses becomes rather evident. Because of their middle-class position, one might expect them to have a higher tendency to support conservative right-wing parties, traditionally the tendency in the Finnish political landscape.²⁶ However, their occupation, that is, their microclass position, includes several characteristics that might moderate class-based political orientation. Both professions are highly institutionalized, to some extent sharing similar professional requirements, educational experiences, and selection effects. For instance, social and diaconal workers’ educational programs are likely to attract students who already have egalitarian and pro-welfare state attitudes.²⁷ Moreover, educational programs for diaconal and social workers cover issues related to social problems, social inequality, and the welfare state and social policy in general.

22 Terry N. Clark et al., “The declining political significance of social class,” *International Sociology*, 8, 3 (September 1993): 293–316.

23 It is worth noting that this trend does not apply to the relationship between social class and political engagement, where evidence of the increasing relevance of social class has been presented elsewhere, see Evans and Tilley, *The new politics of class*.

24 Giedo Jansen et al., “Class voting and left–right party positions: A comparative study of 15 Western democracies, 1960–2005,” *Social Science Research*, 42, 2 (March 2013): 376–400; for a review, see Knutsen, “The decline”.

25 Weeden and Grusky, “The three worlds”.

26 Westinen, “Cleavages”.

27 Idit Weiss et al., “Does social work education have an impact on social policy preferences? A three-cohort study,” *Journal of Social Work Education*, 41, 1 (Winter 2005): 29–47.

In their occupations, diaconal and social workers experience a high level of social interaction and connection to various networks, which may stimulate the crystallization of their political preferences.²⁸ An individual's social networks often largely include members in similar class positions, especially among those in the more advantaged classes.²⁹ However, this is not the case among diaconal and social workers, as they encounter people in disadvantaged economic and social positions on a daily basis. These daily interactions can constrain social distances and make diaconal and social workers more empathetic toward the less well-off while exposing the workers to issues related to poverty and other social problems.³⁰

These types of social interactions may increase diaconal and social workers' support for traditional leftist policies, such as progressive taxation, income redistribution, and other social policies designed to improve the situation of the disadvantaged. In their everyday lives, diaconal and social workers deal directly with the implications of such policies. Microclass-based self-interest could also play a role: An emphasis on such policies is directly linked to workers' occupational conditions and career opportunities, as a growing number of government interventions is likely to lead to increased budgets in social sectors. Moreover, as experts in social policy issues, their close connection with the decision-making bodies is likely to enhance their political awareness and interest in politics, as well as their understanding of the complexities of political processes.³¹

Previous studies showed that diaconal and social workers have very similar attitudes toward welfare deservingness, social security, and the causes of poverty.³² They tend to envisage poverty and disadvantage as a consequence of structural factors and, therefore, show considerably less support for individualistic explanations

28 Weeden and Grusky, "The three worlds."

29 Tak W. Chan and John H. Goldthorpe, "Is there a status order in contemporary British society? Evidence from the occupational structure of friendship," *European Sociological Review*, 20, 5 (December 2004): 383–401; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007, "Class and status"; Mikael Persson, "Social network position mediates the effect of education on active political party membership," *Party Politics*, 20, 5 (2014): 724–739; and Mike Savage, *Social class in the 21st century* (London: Pelican, 2015).

30 Arlie R. Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right* (New York: New Press, 2016); Heather E. Bullock, "From the front lines of welfare reform: An analysis of social worker and welfare recipient attitudes," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 144, 6 (December 2004): 571–588; and Idit Weiss-Gal et al., "Social workers' and service users' causal attributions for poverty," *Social Work*, 54, 2 (April 2009): 125–133.

31 John Gal and Idit Weiss-Gal, *Social workers affecting social policy. An international perspective* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2013).

32 Johanna Kallio and Antti Kouvo, "Street-level bureaucrats' and general public's deservingness perceptions of the social assistance recipients in Finland," *Social Policy & Administration*, 49, 3 (May 2015): 316–334; Kallio and Saarinen, "Street-level bureaucrats"; and Blomberg et al., "Frontline workers' views".

than welfare officials with a lower level of education.³³ Overall, diaconal and social workers perceive the recipients of social assistance positively and are even more empathetic toward the disadvantaged than their clients or the recipients of social assistance themselves.³⁴ Empirical findings further suggest that diaconal and social workers differ from the overall electorate and other middle-class professionals in terms of their attitudes toward the welfare state in general.³⁵ These characteristics related to diaconal and social workers' professions, interactions, and previous results regarding welfare attitudes lead us to our first hypothesis related to research question 1:

H1: Diaconal and social workers vote for left-wing parties more often than other members of the same social class.

