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AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS DRIVING
INCUMBENT VOTE CHOICE

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between social class, economic perceptions, and their influence on voting behavior, particularly regarding support for incumbents. Leveraging political science research, it investigates how distinct economic experiences and challenges across social classes shape perceptions of the economy and incumbent policies, influencing electoral choices. The paper seeks to answer three critical questions: the impact of economic perceptions on voting for the incumbent, the interaction between social class and economic perceptions on voting behavior, and how social class moderates this relationship. Utilizing logistic regression models, the research highlights how social class and economic perceptions interact to influence voting decisions, contributing to the discourse on class voting's impact. The findings offer new insights into the dynamics of voting behavior, emphasizing the enduring importance of social class in political decision-making, and enriching our understanding of electoral dynamics in incumbent elections.

Keywords: social class, economic perceptions, voting behavior, incumbent support, class voting.

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Introduction

Individuals from different social classes often have different economic experiences and face different economic challenges. It is assumed that those in lower social classes may have lower incomes and be more likely to experience unemployment or economic insecurity, while those in higher social classes may have more financial stability and access to resources (Manstead, 2018). These different economic experiences can shape individuals' perceptions of the economy and the incumbent's economic policies and therefore the voting decision (Fiorina, 1978). For instance, research has shown that individuals in higher social classes tend to have more positive economic perceptions and are more likely to support the incumbent, while those in lower social classes may be more skeptical and less likely to support the incumbent (Mutz, 2018).

The link between social class, economic perception and voting for the incumbent has been a topic of interest in political science research for decades. Previous research suggests that social class is a strong predictor of voting behavior (Prysby, 2020; Särlvik, 1969; Zingher, 2020). For instance, research emphasizes that working-class voters are more likely to support the left-wing parties, while middle and upper-class voters tend to support the right-wing parties (Särlvik, 1969; Zingher, 2020). Similar, economic perception is another important factor in voting behavior (Fiorina, 1978). Studies have shown that individuals who perceive their economic situation to be positive are more likely to vote for the incumbent. On the other hand, those who perceive their economic situation to be negative are more likely to vote for the opposition party (Comșa, & Gheorghiță, 2012; Comșa, & Tufiș, 2016; Dassonneville, & Hooghe, 2017; Fiorina, 1978; Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 2021).

Research has also explored the interaction between social class, economic perception and voting behavior for the incumbent. Studies have shown that individuals from higher social classes are more likely to perceive their economic situation positively and are therefore more likely to vote for the incumbent (Anderson, 2007; Bornschier *et al.*, 2021; Zingher, 2020). In contrast, individuals from lower social classes are more likely to perceive their economic situation negatively and are therefore more likely to vote for the opposition party.

In this context, this paper aims at investigating the influence of social class and economic perceptions on voting for the incumbent. In general terms, we conclude that social class and economic perceptions can interact in complex ways to shape an individual's decision to vote for the incumbent. While social class can influence economic perceptions, economic perceptions themselves can also influence vote choice, particularly in the context of incumbent elections where the economy and the incumbent's economic record are often key issues.

However, less research discusses the relationship between social-class and voting behavior in a Romanian context. Thus, this paper seeks to fill this gap in

the literature and attempts to answer two main research questions: (Q1) To what extent do economic perceptions influence an individual's decision to vote for the incumbent? We aim at investigating the magnitude of economic perceptions on voting behavior. The second question (Q2) intends to explain if the effect of social class on voting behavior varies depending on an individual's economic perceptions? We consider it relevant to investigate if class voting is still a determinant of voting behavior. Thus, his paper provides valuable insights into the ongoing debate about the impact of class voting on citizens' decision to vote for the incumbent and will help us to understand the ways in which social class continues to shape the world in which we live.

The remaining part of this paper is structured as follows: In the next section, we briefly review the literature on voting behavior with a focus on class and economic voting. Section 3 presents the dependent and independent variables of the analysis as well as the empirical strategy employed for testing the hypothesis. Section 4 presents the results of the logistic regression models, while Section 5 discusses and concludes with the findings of empirical analysis aimed at explaining the interaction social class and economic perceptions on the decision to vote for the incumbent.

