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Crystal L. Hoyt
University of Richmond, choyt@richmond.edu

Brenten H. DeShields

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How Social Class Background Influences Perceptions of Political Leaders

Crystal L. Hoyt

University of Richmond

Brent DeShields

University of South Carolina

Crystal L. Hoyt, Corresponding Author; Jepson School of Leadership Studies and Department of Psychology, University of Richmond; 221 Richmond Way, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, 23173; 804.287.6825; choyt@richmond.edu

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Abstract

In this research we contribute to a nascent literature examining how cues to social class can guide voters' political judgments. Drawing upon and merging a voting cues framework with the stereotype content model we test predictions that, relative to those from high-class backgrounds, candidates from lower- and working-class backgrounds will be perceived to be more ideologically liberal, warmer, and will be evaluated more positively. We test these predictions across four experimental studies ($N_{Study1}=200$; $N_{Study2}=537$; $N_{Study3}=352$; $N_{Study4}=654$) employing a candidate evaluation paradigm; participants were presented with basic candidate background information, including cues to candidate class and other demographics, and were asked to read an excerpt from a speech before providing their judgments. Findings reveal that candidates from lower- and working-class backgrounds were perceived to be more liberal and warmer than those from high-class backgrounds. Additionally, we found that lower-class candidates were generally evaluated more positively than high-class candidates and we found some evidence for evaluations across class to be moderated by participants' political ideology. These effects generally held across candidate gender and race. This work has important theoretical and practical implications offering insight into the social class gap between the electorate and the largely elite elected policy makers.

Keywords = social class, political leaders, warmth, competence, political ideology, candidate evaluation

How Social Class Background Influences Perceptions of Political Leaders

Candidates for political office are often eager to assure voters that they genuinely understand the problems facing ordinary Americans. Despite overwhelmingly coming from affluent backgrounds (Carnes, 2018), political candidates in the United States often emphasize, in one way or another, how they personally know what it means to struggle financially. Indeed, social class background has become weaponized in the political arena with wealthy candidates downplaying their elite backgrounds to defend themselves against accusations of being out of touch with everyday Americans (Busby, 2009). Given the emphasis placed on social class by both political candidates and voters, surprising little research has focused on understanding the ways in which cues to social class background inform political judgments. In this research we set out to gain a better understanding of the potential benefits, as well as potential costs, afforded to political candidates from lower- or working-, relative to high-, class backgrounds.

Idealized lay and scholarly theories of democratic political participation conceptualize voters as engaging in rational consideration of information, such as policy positions and voting records, when considering individual political candidates. However, in contrast to this resource-heavy individuating approach to impression formation, significant research shows that voters tend to exert minimal cognitive effort on politics. Rather than a data-driven approach, voters often use social category-based impression formation processes, relying on cues that activate stereotypes to inform political evaluations (Citrin, Green, & Sears, 1990; Koch, 2000; McDermott, 1998). There is now a robust literature using a voting cues framework for understanding voters' evaluations of politicians (Campbell, Green, & Layman, 2011; Feldman & Conover, 1983; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Rahn, 1993). Given the ample scholarship focused on understanding the impact of cues to social groups such as gender, race and religion, there is

surprisingly little research into understanding the effect of social class cues on political candidate assessment and evaluation. In this research we draw upon a voting cues framework and the stereotype content model to explore how social class serves as a cue to inform judgments of political candidates structured around perceptions of their political ideology as well as the central and relevant traits of warmth and competence (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004).

Perceiving Political Candidates' Ideology

In recent years, both ideological and affective polarization have increased in the United States (Abramowitz, 2013; Jacobson, 2015). That is, rank and file Democrats and Republicans have moved to the ideological left and right and have increased negative feelings regarding the opposing party. Indeed, these divisions are intricately linked, with both partisan identity and policy disagreement feeding feelings toward those who are ideologically similar or different (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). Thus, perceived ideological distance plays an increasingly important role in political preferences of the American electorate. Importantly, voters often use candidates' social identities, and related social group stereotypes, to help them infer candidate ideology. For example, research shows that people perceive women and minority candidates to be significantly more ideologically liberal than male and white candidates (Jacobsmeier, 2014, 2015; Koch, 2000; McDermott, 1998; Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, & Nitz, 1995). In making these evaluations, voters often employ a representativeness heuristic; that is, they infer ideology of a candidate in part by using race and gender cues to determine how similar the candidate is to the stereotype of ideologically liberal politicians. These stereotype-based expectations are rooted in observations of the majority of non-White and female political candidates and leaders belonging to the Democratic party. However, these stereotypes that serve as cues to candidate ideology can lead to misperceptions, such as perceiving female and minority political candidates

as more liberal than they are, and in turn this can have important implications for candidate support (Fulton & Gershon, 2018; Koch, 2000).

One relatively understudied cue to a candidate's political ideology is social class background. Carnes and Sadin (2015) conducted initial work to begin to address this lacuna by investigating whether stories about how a candidate was raised can influence voters' perceptions of their priorities and positions. Taking a representativeness heuristic approach, Carnes and Sadin argued that learning about a candidate's working-class background might activate stereotypes that associate working-class individuals with more progressive economic ideologies (Bartels, 2008; Hout, 2008), thus leading voters to infer the candidate is economically liberal. Indeed, they found support for what they term the "mill worker's son" heuristic: voters often infer that politicians from less affluent backgrounds are more progressive on economic issues than those from more affluent backgrounds. In the current research, we seek to replicate and extend this work by testing whether this progressive inference holds for those candidates from both working and lower-class backgrounds and whether it extends to perceived political ideology generally, including both economic and social issues.

Perceiving Political Candidates' Warmth and Competence

Beyond ideology, perceptions of a candidate's traits guide political choices and behavior (Funk, 1999). Social cognitive research identifies two fundamental dimensions associated with perceiving political leaders: warmth and competence (Fiske, 2019). When assessing candidates, voters focus on understanding their motives and trustworthiness (i.e., warmth), as well as understanding their ability to enact their motives (i.e., competence; Cuddy, Glick, Beninger, 2011; Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996). People positively evaluate and endorse leaders they deem warm, that is, those that are perceived to be friendly and trustworthy, and those they deem as

competent and capable (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, 2007). Even though people's evaluations of political leaders have been shown at times to employ different cognitive systems than when they are making other social evaluations (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015, 2017), these two dimensions are also fundamental to social perception generally (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske et al., 2007). Of these two trait dimensions, warmth has been shown to hold primacy in social perceptions (Fiske, et al., 2007). Both traits are also important sources of information in political candidate evaluations. Research examining rapid trait inferences reveals that competence inferred from brief exposure to candidates' faces is predictive of voting decisions (Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). Research that moves beyond face perceptions to examine trait evaluations of actual candidates as well as experimentally manipulated fictitious candidates has shown that warmth plays a more important role than competence in political candidate evaluations and vote choice (Laustsen & Bor, 2017).

