Intergenerational Social Mobility and Partisan Choice*

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"Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail."[1] Peter G. J. Pulzer is correct in this assertion. Yet more than one British voter in four does not vote for the party most popular among others in his social class. Many students of British politics have attempted to explain the behavior of the "working class Tory,"[2] and some have discussed the middle-class Labourite.[3]

In this paper I will demonstrate that many voters who do not support the party of their social class are supporting the party of their fathers' social class. My data base will be 2,009 Britons randomly sampled in 1963 by David E. Butler and Donald E. Stokes.[4] Their survey provides the best available data about the political effects of intergenerational social mobility in Britain. After analyzing the effects of mobility, Butler and Stokes concluded, "social mobility can make only a small contribution to the fact that more than a quarter of British electors

[1] Peter G. J. Pulzer, *Political Representation and Elections: Parties and Voting in Great Britain* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 98.

[2] For example, see Eric A. Nordlinger, *The Working Class Tories: Authority, Deference and Democratic Stability* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) and Robert T. McKenzie and Allan Silver, *Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[3] For example, see Mark Abrams, "Party Politics After the End of Ideology," in Erik Allardt and Yrjö Littunen, eds. *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems: Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology* (Helsinki: Westermarck Society, 1964), pp. 53–63. My analysis demonstrates that Abrams is wrong in his assertion that "Middle class deviants [i.e., those who vote Labour] . . . are likely to be at least second generation middle class" (pp. 57–58).

[4] The sampling procedures are described by David E. Butler and Donald E. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), pp. 449–462. Although the first wave included 2,009 respondents, the total N in Table 1 is 1832. I have excluded from the analysis those for whom the social class of the "person to be graded" was not available, or for whom no data about the "social class of father when respondent was a child" were available. I have also excluded respondents for whom direction of party identification was coded as "not applicable."

fail to vote in accord with their class."[5] I disagree.

Butler and Stokes defined social mobility too narrowly and, as a consequence, overlooked the sizable impact that intergenerational social mobility makes upon the social composition of each party's electoral support. Most students of social mobility have classified as mobile those persons whose occupational position differed substantially from that of their fathers. But Butler and Stokes employed a "combined test" of mobility: To be classified as socially mobile in their study a respondent not only had to occupy a social class position different from his father's, but also had to *consider himself* to be socially mobile. Butler and Stokes write: "In view of the dependence of these indicators on human memory, we have sought to identify purer groups of the socially mobile by separating out those whose upward or downward movement is confirmed both by their perceptions of their own and their father's class and by a comparison of their own and father's occupational grade."[6]

Such a combined test does isolate purer groups. My reanalysis of the Butler and Stokes data shows that people who are mobile, and who pass the "combined test'" of mobility, are more likely to support the party of their class than are those who fail to recognize that they are mobile. But the combined test sharply reduces the number of persons who can be classified as mobile. Whereas Butler and Stokes found 26 per cent of their sample to be socially mobile on objective grounds, only nine per cent of their sample survived the combined test of mobility.[7]

My analysis of the Butler and Stokes data differed in several important respects from theirs. In the first place, my analysis was restricted to the first wave of their three-wave panel. Second, I classified all nonmanually employed respondents[8] as middle class, whereas

[5] Butler and Stokes, p. 104.

[6] Butler and Stokes, pp. 97–98.

[7] See Butler and Stokes, p. 97. If Butler and Stokes had classified lower nonmanual employees as middle class, they would have classified 30 per cent of their sample as objectively mobile.

[8] To be more precise I assigned persons to a class on the basis of the "social class of the person to be graded." In most cases that person was either the respondent or the respondent's husband. Butler and

Butler and Stokes classified lower grade non-manual workers as working class.[9] Most important, using objective measures of social mobility, I classified 28 per cent of the respondents as intergenerationally mobile. Had I used a combined test, only five per cent of the sample would have been classified as mobile.