The theoretical foundations of class and economic voting and how it affects the incumbent office

To effectively analyze the relationship between social class and voting behavior, it is crucial to first understand the concept of social class and how we operate with it.

Social class, a significant subject within social sciences like sociology, economics, and psychology, examines the hierarchical organization of society through individuals' access to resources, power, and status (Stoica, 2022). It influences life experiences, opportunities, and has given rise to various theories exploring the relationship between social structures and individual outcomes. Early discussions by Karl Marx highlighted how capitalist structures shape social classes, emphasizing the exploitation of the working class (Marx, & Engels, 2015). Max Weber added dimensions of property, status, and power, showcasing the multifaceted nature of social class in determining access to resources and societal influence (Weber, 1978, 2019).

The 20th century saw the advent of conflict theory, focusing on class struggles over resources, and cultural theories, like Pierre Bourdieu's, which linked social class to cultural practices and values (Bourdieu, 2002; Dahrendorf, 2022). Recent research has extended to the impact of social class on health, education, and political involvement, uncovering significant disparities. Theories like the "status attainment" model explore how social class backgrounds shape life chances and

the intergenerational transmission of class status. Studies also investigate the cultural and psychological aspects of social class, including its influence on life perspectives and cultural values.

Defining and measuring social class poses challenges, leading researchers to consider various indicators, including income, education, occupation, and cultural capital, to capture its complexity. Despite these hurdles, the study of social classes remains crucial, offering insights into societal hierarchies and their effects on individual and collective experiences (Argyle, 1994; Inglehart, 1977; Manstead, 2018). Moreover, the relationship between social class and economic perceptions has been a focal point since the dawn of economic analysis, revealing how social class influences views on financial well-being and economic understanding. This body of research underscores the enduring link between economics and social class, highlighting the significant role of social class in shaping economic behaviors and perceptions.

In terms of voting, class voting, and economic voting are two competing, but interlinked theories seek to explain how social class and economic factors influence voting behavior. While both theories have their strengths and weaknesses, the debate between them has been an ongoing topic of discussion among political scientists for decades (Borre, 1997; Hicks *et al.*, 2016; Jansen *et al.*, 2011; Korpi, 1972; van der Waal *et al.*, 2007; Weakliem, & Heath, 1994).

First, it is important to make the distinction between the two of them. Class voting theory posits that an individual's social class is the primary determinant of their voting behavior (van der Waal *et al.*, 2007; Weakliem, & Heath, 1994). This theory holds that people in different social classes have distinct economic interests, and these interests shape their political preferences. Take for example people in higher social classes in comparison with people in lower social classes. The former may have a greater interest in lower taxes and less government regulation, while the latter may have a greater interest in social welfare programs and government intervention in the economy (Gallice, & Grillo, 2020; Ramaekers *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, one can assume, accordingly with class voting theory, that people tend to vote for political parties and candidates that align with their economic interests (Manza, & Brooks, 1999). In contrast, economic voting theory argues that economic conditions, rather than social class, are the primary driver of voting behavior. This theory posits that voters evaluate the incumbent's economic record and base their vote on their assessment of how well the incumbent has managed the economy (Anderson, 2007; Bechtel, & Hainmueller, 2011; Dalton, & Klingemann, 2007; Healy, & Malhotra, 2013).

However, both class voting and economic voting theories have been subject to empirical testing, with mixed results. Some studies have found support for class voting theory, showing that social class is a significant predictor of voting behavior. For instance, one study conducted in the United States found that people in higher social classes were more likely to vote for Republican candidates, while

those in lower social classes were more likely to vote for Democratic candidates. Similarly, a study conducted in Europe found that people in higher social classes were more likely to support conservative parties, while those in lower social classes were more likely to support left-wing parties (Andersen, & Curtis, 2012; Harrits *et al.*, 2010; Manstead, 2018b). Other studies have found support for economic voting theory, showing that economic conditions are a significant predictor of voting behavior (Healy *et al.*, 2017; Healy, & Malhotra, 2013b; Ramaekers *et al.*, 2022). For example, one study conducted in the United States found that presidential approval ratings were strongly correlated with economic indicators such as the unemployment rate and GDP growth. Similarly, a study conducted in Europe found that voters were more likely to support incumbents when economic conditions were good and were more likely to support challengers when economic conditions were bad (Berlemann, & Enkelmann, 2014; Singer, 2011).