These two fundamental questions associated with individual person perception—are they likeable and trustworthy, are they capable and competent—also undergird perceptions of groups of people. A robust body of research shows that people draw upon the stereotypes of social groups to infer warmth and competence in others. For example, these two dimensions of person perception are inherent in the generalizations people make about the attributes of women and men, i.e., gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes both describe gender differences, stemming largely from gendered social roles, and also prescribe how women and men should be (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1999; Heilman, 2012). Prominent gender stereotypes revolve around the notion that “women take care” and “men take charge” (Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995; Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 2001; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). There is a rich literature documenting the stereotype-based associations between women and communal

characteristics that highlight warmth and a concern for others, and men and agentic characteristics that emphasize competence (Abele, 2003; Deaux & Kite, 1993; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Williams & Best, 1990).

One important theoretical perspective linking stereotypes to these two fundamental dimensions of social perceptions is the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). According to the SCM, assessments of both warmth and competence are central dimensions of stereotypes that differentiate social groups across cultures (Fiske, 2018). Stereotypes of social groups can be mapped onto a two-dimensional space ranging from low to high warmth and low to high competence. According to the SCM, these stereotypes stem from perceptions of social structure with perceived interdependence feeding assessments of warmth and perceived status informing competence evaluations (Fiske, 2018). In turn, warmth and competence stereotypes predict emotion-based prejudices and, finally, behavioral discrimination.

The SCM model explains social class stereotypes well (Durante, Tablante, & Fiske, 2017). Generally, stereotypes of those from high versus low social classes exhibit a tradeoff between warmth and competence. People with a lot of wealth are commonly seen as competent but cold whereas those in poverty are more often viewed as warmer than the rich but less competent (Durante et al., 2017). This compensatory pattern is most robust with the extremes of wealth and poverty. There are a number of theoretical perspectives accounting for the tradeoff in competence and warmth from system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003) to social dominance theory (Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). Across explanatory frameworks, this complementarity is seen to provide each group with a favorable dimension serving to both mollify and avoid conflict.

The SCM gives us important insight into how social class might influence evaluations of political leaders. Stereotypes of politicians are similar to stereotypes of those with excessive wealth, and other societal elites—they are seen as highly competent but not very trustworthy (Fiske & Durante, 2014). Indeed, politicians are considered the “worst among the elites” (p. 113, Fiske, 2019). Questions about politicians’ motives are pervasive. The social structure surrounding politicians and constituents is not one that promotes cooperation and trust. Rather, by the nature of their role, politicians are generally understood as seeking power yet the extent to which they share goals with voters is questionable. Although empirical work shows that politicians are consistently viewed as untrustworthy, perceptions of their competence are not reliably low, rather, these judgments show significant variability (Fiske & Durante, 2014). In the current research, we explore how information on a political candidate’s social class background might moderate evaluations of warmth. Given a candidate has basic credentials (e.g., education or experience) that establish a baseline level of competency, it is likely that class cues will predominantly influence perceptions of warmth. Specifically, drawing upon the SCM, we predict that relatively lower-class backgrounds will serve to increase candidates’ perceived warmth compared to those from more affluent backgrounds. We do not have predictions for how cues to social class background will affect perceptions of candidates’ competence given similar educational credentials.

Evaluating Political Candidates

Beyond perceptions of traits and ideology, in this research we assess the role of candidate social class background as a cue informing general candidate support. On the one hand, there are reasons to expect voters might prefer candidates from wealthy backgrounds. The respect often bestowed upon those with a good pedigree who grew up with a sizeable bank account (Fiske, Xu,

Cuddy, & Glick, 1999) might result in a general preference for political leaders from high-class backgrounds. This perspective is exemplified in U.S. President Trump's defense of privileging people from the wealthy elite when making choices to fill his cabinet positions "I love all people, rich or poor. But in those particular positions, I just don't want a poor person" (Scott, 2017). There are powerful cultural matching mechanisms in elite domains that serve to "preserve and pass on valued opportunities to members of privileged and powerful groups" (p. 89, Rivera, 2011). Indeed, empirical research demonstrates that across a wide swath of domains those from more affluent backgrounds are favored over others and that those from lower-class backgrounds are treated the worst (Horwitz & Dovidio, 2017).

Yet, there are compelling theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that candidates from elite backgrounds will not be preferred by voters. For example, recent research experimentally manipulating candidate background across three countries (Britain, Argentina, and the United States), revealed that voters found working-class candidates as equally qualified and equally likely to receive their votes relative to more affluent candidates who worked in white-collar professions (Carnes & Lupu, 2016). Moreover, ample work shows that people positively evaluate and endorse leaders they view as likable and trustworthy, and assessments of warmth are primary over evaluations of competence (Fiske et al., 2007). In a recent poll of what voters are looking for in the 2020 U.S. Democratic presidential candidates, all else equal, voters preferred working- and middle-class candidates over wealthy candidates (Khanna, 2019). In the current work, we test the prediction that cues to a candidates' lower- or working-class background will predict more positive evaluations relative to candidates from high-class backgrounds.

The Current Research

Despite social class playing an important and complicated role in political life, surprisingly little research has focused on understanding how political candidates' social class backgrounds influence political decision making. The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the potential benefits, as well as the potential costs, afforded to political candidates based on their social class backgrounds. We examine how the social class background of a political candidate might inform political judgments regarding ideology, candidate traits, and overall candidate evaluations. Drawing upon and merging a voting cues framework with the stereotype content model, we predict that relative to those from high-class backgrounds, candidates from lower- and working-class backgrounds will be perceived to be more ideologically liberal, warmer, and will be evaluated more positively. In our final study we also explore both perceptions of middle-class candidates as well as the role of social mobility in the observed effects. Additionally, across all studies we examine whether another important demographic variable that has been shown to be associated with these political judgments, specifically, candidate gender, interacts with cues to social class background on the outcomes of interest. We also explore the role of candidate race in one study. We test predictions across four experimental studies employing a candidate evaluation paradigm; participants are presented with basic background information on a candidate (cues to candidate class and other demographics are presented here) and are asked to read an excerpt from a speech before rating their perceptions of the candidates' ideology, warmth and competence, and their evaluations of the candidate.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure. In all studies, we recruited participants from the United States using Mechanical Turk, an internet marketplace used to recruit diverse online samples

shown to be a source of high-quality data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). Across studies, we used G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to determine minimum sample sizes that yield 95% power to detect medium effect sizes assuming $\alpha = .05$. In Study 1, two hundred ten participants completed the study¹ (48.6% female; 50% male; 1.4% missing) with a mean age of 37.40 years ($SD=12.68$).

Participants were asked to read a profile of an ostensible political candidate. We employed a 2 (candidate class) x 2 (candidate gender) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to read about a female or male candidate from either a high-class or working-class background. Gender was manipulated with candidate name (Jennifer Miller or John Miller) and pronoun usage, and class was manipulated with a description of the candidate's family while growing up (affluent parents who worked as an attorney and stay at home mom or working-class parents working for the postal service and as a teacher) and differing athletic and club interests. Additionally, the working-class candidate was described as receiving full financial aid in college (see the Appendix for full materials). Candidates were uniformly described as running for a gubernatorial position and their reported educational accomplishments (graduating above average both as a Political Science major and as a law student) were similar across conditions. All participants then read the same excerpt from a speech. Importantly, in this research we did not provide any cue to the candidate's political party. Next, participants responded to manipulation check items, completed measures of perceived warmth and competence, perceived candidate political ideology, and candidate evaluation before completing demographic questions.²

¹ Four participants completed the study twice; we retained the data from their first completion.