There is a further important feature in the Finnish political landscape to justify this hypothesis among diaconal workers affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Support for the main left-wing party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), has traditionally remained at the same level among church members as that for the leading right-wing party (National Coalition), occasionally even superseding it.³⁶ However, we do expect religious affiliation to express itself within these two groups, and in order to answer research question 1, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Diaconal workers vote for the Christian Democrats more often than social workers or other members of the same social class.

33 Blomberg et al., "Frontline workers' views".

34 Kallio and Kouvo, "Deservingness perceptions"; Helena Blomberg et al., "Häpeää ja laiskuutta: Asiakkaiden, muiden kansalaisten ja hyvinvointivaltion katutason työntekijöiden käsitykset toimeentulokiasiakkuudesta," [Shame and idleness: How clients, other citizens and street-level workers view social assistance recipients?]. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka*, 81, 3 (2016): 301–312.

35 Blomberg et al., "Häpeää ja laiskuutta"; Gregg Robinson, "The contradictions of caring: Social workers, teachers, and attributions for poverty and welfare reform," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 41, 10 (October 2011): 2374–2404; and Idit Weiss and John Gal, "Poverty in the eyes of the beholder: Social workers compared to other middle-class professionals," *British Journal of Social Work*, 37, 5 (July 2007): 893–908.

However, studies conducted in more selective welfare states than those in the Nordic region have shown contradictory results, suggesting that social workers do not generally differ in their opinions from other middle-class professionals and are more critical toward the poor and increasing welfare funding than their clients; see Bullock 2004, "Front lines"; Idit Weiss-Gal et al., "Social workers' and service users' causal attributions for poverty" *Social Work*, 54, 2 (April 2009): 125–133. As expected, this was related to the institutional, educational, and professional differences between Nordic and more selective welfare states.

36 Westinen, "Cleavages".

Work Environment

In addition to the social-class position and occupation-based microclass characteristics, a third work-related component – the work environment – may also influence the political preferences of diaconal and social workers. Here, several factors are potentially relevant, such as the length of work experience, the amount of client work, and the nature of work duties. Those with long work experience seem to have more positive attitudes toward the disadvantaged than others working in the same field, which can be explained by their greater exposure to social inequalities and the generational effect.^{37 38} The length of work experience reflects their exposure to encounters with people in vulnerable positions. Previous research also pointed out that the extent of client work and the nature of work duties impact diaconal and social workers' social policy preferences.³⁹ This may be explained by the fact that those who meet vulnerable groups on a daily basis are more aware of the needs and preferences of these groups in Finnish society. Therefore, with respect to research question 2, we assume that:

H3: Diaconal and social workers in frequent contact with vulnerable groups because of the nature of their work tasks (especially those working in social/economic assistance or substance abuse services) and with longer work experience and a larger share of client work vote for left-wing parties more often than other members of the same occupation.

More generally speaking, the work environment also includes municipality-level factors that function as an institutional context shaping an individual employee's political orientation through his/her personal interests and values.⁴⁰ The institutional context entails the level of resourcing for the work duties assigned to social

37 Johanna Kallio et al., "Social workers' attitudes toward the unemployed in the Nordic countries," *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22, 2 (April 2013): 219–229; Blomberg et al., "Frontline workers' views"; Loring Jones, "Direct service workers' attitudes toward employment, unemployment, and client's problems," *Journal of Social Service Research*, 19, 1/2 (1994): 161–179; Barrett A. Lee et al., "Revisiting the contact hypothesis: The case of public exposure to homelessness," *American Sociological Review*, 69, 1 (February 2004): 40–63; Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 3 (May 2008): 187–199; and Kallio and Saarinen, "Street-level bureaucrats".

38 There may be various professional generations, socialized with different values, attitudes and policy objectives; see Kallio and Saarinen, "Street-level bureaucrats".

39 Johanna Kallio, "Sosiaalityöntekijöiden, diakoniatyöntekijöiden ja etuuskäsittelijöiden näkemykset toimeentulotuen saajista Suomessa," [Social and diaconal workers' and social security officials' attitudes toward recipients of social assistance]. *Diakonian tutkimus*, 1/2013 (January 2013): 53.