Despite the ongoing debate between class voting and economic voting theories, some scholars have attempted to reconcile these two perspectives by highlighting the ways in which social class and economic factors interact to shape voting behavior. For example, one study found that economic voting was stronger among people in lower social classes, suggesting that economic conditions may be particularly salient for people who have fewer economic resources (Anderson, 2000; Talving, 2018; van Noord *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, another study found that while social class was a significant predictor of voting behavior, it was mediated by economic factors such as income and job status. Considering the argument presented above this paper hypotheses that:

H1. A higher socio-economic status score increases the probability of supporting the incumbent government to be re-elected.

In conclusion, the debate between class voting and economic voting theories is an ongoing topic of discussion among political scientists. While both theories have their strengths and weaknesses, empirical evidence suggests that both social class and economic factors play a role in shaping voting behavior. Therefore, it is important for researchers to continue to explore the complex ways in which social class and economic factors interact to shape political preferences and voting behavior.

Considering the argument presented, this paper is in line with the literature that sustains that class and economic voting are highly interconnected and can interact with one another in interesting and important ways. In particular, this paper interprets class voting as an important moderator of economic voting when it comes to deciding whether to vote for the incumbent. For instance, suppose the economy is doing poorly, and the incumbent's economic record is seen as negative. Economic voting theory would suggest that voters are more likely to vote against the incumbent in this case. However, class voting theory suggests that people in different social classes may have different responses to this situation. For people in higher social classes who prioritize economic issues such as taxes and

regulation, a poor economic record by the incumbent may lead them to vote against the incumbent. However, for people in lower social classes who prioritize social welfare programs and government intervention in the economy, a poor economic record by the incumbent may not be as salient as other issues such as healthcare or education. In this case, these voters may still vote for the incumbent, despite their negative economic record.

Conversely, when the economy is doing well, and the incumbent's economic record is seen as positive, economic voting theory suggests that voters are more likely to vote for the incumbent. For example, people in higher social classes who prioritize economic issues may be more likely to vote for the incumbent in this situation, while people in lower social classes who prioritize social welfare programs may still be more likely to vote for candidates who prioritize these programs, even if the economy is doing well.

Overall, the interaction between class voting and economic voting is an important area of research in political science. While economic voting theory is often seen as a dominant explanation for voting behavior, the moderating effects of social class on this theory should not be ignored. Understanding how social class interacts with economic factors to shape voting behavior is critical to understanding the political preferences of different groups in society and can help to explain why certain candidates and parties are more successful than others.

Methods

Description of the dataset

To test our hypothesis, we extract our variables from the 2012 wave of the Romanian Elections Study (RES) collected through the Comparative Study of Electors Systems (CSES). The sample consists of around 1,300 respondents and is representative of the Romanian population in terms of socio-demographic factors. The primary rationale for selecting this dataset is that it includes the key questions necessary for operationalizing our variables of interest. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only dataset that encompasses all the variables crucial to our study.

Main variables employed in the models

From the main database, we extract the variables emphasizing the focus of this paper. For the dependent variable, we selected the variable which asked the respondents for which party they voted for in the parliamentary election held on 9 December 2012. The dependent variable is a dichotomous variable where 1 means if the respondent voted for the incumbent, and 0 otherwise.

In terms of independent variables, our study primarily focuses on *social class* as a key variable, drawing on theoretical insights to measure it empirically. Social class, influenced by factors like income, education, occupation, and wealth, requires careful operationalization to accurately capture its dynamics. It can be conceptualized either as a categorical entity, distinguishing individuals into distinct classes (e.g., middle class), or as a continuum, allowing for fluidity in class status. Operationalization varies widely: some studies prioritize occupation as the primary indicator, others focus on income or education levels, and many adopt a composite socio-economic status (SES) score, integrating multiple factors (Stoica, 2022). This diversity in approaches underscores the complexity of measuring social class, a latent construct with no one-size-fits-all indicator.