² Across studies there were exploratory items and/or exploratory scales administered in the demographics that are not related to the current research; all items/measures are reported in the Appendix.

Measures. Unless noted otherwise, participants responded to measures using a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Full measures are reported in the Appendix.

Manipulation checks. Participants were asked to identify the name of the candidate (both options given), the candidate's gender (male, female, or don't remember), and the candidate's social class rank while growing up. Specifically, using a ladder from 1 to 10 representing where people stand in the U. S., participants indicated where they would place the candidate's family while growing up (modified from Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Participants ranked themselves on a similar subjective class status ladder in demographics.

Perceived warmth and competence. Participants indicated the extent to which they perceived the candidate as competent by indicating their agreement to a set of competence- (*self-confident, dominant, assertive, ambitious*; $\alpha = .85$) and warmth-related (*helpful, kind, sympathetic, gentle, moral, honest*; $\alpha = .91$) traits³.

Perceived candidate political ideology. Using a 7-point scale (*strongly liberal to strongly conservative*), people indicated where they thought the candidate falls on social issues and economic issues and indicated perceived political party affiliation on a 7-point scale (strong democrat to strong republican). Higher scores represent more conservative ideologies ($\alpha = .92$).

Candidate evaluation. Participants responded to 14 items evaluating their general support of the candidate as a leader (e.g., *This candidate would be an influential leader*,

³ Measures of perceived warmth and competence varied slightly across studies using items from a robust literature on these two fundamental dimensions of stereotyping and person perception (Abele et al., 2016). In the fourth study we included any unique items from the 12-item measure of warmth and competence indicated in Fiske's recent overview of the Stereotype Content Model (2018). Measures were highly reliable and the demonstrate the robust nature of the observed effects.

I would vote for this candidate) and 7 items assessing their evaluation of the candidate's potential for effective political governance, (e.g., *Unemployment will shrink under this candidate, This candidate will work to keep our communities safe*). Across all studies these scales were highly correlated and showed similar patterns, thus they were combined into one highly reliable candidate evaluation scale ($\alpha = .98$).

Results and Discussion

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales. Ninety-five percent of participants were correct in their identification of the candidate name and the candidate gender; we report results for those 200 participants who passed these checks (49% female; 50% male; 1% missing) with a mean age of 37.54 years ($SD=12.72$). To examine the effectiveness of the social class manipulation, we conducted a univariate ANOVA with the status manipulation predicting the ladder measure. As expected, participants in the high-class background condition placed the candidate significantly higher on the rungs ($M=7.86$; $SD=1.31$) than those in the working-class condition ($M=5.66$; $SD=1.37$; $F(1, 198)= 135.05$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.41$).

Next, we test our primary hypotheses (see Figure 1 for results for primary predictions). We first examined the effect of class and gender on perceived political ideology. We conducted a univariate ANOVA with the status and gender conditions predicting perceived candidate political ideology. As predicted, participants in the working-class background condition rated the candidate as significantly more liberal ($M=3.66$; $SD=1.32$; $F(1, 196)= 13.60$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.07$) than those in the high-class condition ($M=4.29$; $SD=1.24$). In addition, participants rated the male candidate as significantly more conservative ($M=4.36$; $SD=1.16$) than the female candidate

($M=3.61$; $SD=1.36$; $F(1, 196)= 18.96$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.09$). There was no significant interaction between class and gender ($p = .286$).

Next, we examined the prediction regarding the perception of warmth. We conducted a multivariate ANOVA on perceived warmth and competence. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of class ($F(2, 195) = 6.04$, $p = .003$; Wilks' lambda = .942, partial $\eta^2=.06$) as well as of gender ($F(2, 195) = 4.87$, $p = .009$; Wilks' lambda = .952, partial $\eta^2=.05$), and a marginal multivariate effect for their interaction ($F(2, 195) = 2.81$, $p = .063$; Wilks' lambda = .972, partial $\eta^2=.03$). Tests of between-subjects effects revealed that participants rated the candidate as significantly higher in warmth in the working-class ($M=5.16$; $SD=1.06$) relative to the high-class condition ($M=4.84$; $SD=1.12$; $F(1,196) =4.54$, $p=.034$; partial $\eta^2=.02$). Ratings of competence were significantly lower in the working-class condition ($M=5.16$; $SD=1.22$) relative to those in the high-class condition ($M=5.48$; $SD=.91$; $F(1, 196) =4.33$, $p=.039$; partial $\eta^2=.02$). Additionally, tests of between-subjects effects revealed that participants rated the female candidate as significantly higher in warmth ($M=5.23$; $SD=1.01$) relative to the male candidate ($M=4.77$; $SD=1.15$; $F(1, 196) =9.12$, $p=.003$; partial $\eta^2=.04$). Candidate gender had no effect on ratings of competence ($p=.980$). Finally, there was a significant interaction between gender and class on warmth ($F(1, 196) =5.02$, $p=.026$; partial $\eta^2=.03$) such that the high-class male candidate was seen lower in warmth ($M=4.45$; $SD=1.12$) than the other three conditions (high-class woman: $M=5.24$; $SD=.98$; lower-class man: $M=45.11$; $SD=1.09$; lower-class woman: $M=5.22$; $SD=1.05$).

Finally, we examined the effect of class and gender on candidate evaluation. We conducted a univariate ANOVA with the status and gender predicting candidate evaluation.

There was no effect of candidate class ($p = .714$), candidate gender ($p = .166$), or their interaction ($p = .125$) on participants' evaluations.

In sum, Study 1 provided initial evidence for our predictions that political candidates described as coming from a working-class, relative to a high-class, background will be perceived as warmer and more politically liberal. We also found that the working-class candidates were perceived lower in competence than the high-class candidates. We did not find support for our prediction that the working-class candidates would be evaluated more positively. Additionally, consistent with the rich literature on gender stereotyping (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Koch, 2000), women were evaluated as warmer and more politically liberal than the men candidates. The candidate gender differences in perception of warmth is driven primarily by participants' perceptions of the high-class male candidate as particularly low on warmth relative to the other conditions.

Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to extend our investigation to a candidate with a lower-class (rather than working-class) background and we sought to also explore if these class effects are moderated by candidate race in addition to gender. Additionally, in this study we sought to explore the role of the perceivers' own political ideology in these perceptions. Specifically, because lower-class cues promote the perception that the candidate is more politically liberal, candidate evaluations might depend upon the evaluator's own political ideology such that more liberal voters will evaluate the candidate more positive. We test this prediction in Study 2.