40 Helena Blomberg et al., "Social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty in the Nordic countries," *Journal of European Social Policy*, 23, 1 (January 2013): 68–82; and Helena Blomberg-Kroll, "Kosta vad det kosta vill? Attitydmönster och attitydförändringar hos befolkning och beträffade välfärdsservicen i nedskärningarnas tid" [At any cost? Attitude patterns and attitude changes regarding welfare

and diaconal workers. The political context, in turn, relates to the shared ideas and political climate in the workplace, which then shapes an individual employee's own political orientation. Finally, individuals in the same work organization have regular social interaction with each other, which can influence political orientation, for instance, through face-to-face political discussions and direct or indirect political mobilization. Although there is a lack of previous research on diaconal and social workers' party choice, the studies related to political attitudes among local civil servants highlight the importance of their workplace as a shared context.⁴¹ We thus expect, related to research question 3, the following:

H4: The choice of party among the diaconal and social workers who share a local work environment – those who are employed in the same municipality or parish – is more similar than is the case among other members of the same occupation.

Data and Methods

Data

The analyses are based on a national survey, the Street-Level Bureaucrats Survey 2011 ($n = 1,237$), conducted among diaconal and social workers in Autumn 2011. The online questionnaire was first sent to all social workers who were members of their trade union (*Talentia*), worked in a municipality, and had reported their email address. The sample size of the survey on social workers was approximately 1,600, 530 of whom responded to the questionnaire, a response rate of 33%.⁴² This relatively low figure may be explained by the fact that the trade union allowed the research team to send only one reminder, whereas the diaconal workers received two. According to a nonresponse analysis, there was no systematic bias in terms of sociodemographic or professional indicators.

In the second phase, the survey was sent to the diaconal workers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an online questionnaire via the church central administration. All diaconal workers ($n = 1,240$) working for the church at the time received the survey at their work email addresses. The response rate was 57% ($n = 707$). Compared to the official statistics on church employees, the diaconal worker survey

services among citizens and elite groups in times of cuts]. (PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University, 1999).

41 See, e.g., Blomberg-Kroll, "Kosta vad det kosta vill?"

42 In general, the rate of unionization among employees is very high in Finland, especially among public-sector employees (76.3% in 2013); see Lasse Ahtiainen, *Palkansaaajien järjestäytyminen Suomessa vuonna 2013* [Unionization of wage-earners in 2013]. (Helsinki: työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, 2015), 33.

appeared to be highly representative of the sociodemographic and professional characteristics of the population.⁴³

We begin our empirical analysis by comparing party choice among diaconal and social workers to the results obtained from the Finnish National Election Study 2011, conducted through face-to-face interviews after the parliamentary election in April–May 2011 ($n = 1,298$). These three datasets are complemented with macrolevel information on the parties' share of votes in the 2011 parliamentary election in the municipalities where the respondents were employed. This information was derived from the open access *StatFin* database provided by Statistics Finland.⁴⁴

Dependent Variables

Finland has a proportional representation system with mandatory preferential voting. In elections, voters must cast their vote for an individual candidate on a party list. This means that parties compete against one another, and there is also intraparty competition.⁴⁵ The country is divided into 13 voting districts, and both voters and MPs emphasize the role of geographical, constituency-based representation.⁴⁶ During the 2011–2015 term, the Finnish Parliament comprised eight parties, six of which were part of the initial government coalition. Parties are reluctant to reveal their preferences for coalition partners before elections are held. Because of the electoral system, the individual citizen has a wide range of choices, but there are also many things to monitor with a certain lack of relevant information.⁴⁷ Many Finns thus report finding politics difficult to understand.⁴⁸ Large government coalitions and consensual decision-making procedures also make it more complicated to hold incumbents accountable in upcoming elections.

43 Jouko Kiiski, *Diakoniatyöntekijä – rinnallakulkija ja kaatopaikka. Diakoniabarometri 2013* [Deacon Barometer 2013]. (Helsinki: Church Research Institute, 2013).

44 <http://www.stat.fi/tup/tilastotietokannat/indexen.html>

45 Åsa von Schoultz, "Electoral system in context: Finland," In *The Oxford handbook of electoral systems*, ed. Erik S. Herron et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 601–626.