The proportion classified as mobile matters little when one attempts to explain the effects of social mobility upon individual behavior. My basic findings about the partisan preferences of objectively mobile and nonmobile respondents are presented in Tables 1 and 2; these data are very similar to the results reported by Butler and Stokes. For example, I found, as Butler and Stokes did, that middle-class persons with working-class Labourite backgrounds were much more likely to support Labour than were other members of the middle class. We both found that upwardly mobile persons were disproportionately recruited from the children of working-class Conservatives.[10] We both found

that upwardly mobile respondents were more likely to support the Conservative party than downwardly mobile respondents were to support Labour, although in my analysis this relationship did not hold when I controlled for the partisan preferences of the respondents' fathers.[11]

The data in Tables 1 and 2 can be summarized as follows: Upwardly mobile persons were more likely to vote Conservative than were persons of working-class origins who were not upwardly mobile; they were less likely to vote Conservative than were middle-class respondents who had middle-class origins. Downwardly mobile respondents were more likely to vote Labour than were persons of middle-class origins who remained in the middle class; they were less likely to vote Labour than were stable members of the working class.[12] These differ-

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Stokes also assigned persons to a class on the basis of the occupation of the head of household.

[9] The rationale for Butler and Stokes' decision is discussed in Butler and Stokes, pp. 68–73. I have employed the more generally used manual, nonmanual distinction. When studying the relationship of social mobility to partisan choice, mobility appears to be a threshhold phenomenon. (See Arthur S. Goldberg, "Social Determinism and Rationality as Bases of Party Identification," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (March 1969), 22–25.) My analysis of Butler and Stokes' data shows that mobility *within* either the manual or nonmanual occupational categories contributes little to partisan change. Persons mobile *across* the manual, nonmanual threshhold differ markedly in their partisan preferences from members of their class of origin.

[10] This may be seen if one recalculates the data in Table 2. Among the 274 respondents with working-class Conservative fathers, 36 per cent were upwardly mobile; among the 520 respondents with working-class

Labour fathers, only 21 per cent were upwardly mobile.

[11] Butler and Stokes introduced controls for the partisan preferences of the respondents' parents, whereas I controlled for the partisanship of the respondents' fathers.

Butler and Stokes found that upwardly mobile respondents with Labour parents were more likely to support the Conservatives than were downwardly mobile respondents with Conservative parents to support Labour. As the data in Table 2 show, I found the reverse to be true. This is only a minor discrepancy, however. In the first place, both my finding and the Butler and Stokes finding are based upon small N's. Is my analysis, there were only 50 downwardly mobile respondents with Conservative fathers. Butler and Stokes did not report the N's upon which their percentages were based, but the N of downwardly mobile respondents must be small since they classified only two per cent of their entire sample as downwardly mobile. In the second place, by restricting my analysis to the 1963 panel I have slightly overrepresented Labour's normal strength, since 1963 was a period of peak Labour popularity in the public opinion polls.

[12] Kenneth H. Thompson found a similar pattern in his analysis of British survey data collected in 1962

Table 1. Intergenerational Social Mobility and Party Preference

Social Mobility*	Nonmobile Working Class (%)	Upwardly Mobile (%)	Downwardly Mobile (%)	Nonmobile Middle Class (%)
Partisan Preference:				
Conservative	21	52	38	68
Liberal	8	16	13	16
Labour	65	27	44	10
Other response†	6	5	5	5
Total per cent	100	100	100	99
(Number)	(1008)	(380)	(136)	(308)

* In all the tables presented in this paper, the four categories of mobility have the following meanings: nonmobile working class = manual origins, manual occupation (based upon occupation of head of household) upwardly mobile = manual origins, nonmanual occupation; downwardly mobile = nonmanual origins, manua occupation; nonmobile middle class = nonmanual origins, nonmanual occupation.

† Includes other, none, and don't know.

Table 2. Intergenerational Social Mobility and Party Preference, by Father's Party Preference*