Method

Participants and procedure. Six hundred and seven participants from Mechanical Turk (49.4% female; 50.1% male; .5% missing) completed the study with a mean age of 37.85 years

(SD=11.68). The procedure was similar to Study 1 but in this study we employed a 2 (candidate class) x 2 (candidate gender) x 2 (candidate race) between-subjects design. Gender and race were manipulated with candidate name and pronoun usage (Lakisha Washington, Emily Walsh, Jamal Jones, Greg Baker; Bertrand, & Mullainathan, 2004) and class was manipulated with a description of the candidate's family while growing up ("affluent parents" who were an attorney and stay at home mom or both parents working full time at minimum wage jobs and "lower class parents" often struggled to make ends meet financially), differing athletic and club interests, and the lower class candidate was described as receiving full financial aid in college (see the Appendix for full materials). Again, candidates were uniformly described as running for a gubernatorial position and their reported educational accomplishments (graduating above average both as a Political Science major and as a law student) were similar across conditions. After reading the same speech excerpt, participants responded to manipulation check items, perceived warmth and competence, perceived candidate political ideology, and candidate evaluation measures before completing demographic questions.

Measures.

Manipulation checks. Participants were once again asked to identify the name of the candidate (all 4 options given), the candidate's gender (male, female, or don't remember), and the candidate's social class rank while growing up (same as Study 1).

Perceived warmth and competence. Participants indicated the extent to which they perceived the candidate as competent by indicating their agreement to the four traits assessed in Study 1 as well as five new traits ($\alpha = .91$; see the Appendix for all scales). Similarly, perceptions of warmth were captured by assessing responses to the 6 items from Study 1 as well as 5 new items ($\alpha = .96$).

Political ideology. Participants indicated their perceptions of the candidates' political identity on the same scale as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .92$). In addition, participants rated themselves on this scale in the demographics section. ($\alpha = .95$).

Candidate evaluation. Participants responded to 16 items evaluating their general support of the candidate as a leader (the 14 items from Study 1 *plus I respect this candidate, This candidate really cares*) and the same 7 items assessing their evaluation of the candidate's potential for effective political governance to form a highly reliable evaluation scale ($\alpha = .98$).

Results and Discussion

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales. Eighty-eight percent of participants were correct in their identification of the candidate name and the candidate gender; we report results for those 537 participants who passed these checks (52.1% female; 47.3% male; .6% missing) with a mean age of 37.09 years ($SD=12.43$). To examine the social class manipulation, we conducted a univariate ANOVA with all three manipulations predicting the ladder measure. As expected, participants in the high-class background condition placed the candidate significantly higher on the rungs ($M=7.64$; $SD=1.51$) than those in the lower-class condition ($M=3.70$; $SD=2.04$; $F(1, 529)= 637.06$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.55$). There was also a significant effect of race with participants reporting white candidates as significantly higher on the rungs ($M=5.77$; $SD=2.70$) than those the black candidates ($M=5.26$; $SD=2.64$; $F(1, 529)= 10.47$, $p=.001$; $\eta^2=.02$). No other effects were significant ($ps > .16$).

We first examined the effect of candidate class, gender, and race on perceived political ideology (see Figure 2 for results for primary predictions). We conducted a univariate ANOVA with the three independent variables predicting perceived candidate political ideology. As expected, participants in the lower-class condition rated the candidate as significantly more

liberal ($M=3.25$; $SD=1.31$; $F(1, 529)= 48.34$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.08$) than those in the high-class condition ($M=4.06$; $SD=1.42$). There was also an effect of candidate gender with participants rating the male candidate as more conservative ($M=3.74$; $SD=1.42$) than the female candidate ($M=3.50$; $SD=1.41$; $F(1, 529)= 5.05$, $p=.025$; $\eta^2=.01$). There was a significant effect of candidate race such that participants rated the white candidates more conservative ($M=3.91$; $SD=1.48$) than the black candidates ($M=3.34$; $SD=1.29$; $F(1, 529)= 25.61$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.05$). There were no significant interactions ($ps > .24$).

Next, we examined the effect of candidate social class, gender, and race on trait perceptions. We conducted a multivariate ANOVA examining the effect of candidate class, gender, and race on perceived warmth and competence. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of class ($F(2, 528) = 21.29$, $p < .001$; Wilks' lambda = .925, partial $\eta^2=.08$) and no other significant effects ($ps > .29$). Tests of between-subjects effects revealed that participants rated the candidate as significantly higher in warmth in the lower-class ($M=5.55$; $SD=.89$) relative to the high-class condition ($M=5.07$; $SD=1.00$; $F(1,529) =33.17$, $p<.001$; partial $\eta^2=.06$). Ratings of competence did not significantly differ across conditions ($p = .449$). No other between-subjects effects reached significance ($ps > .12$).

Next, we examined the effect of candidate class, gender, and race on candidate evaluation. We conducted a univariate ANOVA predicting candidate evaluation. There was a significant effect of candidate class such that participants evaluated the lower-class candidate more positively ($M=5.33$; $SD=.97$) than the high-class candidate ($M=4.99$; $SD=1.01$; $F(1,529) =15.00$, $p<.001$; partial $\eta^2=.03$). There was also an effect of race such that the black candidates were rated more positively ($M=5.28$; $SD=.92$) than the white candidates ($M=5.07$; $SD=1.07$; $F(1,529) =6.28$, $p=.013$; partial $\eta^2=.01$). There were no other significant effects ($ps > .26$).

Finally, we examined if participant political ideology moderated the effect of class on candidate evaluation using Hayes' *PROCESS* (2018) macro Model 1. We mean centered the variables and regressed candidate political ideology, candidate class condition, and their interaction on candidate evaluation, controlling for candidate gender and race. There was no significant interaction between class condition and participant political ideology on candidate evaluation ($p = .798$).

In sum, using lower-class rather than working-class condition, Study 2 replicated the findings from the first study that political candidates described as coming from less affluent background were perceived as more politically liberal and warmer relative to candidates from a more affluent background. In this study, we found no evidence that cues to class background influence perceptions of competence. Unlike in Study 1, we did find support for our prediction that candidates from a lower-class background would be evaluated more favorably. Moreover, these evaluations of the candidate were not moderated by the participants' own political ideology. In our exploratory analyses examining the effects of gender and race, we found a significant effect of candidate gender and race on evaluations of ideology such that participants evaluated women and black candidates as more liberal than men and white candidates consistent with extant research (Jacobsmeier, 2014, 2015; Koch, 2000). We also unexpectedly found that black candidates were evaluated more positively than the white candidates. Finally, the effects of class on evaluations of warmth and political ideology and overall evaluation were not moderated by candidate gender or race.

Study 3

The first two studies were consistent in revealing that political candidates from working- or lower-class backgrounds were evaluated as more liberal and warmer than those from a more

affluent background. However, we found contradictory results on perceptions of competence, with working-, and not lower-, class candidates perceived to have less competence than high-class candidates, and on evaluations with only the lower-, and not the working-, class candidates being evaluated more positively than candidates from the high-class background. In Study 3, we sought to test all three class backgrounds in one study.

Method

Participants and procedures. Three hundred seventy-five participants from Mechanical Turk completed Study 3⁴ (53.6% female; 45.1% male; 1.3% missing) with a mean age of 38.31 years (SD=13.02).

The experimental procedure was similar to the first two studies; in this study we employed a 3 (candidate class) x 2 (candidate gender) between-subjects design. Gender was manipulated with candidate name (Jennifer Miller, John Miller) and pronoun usage and class was manipulated using the descriptions of high-class, working-class, and lower-class background used in the first two studies. After reading the candidate's speech excerpt, participants completed measures. In this study, two attention check items were embedded in the measures such that participants were asked to respond a certain way (such as 'strongly agree') to the items.