46 Åsa von Schoultz and Hanna Wass, "Beating issue agreement: Congruence in the representational preferences of candidates and voters," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69, 1 (January 2016): 136–158.

47 See Hannu Lahtinen et al., "Explaining social class inequality in voter turnout: The contribution of income and health," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 40, 4 (December 2017): 388–410.

48 Lauri Rapeli and Sami Borg, "Kiinnostavaa mutta monimutkaista: tiedot, osallistuminen ja suhtautuminen vaikuttamiseen," [Interesting but complicated: Political knowledge, participation and attitudes toward political engagement]. In *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen – Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015* [Differentiation of political participation – Finnish National Election Study 2015], ed. Kimmo Grönlund and Hanna Wass, (Helsinki: oikeusministeriö, 2015), 358–378.

Party choice was identified by the following question: “Which party (or political group) did the candidate you voted for in these parliamentary elections belong to (2011)?” The response categories included the SDP, the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party, the Swedish People’s Party, the Christian Democrats, the Green League, the Left Alliance, the True Finns, other party or alliance, did not vote, and cannot/will not say. For the purpose of our analysis, we formed eight dummy variables (including only the respondents who voted for a party represented in the parliament). In the multilevel analysis (conducted in the second phase), the populist party True Finns and the Swedish People’s Party, representing the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, were omitted because of the small number of party supporters among the respondents. Thus, we formed six dummy variables, each of which included two categories (1 = a party voted for and 0 = all other parties and alliances, did not vote, and cannot/will not say). Listwise deletion of missing cases was conducted in both analyses, meaning that a case is excluded from the analysis if any single value is missing.

Independent Variables

Independent variables related to the professions of diaconal and social workers, including work experience in years, amount of client work (modelled as a continuous variable), and main work duties, were measured by four dummy variables (child services, social/economic assistance, substance abuse services, and services for older-aged people).⁴⁹ A dummy variable was also used to measure the profession (social or diaconal worker).⁵⁰ The control variables included sex, age (years), and categories of family type (living alone, single parent, in a relationship without children, and in a relationship with children). Table A1 includes descriptive statistics of the categorical independent variables. The survey conducted among diaconal and social workers also included a question about the municipality or parish in which the respondent was employed.⁵¹ Given that the support for some parties is geographically heavily concentrated, our multilevel models controlled for the corresponding share of the party votes in the municipality in which the respondent worked in 2011.

49 Some social workers have worked traditionally within social assistance, which is the last-resort form of financial support in the public social-security system. Diaconal workers, in turn, have provided voluntary economic assistance to those in greatest need.

50 Based on our research questions, we excluded possible independent variables measuring *personal characteristics* such as respondents’ economic situation, values, and religiosity.

51 This refers to parish or parish union (Finnish seurakuntayhtymä).

Methods

We conducted the analyses in two phases. First, we measured the share of votes for various parties by applying two multinomial logistic models. In the first model, we estimated the results for diaconal and social workers from the survey data; in the second model, we compared the results to the overall population using the Finnish National Election Study 2011. Here, our main interest was to compare diaconal and social workers to others in the same social class. Social class was defined according to the European Socioeconomic Classification (ESeC).⁵² In the nine-class ESeC schema, both social and diaconal workers belong to the second category, entitled “lower grade professional, administrative and managerial occupations and higher grade technician and supervisory occupations,” referred to as ESeC2 in our analysis. The reference category “others” included the rest of the population, that is, all those who did not belong in the ESeC2 category. To ease the interpretation of the effect sizes and to enable comparability between the different samples, we report the results as predicted probabilities, holding other variables as observed.⁵³ The 95% confidence intervals were obtained using the delta method.⁵⁴

In the second set of analyses, we used only the survey data collected among diaconal and social workers. Here, we applied six two-level random-effect linear probability models.⁵⁵ For each of the dependent dummy variables indicating party choice, we first estimated empty models (see the Appendix) without independent variables and then introduced all independent variables in the full models. In the models, level 1 contained individuals, whereas level 2 included the municipality (social workers) or parish (diaconal workers) in which the respondent was employed. In addition, we estimated full models with interactions in order to examine the possible differences between social and diaconal workers in regard to the extent to which the applied independent variables are connected to party choice.