Our research adopts the SES score, valuing its continuum-based perspective for examining economic conditions' impacts. We calculate SES by standardizing and weighting education, income, and occupation variables, interpreting higher scores as indicating higher social class status. Despite its strengths, we acknowledge that solely using occupation might not fully encapsulate social class's complexity. Thus, we also explore categorical operationalization, offering a broader view by considering various dimensions of social class. This dual approach allows us to examine the nuanced effects of social class on economic perceptions, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of its role. Therefore, in this study, social class is operationalized using a socio-economic status (SES) approach, treating it as a continuous variable as suggested (Ganzeboom *et al.*, 1992). To compute the SES, we first standardized the variables of education, income, and occupation. This standardization was achieved using the `scale ()` function in R, which normalizes these variables to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Subsequently, we calculated the final SES score by taking a weighted average of these standardized variables. The weights assigned to each variable were based on their relative importance in determining SES, with education and income each weighted at 0.40 and occupation at 0.20. The resulting score interprets higher values as a higher socio-economic status and lower values as a lower status.

Additionally, we include in our analysis several control variables measuring, economic perceptions, individual political predispositions such as political interest, corruption perception and political ideology. The variable that measures economic perceptions is based on four variables that asked the respondents to assess the situation of the past national economy or past household economy (retrospective sociotropic and retrospective egotropic) or to assess the situation of the future economy either focusing on household or on national economy (prospective sociotropic or egotropic)[5]. Briefly defining each concept, retrospective

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[5] For economic perception the respondents were asked 'Compared with 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY Romania's economy is doing better, worse or the same? Much better / worse or just better / worse? The answer options range from 1 to 5 where 1 means it improved significantly and 5 it got worsen significantly. For the

or prospective refer to individuals assessing the economy by looking at the past economic context, or by assessing the evolution of economic indicators in the future, while sociotropic or egotropic refer to individuals who assess the economic context by either looking at their own economic situation or the national economic indicators.

In terms of raw macroeconomic indicators (unemployment rate, inflation rate and income), the respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY in Romania, the unemployment/inflation/income have/increased, have decreased or have remained the same? It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 means have decreased considerably, and 5 means have increased considerably. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer*. To measure political interest, the respondents were asked 'How interested are you in politics in general?' The variable is measured on a four-item scale, where 0 means *not at all interested,* and 3 means *very interested in politics*. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer,* while in terms of political identification the respondents were asked 'In politics, we sometimes talk about left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?' It is measured on an eleven-item scale, where 0 means *left,* and 11 means *right.* There are also labels for *I never heard of left and right, Do not know* and *No answer*.

Corruption was measured by asking respondents 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY CORRUPTION in Romania is higher, lower or has remained the same? (IF LARGER/SMALL): Is it much smaller/large or just smaller/large? It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 is much higher, and 5 means much lower. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer*. The answers were reversed so that higher numbers indicate a higher level of perceived corruption. The entire structure of the questions can be found in Table A1 and Table A2 in the Appendix.

Empirical strategy

To assess the hypothesis formulated above, we apply an empirical analysis based on regression models[6]. Because we have multiple independent observations with h-explanatory variables and because the response variable is binary, we apply a logistic regression model, having the following equation:

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robustness check the answers are recoded in three main categories: 1 - 2 became 1, 3 became 2 and 4 -5 became 3, where 1 means "Better", 2 means "Maintained", and 3 means "Worse".