Measures.

Manipulation checks. Once again participants were asked to identify the name of the candidate (both options given), the candidate's gender (male, female, or don't remember), and the candidate's social class rank (using the subjective class status ladder) while growing up.

⁴ Two participants completed the study twice; we retained the data from their first completion.

Perceived warmth and competence. Employing similar measures as in the first two studies, participants responded to highly reliable measures of competence ($\alpha = .90$) and warmth ($\alpha = .96$).

Political ideology. Participants indicated their perceptions of the candidate's political ideology ($\alpha = .92$) and they rated themselves ($\alpha = .95$) on the same items used in the previous studies.

Candidate evaluation. Participants responded to the 14 items evaluating their general support of the candidate as a leader and the 7 items assessing their evaluation of the candidate's potential for effective political governance as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .97$).

Results and Discussion

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales. Ninety-four percent of participants were correct in their identification of the candidate name and the candidate gender; we report results for those 352 participants who passed these checks (54.8% female; 44.0% male; 1.1% missing) with a mean age of 38.73 years ($SD=13.11$)⁵.

To examine the social class manipulation, we conducted a univariate ANOVA with candidate class and gender predicting the ladder measure. As expected, there was a significant effect of candidate class ($F(2, 346) = 266.58, p < .001; \eta^2 = .61$) but there was no effect of gender ($p = .499$) and no interaction ($p = .871$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that participants in the high class background condition placed the candidate significantly higher on the rungs ($M=7.94; SD=1.25$) than those in the working class ($M=5.39; SD=1.42; p < .001$) and those in the lower class conditions ($M=3.42; SD=1.81; p < .001$); the difference between the working and lower class conditions was also significant ($p < .001$).

⁵ For both Studies 3 and 4, which include attention checks, analyses are similar when including those who did not accurately complete the attention checks thus, we retain them for analyses.

We first examined the effect of candidate class and gender on perceived political ideology (see Figure 3 for results for primary predictions). As expected, there was a significant effect of class $F(2, 346) = 7.46, p < .001; \eta^2 = .04$. LSD post hoc tests revealed that participants rated both the working-class candidates ($M = 3.66; SD = 1.34; p < .001$) and the lower-class candidates ($M = 3.88; SD = 1.30; p = .009$) as significantly more liberal than the high-class candidates ($M = 4.33; SD = 1.40$). Ratings of the lower- and working-class candidates did not differ ($p = .207$). There was also a significant effect of candidate gender such that participants rated the female candidates more liberal ($M = 3.77; SD = 1.34; F(1, 346) = 7.16, p = .008; \eta^2 = .02$) than the male candidates ($M = 4.16; SD = 1.38$). Additionally, there was a marginal interaction between candidate gender and class ($F(2, 346) = 2.43, p = .070; \eta^2 = .02$). These findings suggest more conservative ratings of the male candidates, relative to the female candidates, in the high-class and working-class conditions but not in the lower-class condition.

Next, we examined the effects of candidate class and gender on perceptions of warmth and competence. We conducted a multivariate ANOVA on perceived warmth and competence. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of class ($F(4, 690) = 6.83, p < .001$; Wilks' lambda = .925, partial $\eta^2 = .04$), a marginal multivariate effect of gender ($p = .067$), and no interaction effect. Tests of between-subjects effects revealed a significant effect of candidate class on warmth ($F(2, 346) = 6.13, p = .002$; partial $\eta^2 = .03$) but not on competence ($p = .225$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that participants rated the high-class candidates as significantly less warm ($M = 4.92; SD = 1.01$) than both the working-class candidates ($M = 5.31; SD = .96; p = .003$) and the lower-class candidates ($M = 5.31; SD = .98; p = .002$). Ratings of the lower- and working-class candidates did not differ ($p = .973$). No other between-subjects effects were significant ($ps > .187$).

Next, we examined the effect of candidate class and gender on candidate evaluation. We conducted a univariate ANOVA predicting candidate evaluation. There was a significant effect of candidate class ($F(2,346) = 3.91, p = .021$; partial $\eta^2 = .02$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that participants evaluated the lower-class candidate ($M = 5.14; SD = .96$) significantly more positively than they evaluated the high-class candidate ($M = 4.79; SD = .97; p = .006$). Evaluations of the working-class candidate ($M = 5.03; SD = 1.07$) were marginally higher than evaluations of the high-class candidate ($p = .067$) and ratings of the lower- and working- class candidates did not differ ($p = .366$). The effect of candidate gender and the interaction were not significant ($ps > .39$).

Finally, we examined if participant political ideology moderated the effect of class on candidate evaluation using Hayes' *PROCESS* (2018) macro Model 1. We mean centered the variables and regressed participant political ideology, candidate class condition, and their interaction on candidate evaluation, controlling for candidate gender. We used indicator coding with high-class condition as the reference group with which to compare both less affluent conditions. Consistent with the analyses above, participants evaluated the lower-class candidate more positive than the high-class candidate ($B = .33, t = 2.60, p = .010, 95\% \text{ CI} [.08, .59]$) and the difference between the working-class and the high-class candidates was marginally significant ($B = .23, t = 1.81, p = .070, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.01, .49]$). Also, consistent with findings from Study 2, there was no significant interaction between participant political ideology and evaluation of the lower-versus high-class candidates ($p = .865$). However, there was a significant interaction in the evaluation of the working- versus high-class candidates ($B = -.19, t = -2.62, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.33, -.05]$) such that liberals (-1 SD on political ideology) evaluated the working-class candidate significantly more positively than the high-class candidate (effect = .58, $t = 3.19, p = .002, 95\%$

CI[.22, .93]) but conservatives (+1 SD on political ideology) evaluated them non-significantly less positively ($p = .411$). Alternatively, liberals evaluated the high-class candidates less positively than conservatives did (effect = .12, $t = 2.39$, $p = .018$, 95% CI[.02, .22]), but participant ideology did not predict evaluation of the working-class candidates ($p = .180$).

In sum, examining both lower-class and working-class conditions, Study 3 replicated the findings from the first two studies revealing that political candidates described as coming from less affluent backgrounds were perceived as more politically liberal and warmer relative to candidates from a more affluent background. And candidates from low- and working-class backgrounds were evaluated similarly warm and liberal. Once again, we found no evidence that cues to class background influence perceptions of competence. Also, we found that the lower-class candidates were evaluated more positively than the high-class candidates (similar to Study 2), and working-class candidates were evaluated marginally more positively than high-class candidates. Additionally, while we once again found that evaluations of the lower-class relative to high-class candidates were not moderated by the participants' own political ideology (replicating Study 2), we did find that ideology moderated the effect of working- versus high-class on evaluations (this was not tested in Study 1 as participant ideology was not assessed). The interaction revealed that the high-class candidates were evaluated less positively than the working-class candidates, but only for more liberal participants. Candidate gender did not moderate the effects of class background on evaluations of warmth and overall evaluation and only marginally moderated perceptions of political ideology. Once again, we found that women were evaluated more politically liberal than the men candidates, consistent with other literature (Koch, 2000).