The coefficients of the linear probability model can be straightforwardly interpreted as probabilities.⁵⁶ If the estimate of a certain group is, for example, 0.02 for categorical variables, this indicates a higher probability of 2 percentage points

52 Rose and Harrison, “The European socio-economic classification”.

53 Michael J. Hanmer and Kerem Ozan Kalkan, “Behind the curve: Clarifying the best approach to calculating predicted probabilities and marginal effects from limited dependent variable models,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 57, 1 (2013): 263–277.

54 Gary W. Oehlert, “A note on the delta method,” *The American Statistician*, 46, 1 (1992): 27–29.

55 The reason for using this modeling strategy instead of random-effect logit or probit models lies in the fact that residual variance can change when additional observed effects are controlled for and not treated as fixed.

56 E.g. Carina Mood, “Logistic regression: Why we cannot do what we think we can do, and what we can do about it,” *European Sociological Review*, 26, 1 (February 2010): 67–82.

to vote for a certain party than those who belong to the reference category. For continuous variables, this would mean that a one-unit increase in the variable (such as 1 additional year of work experience) predicts a two-point higher probability of voting for this party. In addition to the usual regression coefficients, our two-level models allowed us to estimate intraclass correlation, which is the proportion of unexplained municipal/parish-level variance relative to the total unexplained variance in the model.⁵⁷ This statistic can be considered an estimate of the degree of similarity between diaconal workers within the same parish or social workers employed in the same community. For instance, an intraclass correlation of 0.2 indicates that 20% of the total unexplained variation in voting for the party in question can be attributed to the municipality or parish in which the respondent is employed. This allows us to respond to the third research question concerning the contribution of individual work organizations. The standard errors of intraclass correlations are again derived using the delta method.

Results

Figure 1 shows the estimated vote share of parties in the 2011 parliamentary elections among diaconal and social workers, other individuals sharing the same class position (ESeC2) and other members of the population (others), after adjusting for sex, age, and family type. Our data (FNES) also included questions in which respondents were asked to place parties on the left–right continuum with a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). We presented the parties according to the average evaluations, with the most left-wing party – the Left Alliance with an average rating of 1.8 – in the upper left-hand corner to the most right-wing party – the National Coalition with an average rating of 8.1 – in the bottom right-hand corner. We placed the other six parties on the axis in the following order: (2) SDP (average rating 4.3); (3) Green League (average rating 4.9); (4) True Finns (average rating 5.5); (5) Christian Democrats (average rating 6.0), and (6) Swedish People's Party (average rating 6.9).

Most social workers voted either for the SDP (25%), the Green League (23%), or the Left Alliance (18%). This is a clearly higher proportion than the corresponding share for the lower-grade professional class (ESeC2) as a whole, in which 14% voted for the SDP, 7% for the Green League, and 8% for the Left Alliance. This lends partial support to Hypothesis 1, suggesting that diaconal and social and workers vote for left-wing parties more often than other members of the same social class. However,

57 Sophia Rabe-Hesketh and Anders Skrondal, *Multilevel and longitudinal modeling using Stata. Volume I: continuous responses* [3rd ed.] (College Station: Stata Press, 2012), 80–85.

our findings concerning diaconal workers were not in line with our expectations: Their support for the SDP (15%) and the Green League (8%) closely resembled the overall voting pattern of ESeC2, while the Left Alliance was less popular among this group (3%). However, we must point out that support for the largest right-wing party, the National Coalition, was significantly lower among both diaconal workers (13%) and social workers (9%) than among the ESeC2 class in general (27%).