[6] The statistical analysis was conducted using the RStudio software. RStudio Team (2020). RStudio: Integrated Development for R. RStudio, PBC, Boston, MA URL http://www.rstudio.com/.

$$\log\left(p(x)\right) = \log\left(\frac{p(x)}{1-p(x)}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x_1 + \alpha_2 x_2 + \ldots + \bar{\alpha}_i x_i \ (1)$$

where α_0 is the constant of the equation, and α_1, α_2, … α_i are the coefficients

for the independent variables. The parameters of the logistic regression are estimated by using maximum likelihood. Specifically, p can be computed having in view the following specification:

$$p = \frac{e^{\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x_1 + \alpha_2 x_2 + \ldots + \bar{\alpha}_i x_i}}{1 + e^{\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x_1 + \alpha_2 x_2 + \ldots + \alpha_i x_i}}$$

Robustness

Several robustness estimations were conducted. First, instead of applying the main explanatory variables on voting for the incumbent, we applied them to the government approval rate and estimate a linear model where the dependent variable ranges from 0 to 10 (0 if the respondent strongly disapprove the previous governments' activity and 10 if the respondent strongly approve the previous governments' activity). We find the same effects economic perceptions and social class on government assessment. Second, one main concern is that the correlation between economic expectations and government assessment is affected by the socio – economic score. The sub-sample robustness check confirms that the results regardless of the socio – economic level.

Following, we present the findings of the explanatory model that measures the effects of social class and economic perceptions on voting for the incumbent.

Results and discussion

This section presents the estimates obtained through the logistic regression models. Table 1 presents the estimation results for the model testing for the effect of socio – economic status (SES) and economic expectations on voting for the government when individuals assess retrospectively, while Table 2 presents the estimates for the model testing for prospective assessment.

In relation to our main explanatory variable, the results of our analysis indicate that socio-economic status (SES) plays a significant role in determining voter preferences, particularly in relation to support for the incumbent. In all models, SES exhibits a positive association, suggesting that higher SES is associated with an increased likelihood of voting for the incumbent. As emphasized by the

literature (Stoica, 2022, Argyle, 1994; Inglehart, 1977; Manstead, 2018), SES typically encapsulates various dimensions of an individual's economic position, including income levels, educational attainment, and occupational status. Lower SES often correlates with higher economic vulnerability, which can influence political preferences and behaviors. Individuals from lower SES brackets may feel that the current government has failed to improve their economic situation or protect their economic interests, leading them to withdraw their support from the incumbent.

Furthermore, the influence of SES on voting behavior can also be interpreted through the lens of sociotropic (society-focused) versus egocentric (self-focused) voting. In sociotropic voting, individuals consider the overall economic health of the society. If people with lower SES perceive that society at large is not benefiting under the current administration, this might reinforce their inclination to vote against the incumbent. Conversely, in egocentric voting, where personal economic circumstances are paramount, those with lower SES who have not seen personal economic improvement might feel a direct and personal disenchantment with the incumbent.

Thus, the SES results from the models highlight a crucial aspect of electoral dynamics: economic status is not just a background characteristic but a fundamental predictor of political behavior. This influence is mediated by individuals' perceptions of their economic security and expectations of future economic policies, which are crucial determinants of their political allegiances and voting decisions. Understanding and addressing the economic concerns of lower SES groups could be key to garnering broader support for incumbents, suggesting a need for more equitable economic policies and better communication of their benefits to these populations.

Table 1. Retrospective estimates result of logistic regression on voting for the incumbent

	Voting for the incumbent (USL)			
	Model 1 (egotropic)		Model 2 (sociotropic)	
	B(SE)	Exp(B)	B(SE)	Exp(B)
Intercept	.742 (1.000)*		1.065 (1.097)*	
SES	.009(.003)***	.991	.008(.003)**	.992
Economic perception: retrospective	.415(.147)**	1.515	.244(.150)	1.276
Unemployment perception	.231(.118)*	1.260	.212(.119)**	1.236
Inflation perception	-.156(.117)	.856	-.117(.180)	.890
Income perception	.063(.089)*	1.065	.079(.090)	1.082
Political ideology (left-right)	.214(.127)***	1.239	-.198(.040)***	-821

Current corruption perception	-.161(.119)*	.851	-.156(.121)**	.855
Interest in economic news	.113(.127)	1.120	.115(.130)	1.122
Gender (1=male)	.439(.192)**	1.550	-.424(.191)**	1.528
Education	-.116(.110)	.891	-.069(.108)	.933
Age	-.005(.006)	-995	-.005(.006)**	-995
Nagelkerke R Square	.146		.132	
AIC	703.207		709.716	

Note: Standard errors are presented in parentheses; *, **, and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% confidence.