Study 4

In Study 4, we sought to extend our investigation into candidate class background by also examining perceptions of those who come from middle-class backgrounds. Are candidates from the middle class perceived more akin to those from elite backgrounds or from those who come from low- or working-class means or somewhere in the middle? Additionally, by presenting the candidates as similarly educated, the low- and working-class candidates have been presented as upwardly mobile, attaining both undergraduate and law degrees. In order to better gauge the role of upward mobility in our findings, in this study we include a condition with candidates from a working-class background who remained in the working class.

Method

Participants and procedures. Seven hundred fifty-four participants from Mechanical Turk completed Study 4 (40.3% female; 58.6% male; .4% other; .7% missing) with a mean age of 35.49 years (SD=10.36; .7% missing).

In this experimental study we employed a 5 (candidate class) x 2 (candidate gender) between-subjects design. Similar to previous studies, all candidates were described as running for a gubernatorial position and gender was manipulated with candidate name (Jennifer Miller, John Miller) and pronoun usage. We used the descriptions of the high-, working-, and lower-class candidates used in the first three studies, with one minor exception. In the high-class condition, we described the mother as a pediatrician to address concerns that describing the mother as a stay-at-home mom might have cued a more traditional family. In addition, we included a condition describing a middle-class candidate, whose parents worked as a manager and a nurse and who received partial financial aid for college (see the Appendix for full materials). Additionally, we included a condition of a candidate from a working-class

background who did not demonstrate upward mobility (the working-class-remain condition). In this condition, the candidate was described as not attaining education beyond high school, but achieving success in their working-class jobs, including clerking at City Hall and then researching legal issues at a law firm, which afforded them knowledge of both political and legal systems. After reading the candidate background information, participants then read the speech excerpt presented in previous studies before responding to manipulation check items and completing measures including two embedded attention check items.

Measures.

Manipulation checks. Once again participants were asked to identify the name of the candidate (both options given), the candidate's gender (male, female, or don't remember), and the candidate's social class rank (using the subjective class status ladder) while growing up. We also asked participants to identify where they think the candidate *currently stands* on the class status ladder.

Perceived warmth and competence. We expanded the measures of warmth and competence in this study. Specifically, in addition to using the 16-items used in the previous studies, we included any unique items from the 12-item measure of warmth and competence indicated in Fiske's recent overview of the Stereotype Content Model (2018), resulting in a 23-item measure (see Appendix). These measures of warmth ($\alpha = .96$) and competence ($\alpha = .89$) were highly reliable.

Political ideology. Participants indicated their perceptions of the candidate's political ideology ($\alpha = .92$) and their own political ideology ($\alpha = .95$) on the same items used in the previous studies.

Candidate evaluation. Participants responded to the 14 items evaluating their general support of the candidate as a leader and the 7 items assessing their evaluation of the candidate's potential for effective political governance as in previous studies ($\alpha = .97$).

Results and Discussion

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales. Eighty-seven percent of participants were correct in their identification of the candidate name and the candidate gender; thus, we report results for those 654 participants who passed these checks (59.5% female; 39.4% male; .5% other; .6% missing) with a mean age of 36.07 years ($SD=10.68$).

To examine the effectiveness of the social class manipulation, we first conducted a univariate ANOVA with candidate class and gender predicting the ladder measure assessing social class while growing up. As expected, there was a significant effect of candidate class ($F(4, 644)= 72.73, p<.001; \eta^2=.31$). There was also an effect of candidate gender ($F(1, 644)= 7.18, p=.008; \eta^2=.01$), with men being perceived to come from a higher class ($M=6.19; SD=2.14$) than women ($M=5.87; SD=2.07$). LSD post hoc tests revealed significant differences between all social class conditions at the $p = .002$ level or lower except for the two working-class conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p = .767$). The high-class candidates were rated higher than the middle-class candidates who were rated higher than both sets of the working-class candidates, who were in turn were rated higher than lower-class candidates (see Table 2). There was also an interaction between class and gender ($F(4, 644)= 2.84, p=.024; \eta^2=.02$). The interaction is largely driven by participants rating the lower-class female candidate ($M=3.93; SD=1.88$) as lower on the rung than the lower-class male candidate ($M=5.08; SD=2.62; p <$

.001), whereas evaluations of the male and female candidates did not differ in the other class conditions. Thus, overall, our manipulation of candidate class background was effective.

Next, perceptions of the candidate's current social class revealed a significant effect of the class manipulation ($F(4, 643) = 12.81, p < .001; \eta^2 = .07$). There was also an effect of candidate gender ($F(1, 643) = 9.89, p = .002; \eta^2 = .02$), with men being perceived to be in a higher class ($M = 7.64; SD = 1.32$) than women ($M = 7.34; SD = 1.35$). There was no significant interaction ($p = .195$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that the working-class-remain candidates were perceived to currently be lower on the ladder than the working-class candidates ($p = .034$), the middle-class candidates ($p = .022$), and the upper-class candidates ($p < .001$) and were seen to be at the same place on the ladder as the candidates from the lower-class background ($p = .180$). In addition, the high-class candidates were perceived to be in a higher social class than those in all other conditions ($ps < .001$). In sum, these results reveal that the candidates who were described as both coming from and remaining in the working class were identified as being in a lower class than those described as upwardly mobile working-class candidates and those in the middle and high classes. However, they were not significantly lower on the rung relative to upwardly mobile candidates described as coming from the lower class. Additionally, participants inferred that those candidates who came from high-class backgrounds were currently significantly higher in class than candidates from all other backgrounds.

Next, we test our primary hypotheses (see Figure 4 for results for primary predictions). We first examined the effect of class and gender on perceived political ideology. We conducted a univariate ANOVA with the status and gender conditions predicting perceived candidate political ideology. There was a significant effect of candidate gender such that once again participants rated the female candidates more liberal ($M = 3.63; SD = 1.50; F(1, 644) = 28.61,$

$p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .04$) than the male candidates ($M = 4.26$; $SD = 1.54$). There was also a significant effect of class $F(4, 644) = 2.54$, $p = .039$; $\eta^2 = .02$) and no significant interaction ($p = .498$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that high class candidates were perceived to be more conservative than the lower-class candidates ($p = .030$), marginally more conservative than the working-class candidates ($p = .083$), and significantly more conservative than the working-class-remain candidates ($p = .004$). In addition, the working-class-remain candidates were rated as more liberal than the middle-class candidate ($p = .049$). All other comparisons did not reach significance ($p > .20$). Thus, akin to previous studies, the high-class candidates were perceived to be more conservative than the low- and working-class candidates. Perceptions of the middle-class candidates did not significantly differ from those of the other candidates except for the working-class-remain candidates who were seen as more liberal than both high and middle-class candidates.