| Father's Party Preference: | Conservative | | | |
Social Mobility:	Nonmobile Working Class (%)	Upwardly Mobile (%)	Downwardly Mobile (%)	Nonmobile Middle Class (%)
Respondent's Partisan Preference:				
Conservative	50	85	50	83
Liberal	8	9	14	7
Labour	36	5	32	7
Other response	6	1	4	3
Total per cent	100	100	100	100
(Number)	(175)	(99)	(50)	(161)
Father's Party Preference:		**Labour**		
Respondent's Partisan Preference:				
Conservative	9	29	22	36
Liberal	4	15	6	32
Labour	83	52	72	28
Other response	4	5	0	4
Total per cent	100	101	100	100
(Number)	(412)	(108)	(32)	(25)
Father's Party Preference:		**Liberal**		
Respondent's Partisan Preference:				
Conservative	29	53	22	65
Liberal	20	28	44	31
Labour	49	19	28	2
Other response	3	0	6	2
Total per cent	101	100	100	100
(Number)	(111)	(64)	(18)	(51)
Father's Party Preference:		**Other†**		
Respondent's Partisan Preference:				
Conservative	19	44	42	48
Liberal	9	17	3	20
Labour	63	28	44	19
Other response	9	12	11	13
Total per cent	100	101	100	100
(Number)	(303)	(103)	(36)	(69)

* The total N in Table 2 is 1817. Fifteen respondents included in Table 1 were not included in Table 2 because their fathers' party preference was coded as "not applicable."

† Includes: other party, no preference, moved around, respondent does not know.

ences persisted even when I controlled for the partisan preferences of the respondents' fathers,[13] and they are consistent with findings reported by Butler and Stokes.[14] Both my analy-

See "A Cross-National Analysis of Inter-generational Social Mobility and Political Orientations," *Comparative Political Studies*, 4 (April, 1971), 8. However, Thompson was not able to add controls for the respondents' parents' party. Paul R. Abramson and John W. Books found a similar pattern in their analysis of a survey of British youth conducted in 1963. See "Social Mobility and Political Attitudes: A Study of Intergenerational Mobility among Young British Men," *Comparative Politics*, 3 (April, 1971), 420–426. These patterns held even after they controlled for the respondents' fathers' party.

[13] There is only one exception to this pattern. Upwardly mobile respondents with Conservative fathers are more likely to support the Conservatives than are nonmobile middle-class respondents with Conservative fathers.

[14] Butler and Stokes do not present data on the partisan preferences of nonmobile respondents. Nonetheless, a careful comparison of their data on the partisan preferences of mobile respondents with their data on the partisan preferences of all working and middle-class respondents reveals a pattern substantially similar to the one I report.

sis and theirs suggest that a substantial proportion of socially mobile persons are resocialized to support the predominant party of their class of entry; both analyses also show that many socially mobile persons continue to favor the party of their class of origin, especially if it is the party preference of their fathers.

The proportion of persons considered to be mobile is very important if one is attempting to explain why "more than a quarter of British electors fail to vote in accord with their class." When Butler and Stokes classified less than one person in ten as mobile, mobility could not account for much of the behavior of more than one-fourth of the electorate. By classifying more than one person in four as mobile, I reached different conclusions: more than one-third of the respondents who did not support the party of their social class were socially mobile.[15]

Even more striking results appear when one looks at the effects of social mobility upon the social composition of the Conservative and Labour electorate (see Table 3). Downwardly mobile respondents make up eight per cent of the Conservative electorate, and constitute 20 per cent of the working-class Tories. Upwardly mobile respondents make up 12 per cent of the Labour party electorate, and 75 per cent of the

[15] This may be seen if one recalculates the data in Table 1. Thirty-nine per cent of the respondents did not support the party of their class; of these respondents, 36 per cent were socially mobile.

Table 3. Social Composition of Conservative and Labour Party Electorate

Party Preference:	Conservative (%)	Labour (%)
Social Composition:		
Nonmobile working class	32	77
Downwardly mobile	8	7
Nonmobile middle class	31	4
Upwardly mobile	29	12
Total per cent	100	100
(Number)	(673)	(850)

middle-class Labourites. Upwardly mobile respondents who are not resocialized away from the Labour party[16] have a substantial effect upon its social composition. If large numbers of persons were not upwardly mobile the Labour party would consist almost totally of working-class supporters.

[16] There is a possible alternative explanation for upwardly mobile respondents being more likely to support the Labour party than nonmobile middle-class respondents are. Upwardly mobile persons tend to occupy lower occupational positions within the middle class than nonmobile middle-class persons hold. Differences between mobile and nonmobile middle-class respondents might be the result of residual variation *within* the middle class. But these differences are only in small part the result of residual variation. Even within occupational grades, upwardly mobile respondents were less likely to support the Conservatives than were nonmobile middle-class respondents.