Additionally, Tables 1 and 2 show that both prospective and retrospective economic perceptions significantly influence support for the incumbent, highlighting the equal importance of future expectations and past economic evaluations in voting behavior. This indicates voters are proactive, basing their choices not just on past economic outcomes but also on anticipated future performance. If optimistic about the economy's future, voters tend to favor the current leadership or those deemed capable of economic management. Conversely, pessimism about the future may drive support towards the opposition. Additionally, future economic expectations might be shaped by various factors, including global economic trends, technological progress, and policy shifts, rather than solely past economic performance. Furthermore, while past economic evaluations can be skewed by limited or biased information, future expectations are inherently subjective and influenced by a broader range of considerations beyond just economic indicators.

Table 2. Prospective estimates result of logistic regression on voting for the incumbent

	Voting for the incumbent (USL)			
	Model 3 (egotropic)		Model 4 (sociotropic)	
	B(SE)	Exp(B)	B(SE)	Exp(B)
Intercept	.992 (1.111)*		.947(1.111)*	
SES	.009(.003)***	.991	.008(.003)***	.992
Economic perception: prospective	.250(.138)**	1.283	.227(.130)***	1.255
Unemployment perception	.201(.118)*	1.223	.190(.117)	1.209
Inflation perception	-.131(.179)	.877	-.118(.179)	.888
Income perception	.096(.090)	1.101	.093(.090)	1.097
Political ideology (left-right)	.192(.043)**	.825	-.190(.043)***	.827
Current corruption perception	-.170(.120)*	.844	-.150(.121)	.861

Interest in economic news	.103(.130)	1.108	.114(.130)	1.121
Gender (1=male)	.439(.192)**	1.552	-.408(.192)**	1.504
Education	-.086(.109)	.917	-.081(.109)	.922
Age	-.004(.006)	-996	-.005(.006)**	-995
Nagelkerke R Square	.133		.133	
AIC	709.149		709.362	

Note: Standard errors are presented in parentheses; *, **, and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% confidence.

The data from both tables show that voters with political orientation different from the incumbent are less likely to support them, suggesting a clash in policy preferences and beliefs regarding government operations, as highlighted by Fiorina (1981) and Converse (1964). This gap between a voter's beliefs and the incumbent's policies leads voters to favor candidates whose views align more closely with their own. For example, a liberal voter is unlikely to support a conservative incumbent, preferring instead a candidate who mirrors their values. This concept, known as ideological proximity, plays a crucial role in voting behavior, with voters inclined to back candidates reflecting their political ideologies. Moreover, voters often rely on ideological similarity as a shortcut for making informed choices in the absence of detailed policy knowledge.

The findings highlight the significant role of unemployment perceptions in voting, with voters more inclined to support the incumbent when they view the unemployment situation favorably. This reflects a broader trend where voters attribute positive economic conditions to the incumbent's leadership and policies. Additionally, the emphasis on economic stability suggests that voters prioritize economic issues, especially when they feel their personal financial situation is secure, making the incumbent's economic management a pivotal factor in their decision.

In summary, the analysis presented in both tables underscores the need to consider both past economic outcomes and future economic expectations in voter behavior research, as well as the effects of social class on voting behavior.

Conclusions

The paper contributes to the growing effort of empirical research investigating the effects of class and economic voting on citizen's decision to vote for the incumbent government. Specifically, we examined the influence of egotropic and sociotropic economic perceptions, as well as other socio-demographic and political factors, on voters' decisions to support the incumbent party. Employing a unique data set collected through the wave of the Romanian Elections Study (RES) collected through the Comparative Study of Electors Systems (CSES), the paper's

results extend the restrained research in a post - communist country, Romania by providing additional empirical evidence. The findings of this paper reinforce those of previous studies (Manstead, 2018; Hicks *et al.*, 2016; Jansen *et al.*, 2011; van der Waal *et al.*, 2007; Gallice, & Grillo, 2020; Ramaekers *et al.*, 2022; Anderson, 2007; Bechtel, & Hainmueller, 2011; Dalton, & Klingemann, 2007; Healy, & Malhotra, 2013) in identifying the determinants contributing to supporting the incumbent government, with a focus on social class and economic perceptions.