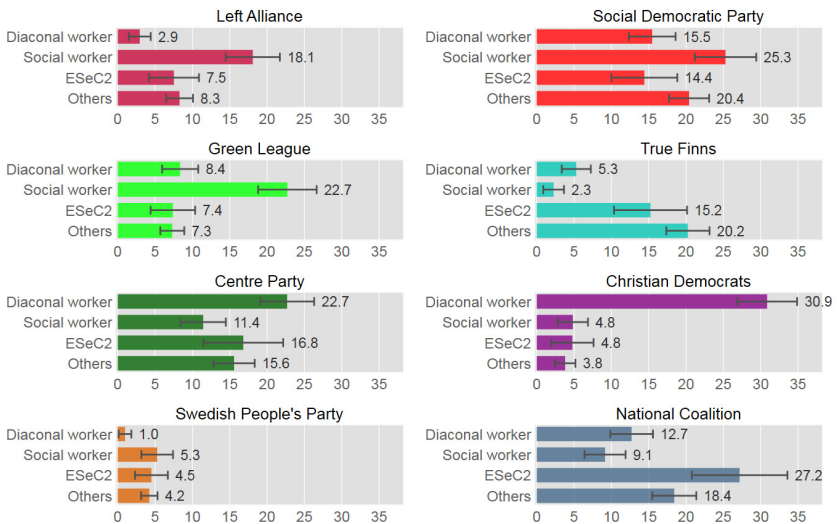


Figure 1 Vote shares in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections by party (% and 95% confidence intervals). Postestimation from multinomial logit-models, adjusted for sex, age, and family type.

The most popular parties among diaconal workers were the Christian Democrats (31%) and the Centre Party (23%), the latter of which also has strong Christian roots. In line with Hypothesis 2, the vote share of the Christian Democrats was much higher than among social workers (5%) or (ESeC2) in general (5%). In addition, the populist party, the True Finns, was remarkably unpopular among diaconal workers (5%) and social workers (2%) compared to other members of the same social class (15%) and the overall population (20%).

The results from the random-effect linear probability models (see Table 2) also supported Hypothesis 2: Diaconal workers vote statistically significantly more often for the Christian Democrats and less often for the Green League and Left Alliance than social workers when all independent variables were controlled for ($p = .000$). These findings lend partial support to Hypothesis 3 as the length of work experience

and, to a lesser extent, principal work duties seem to account for party choice among diaconal and social workers when controlling for sex, age, family type, and the party's vote share in the municipality in which the respondent was employed.

Work experience was negatively connected to voting for the Green League among diaconal and social workers (-4 percentage points for a 10-year increase, $p = .005$). Furthermore, the number of years of work experience was negatively related to the probability of voting for the Christian Democrats (-3 points for a 10-year increase, $p = .018$) and positively related to the probability of voting for the Left Alliance (+2 points for a 10-year increase, $p = .046$).

According to the results, the diaconal and social workers who worked in elderly care services were less likely to vote for the SDP (-13 points, $p = .000$). Moreover, those who worked in elderly care services were 10 percentage points ($p = .000$) more likely to vote for the Christian Democrats than others. Finally, diaconal and social workers in substance abuse services were approximately 5 percentage points more likely to vote for the Left Alliance than diaconal and social workers in other services ($p = .017$).

Based on full models with interactions (additional analysis, not reported in tables), the number of years of work experience was negatively connected to voting for the Left Alliance among diaconal workers (-0.005, $p = .001$), whereas the corresponding connection among social workers was the vice versa. Work experience was positively associated with voting for the National Coalition among diaconal workers (0.004, $p = .024$), but not among social workers. Diaconal workers who worked in economic assistance had a lower tendency to vote for the Social Democratic Party (-0.109, $p = .037$), which was not the case among social workers who worked in social assistance. In addition, diaconal workers occupied in elderly services were more inclined to vote for the Christian Democrats (0.136, $p = .040$), though this connection was not found among social workers.

Next, we examine our third research question by focusing on the intraclass correlations of our models (see the lower part of Table 2; for empty models, see Table A2 in the Appendix). These intraclass correlations lend some, albeit relatively weak, support to Hypothesis 4, namely, that diaconal and social workers' party choice is more similar when they are employed by the same municipality or parish. In Table 2, the intraclass correlation was fairly high in terms of voting for the Centre Party or the Christian Democrats. Even after controlling for local-level support and occupation, 20% ($p = .001$) of the total variance in voting for the Centre Party and 11% ($p = .009$) of the total variance in voting for the Christian Democrats could be attributed to the work municipality or parish. The intraclass correlation was negligible and statistically insignificant in terms of the other parties.

Table 2 Party choice among diaconal and social workers. Two-level random intercept linear probability models (standard errors).