Next, we examined the effects of candidate class and gender on perceptions of warmth and competence. We conducted a multivariate ANOVA on perceived warmth and competence. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of class ($F(8, 1286) = 3.66$, $p < .001$; Wilks' lambda = .956, partial $\eta^2 = .02$) and a significant multivariate effect of gender ($F(2, 643) = 3.39$, $p = .034$; Wilks' lambda = .990, partial $\eta^2 = .01$). Tests of between-subjects effects revealed only one significant effect; candidate class had a significant effect on evaluations of warmth ($F(4, 644) = 2.48$, $p = .043$; partial $\eta^2 = .02$); there was no effect on competence ($p = .662$). LSD post hoc tests revealed that participants rated the high-class candidates as significantly less warm than both the lower-class candidates ($p = .032$) and the working-class-remain candidates ($p = .004$). Although they were rated less warm than the working-class and middle-class candidates, these differences were not significant ($p = .166$ and $p = .340$, respectively). In addition, the remain in working class candidates were rated as marginally warmer than the middle-class candidates ($p =$

.055). There was no effect of candidate class on competence ($p = .66$), and no significant between-subjects effects of candidate gender ($ps > .29$) or interactions between class and gender ($ps > .77$).

Next, we examined the effect of class and gender on candidate evaluation. We conducted a univariate ANOVA with class status and gender predicting candidate evaluation. There was no effect of candidate class ($p = .698$), candidate gender ($p = .157$), or their interaction ($p = .901$) on participants' evaluations. Although the lower-class candidates were evaluated more positively than the high-class candidates, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .22$).

Finally, we examined if participant political ideology moderated the effect of class on candidate evaluation using Hayes' *PROCESS* macro Model 1. We mean centered the variables and regressed participant political ideology, candidate class condition, and their interaction on candidate evaluation, controlling for candidate gender. We used indicator coding with high-class condition as the reference group with which to compare the other conditions. There was a significant interaction in the evaluation of the working-class-remain versus high-class candidates ($B = -.14, t = -2.13, p = .034, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.26, -.01]$) such that liberals (-1 SD on political ideology) evaluated the working-class-remain candidates significantly more positively than the high-class candidates (effect = $.38, t = 2.08, p = .038, 95\% \text{ CI} [.02, .74]$) but conservatives (+1 SD on political ideology) evaluated them non-significantly less positively ($p = .261$). There was also a marginal interaction in the evaluation of the lower-class- versus high-class candidates ($B = -.13, t = -1.87, p = .062, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.26, .01]$) such that liberals evaluated the lower-class candidates significantly more positively than the high-class candidate (effect = $.42, t = 2.24, p = .026, 95\% \text{ CI} [.05, .78]$) but conservatives evaluated them non-significantly less positively ($p = .515$). Although the pattern was similar for the working-class vs high-class candidates with

liberals evaluating the working class more positively and conservatives evaluating them less positively than the high-class candidates, the interaction and the conditional effects were not significant ($ps > .26$). Alternatively, liberals evaluated the high-class candidates less positively than conservatives did (effect = .10, $t = 2.15$, $p = .032$, 95% CI[.01, .18]), but participant ideology did not predict evaluation of the lower-class ($p = .554$), working-class remain ($p = .378$), and working-class candidates ($p = .616$).

In sum, Study 4 offers a more nuanced understanding of how social class background impacts perceptions of candidates by adding a middle-class condition and also testing a condition with candidates from a working-class background who are not upwardly mobile. Similar to studies 2 and 3, in this study, there were no significant effects of class, or gender, on perceptions of competence. However, also in line with previous findings, the high-class candidates were perceived to be more conservative and less warm than the lower-class candidates. The high-class candidates were also perceived to be marginally more conservative than the working-class candidates, and although they were seen as less warm than them, this was not significant. Our new middle-class condition revealed that, in terms of both political ideology and warmth, those candidates were perceived to be right in the middle of the primary three conditions examined in previous studies—not significantly different than any of them. That is, middle-class candidates were seen slightly, but not significantly, warmer and more liberal than the high-class candidates, and they were seen slightly, but not significantly, less warm and more conservative than the lower- and working-class candidates. The only candidates they significantly differed from were the working-class-remain candidates, with the middle-class candidates being seen as more conservative and less warm. Finally, the working-class-remain candidates were perceived to be the most liberal and the warmest, with these differences reaching significance, or marginal

significance, in comparison to the high- and middle-class candidates. Thus, this study reveals that working-class candidates who are not upwardly mobile are granted the same progressive inference and warmth premiums extended to those upwardly mobile candidates from lower and working classes.

Additionally, we found support for the prediction that participants' own political ideology would moderate evaluations of the candidates. In this study, we found that ideology moderated evaluations comparing the high-class candidates to the lower-class candidates and comparing the high-class candidates to the working class-remain candidates. The effect is similar across both comparisons: liberal participants evaluated the high-class candidates more negatively than they did the lower-class and working-class-remain candidates; conservatives evaluated them similarly. Finally, once again, we found that women were evaluated more politically liberal than the men candidates.

Discussion

Social class is intertwined with politics in intricate and complicated ways. For example, though the government is run predominantly by the elite, politicians work hard to play down their upper-class beginnings (Busby, 2009). Despite the complex role of social class in political life, relatively little research has homed in on understanding how political candidates' social class backgrounds influence political decision making. In this research, we sought to better understand how cues to social class can impact voters' perceptions of candidates' traits and political ideology and their overall evaluations. There are three points that our research makes clear: first, candidates from relatively less affluent backgrounds are generally perceived to be more liberal than those from more affluent backgrounds, second, they are also seen to be warmer

and, third, social class background affects candidate evaluations, but not in a straightforward way. We elaborate on the theoretical implications of each of these below.

Across all four experimental studies we found evidence for a progressive inference from cues to political leaders coming from less elite backgrounds. These findings are consistent with Carnes and Sadin's (2015) work on the *mill worker's son* heuristic showing that people infer economic progressivism from working-class candidates. We demonstrated this effect both in upwardly-mobile candidates who came from a working-class background as well as candidates who remained in the working class when running for office. Our research also extended these findings beyond the working class and demonstrated that people infer more progressive attitudes from candidates from a lower-class background as well. And perceptions of middle-class candidates lie in between those of both low- and working-class candidates and those of high-class candidates. Additionally, by focusing on ideology more generally, our findings revealed that this progressive inference was not limited to economic issues. Importantly, the focus of this research was on understanding the role of social class background as a heuristic used to inform political judgments; our focus was not on the extent to which they are accurate. However, this heuristic might lead to misperceptions regarding ideology, as work on gender and race cues has shown (Fulton & Gershon, 2018; Koch, 2000), and ultimately have implications for candidate support. Indeed, Carnes and Sadin (2015) showed that in the domain of legislative voting on economic issues, the mill worker's son heuristic is misleading. Their research showed that although people infer that politicians raised in working-class families will be more economically progressive, data on legislative voting shows that tends not to be the case.