Before concluding, we highlight some limitations of the study which need to be acknowledged. First, this study is based on self-reported data collected within a specific cultural context, which might introduce different types of biases. For example, social desirability bias could cause participants to answer in ways they consider socially acceptable rather than providing responses that truly reflect their personal beliefs. Second, because the data is cross-sectional, collected at a single point in time, the study cannot effectively track changes in attitudes or beliefs over time, suggesting that longitudinal studies are needed to understand the evolution of social class impact on voting behavior. Third, considering that there is a high non-answer to the question asking respondents' vote option, the size of the sample reduced which can impact the statistical power of the models.

Despite these limitations, this paper offers valuable insights. On one hand, it contributes to the ongoing debate about whether social class, mediated by economic perceptions still have an impact on individuals' perceptions and beliefs, and in consequence if citizens with higher socio-economic status have more optimistic perceptions towards the economic contexts, and therefore will vote for the incumbent party. The theoretical framework on which we support the results is the social stratification theory, which suggests that social class influences individuals' attitudes and beliefs. Social class can affect individuals' access to resources, such as education and employment opportunities, which can impact their economic situation and shape their economic perceptions. For example, individuals from higher social classes may have greater access to financial education and more stable employment, leading to a more positive economic assessment of the incumbent performance.

On the other hand, the results extend the literature by showing that also factors such as perceptions towards factual economic indicators and political views are affecting the manner in which citizens assess the economic contexts. Additionally, this paper examined the relationship between political orientation and unemployment, income, and inflation perceptions among individuals. The findings reveal that right-wing individuals with a higher interest in politics tend to hold a more positive view of the national economic context, both in the past and the future. Additionally, the study found that positive economic news has a positive impact on individuals' economic perception regarding their future individual economic situation. we sustain these results based on the theory of cognitive bias, which suggests that people tend to seek and interpret information in a way that confirms their existing beliefs or expectations. This means that

individuals with a right-wing political ideology may hold a more optimistic view of the national economy because they support policies that promote individual economic freedom. Furthermore, individuals with a higher interest in politics may have greater knowledge of economic issues and be more attuned to economic news, leading to a more positive economic perception.

The results demonstrate the importance of including social class among factors that contributes to the voting behaviour. Future research should examine these relationships in different cultural contexts to determine the generalizability of the findings.

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Appendix

Table A 1. Descriptive statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variable					
Voting intention	586	-	-	0	1
Independent variable					
Socio – economic status (SES)	586	.000	40.234	-45.31	44.39
Control variables					
Economic expectations:					
Retrospective egotropic	586	-	-	1	3
Retrospective sociotropic	586	-	-	1	3
Prospective egotropic	586	-	-	1	3
Prospective sociotropic	586	-	-	1	3
Macroeconomic indicators perception					
Unemployment perception	586	-	-	1	5
Inflation perception	586	-	-	1	5
Income perception	586	-	-	1	5
Interest in economic news	586	-	-	0	3
Political orientation	586				
Corruption perception	586				
Gender: Male	586	-	-	0	1
Education	586	.041	0.198	0	25
Age	586	47.91	16.501	18	110