	Left Alliance	Social Democratic Party	Green League	Centre Party	Christian Democrats	National Coalition
Diaconal worker (ref. Social Worker)	-0.114*** (0.020)	-0.008 (0.029)	-0.094*** (0.025)	0.003 (0.035)	0.154*** (0.032)	0.024 (0.023)
Work experience in years	0.002* (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.004** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.003* (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Magnitude of client work	-0.005 (0.010)	0.004 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.013)	-0.006 (0.013)	0.005 (0.013)	-0.010 (0.011)
Working in family services	-0.006 (0.017)	0.005 (0.023)	0.002 (0.020)	0.002 (0.021)	0.005 (0.022)	0.022 (0.019)
Working in economic/social assistance	-0.006 (0.018)	-0.024 (0.025)	-0.006 (0.022)	0.009 (0.023)	0.013 (0.023)	0.024 (0.020)
Working in substance abuse services	0.047* (0.020)	-0.035 (0.027)	-0.001 (0.024)	-0.014 (0.025)	-0.033 (0.025)	-0.015 (0.022)
Working in elderly services	-0.023 (0.020)	-0.130*** (0.028)	-0.035 (0.025)	0.038 (0.026)	0.098*** (0.026)	-0.014 (0.023)
Parish/municipality variance	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	0.024 (0.008)	0.013 (0.005)	0.001 (0.002)
Residual variance	0.067 (0.003)	0.129 (0.006)	0.098 (0.004)	0.098 (0.005)	0.103 (0.005)	0.082 (0.004)
Intraclass correlation	0.008 (0.009)	0.012 (0.013)	0.014 (0.012)	0.197 (0.060)	0.114 (0.043)	0.015 (0.019)
chi2	79.64	55.47	90.65	38.97	108.8	13.95
Bic	278.2	1009.4	704.6	843.9	839.8	510.6
N	1125	1125	1125	1125	1125	1125

Note: sex, age, family type, and party's vote share in the work municipality or work parish were controlled in every model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

In this study, we investigated the link between profession and party choice in the case of two occupational groups with specific characteristics. While diaconal workers were most inclined to vote for the Christian Democrats and the Centre Party in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections, most social workers supported the Green League, the SDP, and the Left Alliance. The partisan profile of diaconal workers can thus be described as center-conservative, whereas social workers clearly belong to the “red-green bloc” of leftist and environmentalist parties. This variation between diaconal and social workers is intriguing, as previous studies indicate that their attitudes toward social policy are similar on issues such as social security, the causes of poverty, and whether multiple disadvantaged groups deserve welfare.⁵⁸

Moreover, additional analyses of our data revealed that diaconal workers hold egalitarian values that are even slightly stronger than those of social workers: 85% of social workers and 91% of diaconal workers thought that income differences should be smaller. Whereas social workers clearly demonstrate their attitudes toward the poor in their leftist voting behavior, diaconal workers deviate from such a straightforward pattern.

It is likely that diaconal workers choose to vote for Christian Democrats based on their religion and Christian values.⁵⁹ In general, the electorate of the Christian Democrats is the most religious of all parties, as seen, for example, in their party manifesto.⁶⁰ This could explain the observation that the political orientation and attitudes toward disadvantaged groups or social security of diaconal workers are at least superficially contradictory. Overall, the case of diaconal workers underlines the importance of social identities in politics. When diaconal workers vote, their Christian identity appears to be more salient than their professional identity, driving them to associate themselves more closely with a party with a religious affiliation.⁶¹

This is most likely strengthened by the context, namely, working in parishes, an environment where they interact with religious people. However, it must be noted here that in Finland the Christian Democrats are not conservative with regard to helping the poor and other vulnerable groups in society. Although the party

58 Kallio and Kouvo, “Deservingness perceptions”; Kallio and Saarinen, “Street-level bureaucrats”; and Blomberg et al., “Frontline workers’ views”.

59 Pyykkö, “Hengellisen ja maallisen rajalla”.

60 Westinen, “Cleavages”; and Westinen, “Yhteiskunnallisten ristiriitautottuvuuksien ja puoluevalinnan suhde eduskuntavaaleissa 1991–2007: tilastollinen analyysi” [Social cleavages and party choice in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1991–2007]. (Master’s thesis, School of Management, Tampere University, 2011).