Table A 2. Description of the variables

Variable	Measurement	Code in the dataset
Voting for incumbent (USL)	The question asked the respondents for which party they voted for in the parliamentary election held on 9 December 2012. We recoded the dependent in a dichotomous variable, where 1 means if the respondent voted for the incumbent, and 0 otherwise.	
Socio – economic score (SES)	To compute the SEI, we first standardized the variables of education, income, and occupation. This standardization was achieved using the `scale()` function in R, which normalizes these variables to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Subsequently, we calculated the final SES score by taking a weighted average of these standardized variables. The weights assigned to each variable were based on their relative importance in determining SES, with education and income each weighted at 0.40 and occupation at 0.20. The resulting score interprets higher values as a higher socio-economic status and lower values as a lower status.	
Economic perceptions: retrospective and sociotropic	The respondents were asked 'Compared with 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY Romania's economy is doing better, worse or the same? Much better / worse or just better / worse? The answer options range from 1 to 5 where 1 means it improved significantly and 5 it got worsen significantly. For the robustness check the answers are recoded in three main categories: 1 - 2 became 1, 3 became 2 and 4 -5 became 3, where 1 means "Better", 2 means "Maintained", and 3 means "Worse".	W4D6A
Economic perceptions: prospective and sociotropic	The respondents were asked 'In the next four years, do you think that Romania's economy will do better, worse or the same?' The answer options range from 1 to 5 where 1 means it will improve significantly and 5 it will worsen significantly. For the robustness check the answers are recoded in three main categories: 1 - 2 became 1, 3 became 2 and 4 -5 became 3, where 1 means "Better", 2 means "It will stay the same", and 3 means "Worse".	W4D6D

Variable	Measurement	Code in the dataset
Economic perceptions: retrospective and egotropic	The respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, is your current economic situation better, worse or the same?'. The answer options range from 1 to 5 where 1 means it improved significantly and 5 it got worsen significantly. For the robustness check the answers are recoded in three main categories: 1 - 2 became 1, 3 became 2 and 4 -5 became 3, where 1 means "Better", 2 means "Maintained", and 3 means "Worse".	W4D6C
Economic perceptions: prospective and egotropic	The respondents were asked 'In the next 4 years, do you think your economic situation will be better, worse or the same?'. The answer options range from 1 to 5 where 1 means it will improve significantly and 5 it will worsen significantly. For the robustness check the answers are recoded in three main categories: 1 - 2 became 1, 3 became 2 and 4 -5 became 3, where 1 means "Better", 2 means "It will stay the same", and 3 means "Worse".	W4D6F
Unemployment perception	The respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY in Romania, the unemployment have / increased, / have decreased or / have / remained the same? It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 means have decreased considerably, and 5 means have increased considerably. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer.*	W4D5I1
Inflation perception	The respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY in Romania, the inflation rate have / increased, / have decreased or / have / remained the same? It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 means have decreased considerably, and 5 means have increased considerably. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer.*	W4D5I2
Income perception	The respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY in Romania, the income have / increased, / have decreased or / have / remained the same? It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 means have decreased considerably, and 5 means have increased considerably. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer.*	W4D5I3

Variable	Measurement	Code in the dataset
Political identification (Scale left-right)	The respondents were asked 'In politics, we sometimes talk about left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?' It is measured on an eleven-item scale, where 0 means *left,* and 11 means *right.* There are also labels for *I never heard of left and right, Do not know* and *No answer.*	W4Q13
Interest in economic news	The respondents were asked 'In general, people pay attention to different parts of news programs on television. When you watched the news, how much attention did you pay to news about the economic situation'. It is measured on a four-item scale, where 0 means *no attention at all*, and 3 means *attention very much*. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer.*	W4CM4A
Corruption perception	The respondents were asked 'Compared to 2008, do you think that CURRENTLY CORRUPTION in Romania is higher, lower or has remained the same? (IF LARGER / SMALL): Is it much smaller / large or just smaller / large?. It is measured on a five-item scale, where 1 is much higher, and 5 means much lower. There are also labels for *Do not know* and *No answer.* The answer where reversed so that higher numbers indicate a higher level of perceived corruption.	W4D7
Age	The respondents were asked to tell the year in which they were born. To compute the exact age of the respondents I extracted the current year (2023) from the year of birth.	W4AN
Gender	Dummy variable indicating the respondents' gender, where 1 means *male,* and 0 means *female*.	W4GEN
Education	The respondents were asked which is the highest education level they finished. The variable is coded on lower education, medium education and higher education.	W4EDUC