61 Morris P. Fiorina, “Identities for realists,” *Critical Review*, 30, 1–2 (May 2018): 49–56.

represents traditional moral standards and values law and order, it has not been characterized by promoting a neoliberal market economy and tax cuts.⁶²

Social workers' party choices, in turn, more closely reflect their work-related encounters with disadvantaged groups, which provide them first-hand knowledge of the faults and problems embedded in the Finnish social security system. Furthermore, the professional education of social workers, which includes topics related to social policy and social problems such as poverty, may influence their values, attitudes, and political behavior. Self-selection may also be a noteworthy factor, as those who apply to study toward becoming a social worker are likely to already be interested in the well-being of vulnerable groups to begin with.⁶³ A similar selection of mechanisms should also apply to diaconal workers, but for them, it translates more into the Christian principle of joint responsibility and social consciousness than a leftist political agenda. Again, this finding points toward existing differences in the work environment, as the professional identity of social workers is that of a public-sector employee. It is thus logical that they would support left-wing parties, which are more likely to promote an extensive public sector and a universal welfare state.⁶⁴

These same factors also help us to understand how diaconal and social workers deviate from other members of the same social class. Diaconal workers voted more often for the Christian Democrats and the Centre Party than other voters from a similar class, and less often for the leading right-wing party, the National Coalition. As mentioned, the popularity of the Christian Democrats among diaconal workers is likely to be related to their Christian values and Christian view of life.⁶⁵ Social workers, in turn, were more inclined to support the Green League, the SDP, and the Left Alliance, and less inclined to vote for the National Coalition compared with the average for their social class. These partisan preferences presumably reflect profession-related factors such as client groups and educational requirements. Social workers are exposed to different vulnerable groups in society and have a Master's degree in social work, a training that includes courses on social policy emphasizing structural approaches to various social problems.⁶⁶

Among social workers in particular, the length of work experience was connected to party choice. Even after adjusting for age, the length of work experience correlated positively with the tendency to vote for the Left Alliance and negatively with the probability of voting for the Christian Democrats and the Green League. It is possible that younger social workers are socialized into slightly different values and

62 Westinen, "Cleavages".

63 Weiss et al., "Social work education".

64 See, e.g., Lauri Karvonen, *Parties, governments and voters in Finland: Politics under fundamental societal transformation* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014).

65 Pyykkö, "Hengellisen ja maallisen rajalla".

66 Kallio and Kouvo, "Deservingness perceptions"; and Blomberg et al., "Frontline workers' views".

political ideologies than their older counterparts who entered the labor market during the “golden years” of the welfare state, when the ideological climate of social work was rather different from that of the contemporary era of permanent austerity beginning in the 1990s. Factors related to work duties, in turn, made no strong, consistent contribution to the voting behavior of either the diaconal or the social workers. Instead, diaconal and social workers are quite homogeneous in their different work tasks. We also observed some clustering based on the local work community, especially in terms of voting for the agrarian Centre Party, but this remained weak overall.

Returning to the three layers of work-related mechanisms introduced in Table 1, social class (layer 1) did not vastly improve our understanding of the voting patterns of diaconal and social workers. Furthermore, the explanatory power of work duties or local-level work organizations (layer 3) was modest. Clearly the occupational level (layer 2) stratified the party choices among diaconal and social workers. This observation agrees with the results of Weeden and Grusky concerning the important role of microclasses in political attitudes.⁶⁷

If and when microclasses become more relevant in shaping voters’ political views and partisan preferences, one can question the extent to which party systems can represent an electorate in such a fairly nuanced manner. The Finnish system of proportional representation, with its relatively highly fragmented party landscape, seems to handle the situation rather well, since there are parties occupying various combinations of political axes, such as economic liberty, economic and regional equality, multiculturalism, and traditional values.⁶⁸ With more sophisticated campaigning and microtargeting tools, especially in social media, parties are increasingly becoming capable of customizing their messages according to the preferences of specific groups. In the long run, this might lead to a growing polarization, not only between voters of different parties, but also within parties. The study of the implications of microclass politics is a logical next step after an analysis such as ours, albeit in a different context.

As is always the case with a single-country study, the external validity of the results is limited, especially in contexts that substantially differ from multiparty Nordic welfare states. Our main contribution involves the discussion of the various mechanisms behind the political party choice of both diaconal and social workers. In this respect, the essential question involves the extent to which party choice and political preferences are connected to professional practices, such as the use of discretionary power and the willingness to perform structural social and diaconal

67 Kim A. Weeden and David B. Grusky, “The case for a new class map,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 111, 1 (July 2005): 141–212; and Weeden and Grusky, “The three worlds”.

68 See, e.g., Tapio Raunio and Teija Tiilikainen, *Finland in the European Union* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 44.

work, which are universal issues pertaining to these professions irrespective of any national context.

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