Cues to social class background and current social class help inform voters on candidates' motives and trustworthiness but not so much their competence to enact their

objectives (Fiske, 2019). In this work we saw warmth premiums associated with being in the working-class or being from a lower- or working-class background relative to an elite background. On the dimension of warmth, the middle-class candidates were perceived to be right in between those of low- and working-class candidates and perceptions of high-class candidates. Importantly, we did not robustly witness the tradeoff between warmth and competence often seen in those from high versus low social class (Durante et al., 2017); In general, these warmth premiums came without the competence penalties. The only study revealing an effect of social class on competence evaluations was Study 1, with the remaining studies showing no difference in these evaluations across class background. The similar evaluations on competence might in part be explained by our manipulation; in most scenarios, candidates had similar educational attainments, thus establishing a baseline of competency. However, in Study 4 we introduced candidates remaining in the working class without undergraduate or graduate educational attainments and these candidates were not perceived lower in competence than those with the educational achievements. In sum, our findings suggest that ever present questions regarding politicians' motives (Fiske & Durante, 2014) are answered in part from cues to social class. As politicians are often seen as the "worst among the elites" (p. 113, Fiske, 2019), those who are not from an elite social class appear to catch a bit of a break, at least when it comes to perceptions of likability and trustworthiness.

For both perceptions of political ideology and warmth, candidates from both lower- and working-class backgrounds, and those currently in the working class, were perceived similarly distinct from candidates from high-class backgrounds—they were all perceived to be warmer and more liberal. This is not the case for candidate evaluation. In the three studies with working-class conditions, we only found marginal support in one study for more positive evaluations of

working-class relative to high-class candidates. However, in the studies examining lower-class conditions there were significantly more positive evaluations of the low-, relative to high-, class candidates in two of the three studies with the third study showing the same pattern although it was not significant. Thus, although there is little evidence that working-class candidates are generally evaluated more favorably than elite candidates, there is evidence, though not robust, suggesting that lower-class candidates are evaluated more positively than those from high-class backgrounds. Building upon this initial work examining broad candidate evaluations that include general support of the candidate as a leader and perceptions of their potential for effective political governance, future research should examine the role of social class background and perceptions of candidate warmth in voting intentions specifically.

Given the progressive shift associated with less affluent candidates, we investigated the role of participants' ideology in moderating evaluations of the candidates in studies 2-4. Here, too, findings are not robust but do suggest that participant ideology can influence perceptions of candidates across class backgrounds. Across the six analyses testing whether evaluations of low or working-class candidates relative to high-class candidates depended on participant ideology, there was evidence for moderation in half of them. In all of these findings where participants' political ideology moderated evaluations of the candidates, analyses revealed that the more progressive participants evaluated the seemingly more conservative candidates (i.e., the high-class candidate) less positively whereas conservatives did not differ in their evaluations across class. These findings suggest that more liberal individuals may use class-based cues to a candidates' ideology in their evaluation of the candidates more so than do conservative individuals.

Although these studies were not designed to examine process, it is possible that liberals and conservatives reported more positive evaluations of the lower-class, versus high-class, candidates for different reasons. For example, it might be the case that liberals', and not conservatives', increased ratings of the lower-class candidates are driven by perceptions of the candidates' ideology and assumptions regarding their policy stances. However, there are other processes that might be playing a role, especially in conservatives' evaluations. Lower-class political candidates can attract voters in that they may be seen as cases in point of social mobility and the American Dream (Kraus & Tan, 2015); or, the enhanced evaluations may stem from perceived underdog status of politicians from very meager beginnings (Vandello, Goldschmied, Richards, 2007). Future work should more closely explore ideological differences in evaluations of candidates from different social classes by focusing on the mechanisms involved in these appraisals.

In this work we also explored the role of candidate gender, and in one study candidate race, in the observed effects. Although the primary goal of including these other social identities was to explore the extent to which class-based effects are moderated by them, we also examined the role of these factors on their own. In general, the candidates' gender or race did not moderate the observed effects of social class on trait perceptions, perceived ideology, or evaluation. Across all studies, female candidates were perceived to be more politically liberal than male candidates and in the study examining race the black candidates were perceived to be more progressive than the white candidates. These findings are consistent with a robust literature shows that people perceive women and minority group members to be more ideologically liberal than men and majority group members (Jacobsmeier, 2014, 2015; Koch, 2000; McDermott, 1998; Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, & Nitz, 1995). Although women are generally perceived to be warmer than

men, we only found this main effect in the first study and this effect was driven by the only significant interaction we found between candidate gender and class such that high class men were evaluated very low on warmth. The general lack of candidate gender effects on perceptions of warmth, combined with the robust findings of social class on these perceptions, suggest that the stereotypes associating class with warmth are stronger and are more important sources of information when evaluating political candidates than the stereotypes associating gender with warmth (Abele, 2003; Durante et al., 2017; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000).

Despite the theoretical and applied implications of the present work, there are some limitations worth noting. First, our sample of Mechanical Turk workers, or Turkers, offers access to participants from a wider array of backgrounds relative to traditional undergraduate student samples for experimental survey work, but Turkers are not representative of the U.S. For example, Turkers tend to be younger, more educated, less racially and ethnically diverse, and, relevant for this research, more liberal (Hitlin, 2016). However, research examining the motivations of ideology across samples supports the validity of MTurk samples for political ideology-related psychological research (Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015). Additionally, in this research we homed in on cues to social class in a context devoid of another cue critical to political decision making: political party. Participants were asked to make evaluations of the candidates after reading basic background information (with cues to gender, race in Study 2, and social class background) and reading an excerpt from a speech without being told which political party the candidate belongs to. By experimentally controlling for party affiliation by excluding it, we limited generalizability by not offering the one piece of political information most people know about a candidate.

This research offers insight into the social class gap between the electorate and the largely elite elected policy makers and has important implications for our political life. Research aimed at understanding this gap can help us reduce it. Increasing the representation of politicians from non-elite social classes can broaden the perspectives taken to important economic issues (Carnes & Lupu, 2015). Our findings are consistent with other recent experimental research in showing that it is *not* the case that, all else held constant, people show preferences for affluent wealthy candidates (Carnes & Lupu, 2016). Thus, although political leadership is dominated by the elite class, it is not the case that this reflects the will of the voters. Indeed, our findings suggest those from lower-class may have at least one leg up on the elites. These findings support the argument that the underrepresentation of those from lower- or working-class backgrounds stems from a lower likelihood of running for the office in the first place. This should be encouraging to those considering running for political office who are from lower and working-class backgrounds. Rather than focusing on social class-based biases, these candidates can focus more on the other barriers they may face as they attempt to win political office. Moreover, scholarship on the underrepresentation of candidates from lower social classes might benefit from a greater focus on the barriers to entry in the first place.

In sum, drawing upon a voting cues framework and the stereotype content model, we have shown that political candidates' social class background serves as a cue that informs assumptions regarding the candidates' political ideology and warmth and, in complicated ways, informs overall evaluations. Candidates from lower- and working-class backgrounds were perceived as more liberal and warmer than those from high-class backgrounds. Lower-class candidates were generally evaluated more positively than elite candidates and there was some evidence that, at times, liberal individuals evaluated the high-class candidates significantly lower

than less elite candidates but conservatives did not differ in these evaluations. These effects of candidate social class on perceived ideology, warmth, and candidate evaluations were generally not moderated by candidate gender or race. Although these heuristic-based evaluations may be inaccurate, overall, this research suggests that class-based biases do not play a central role in the overrepresentation of the elite in elected office. We hope the findings in the current work can be used to foster additional inquiry that seeks to understand how social class influences perceptions of political candidates' and their access to elected office.

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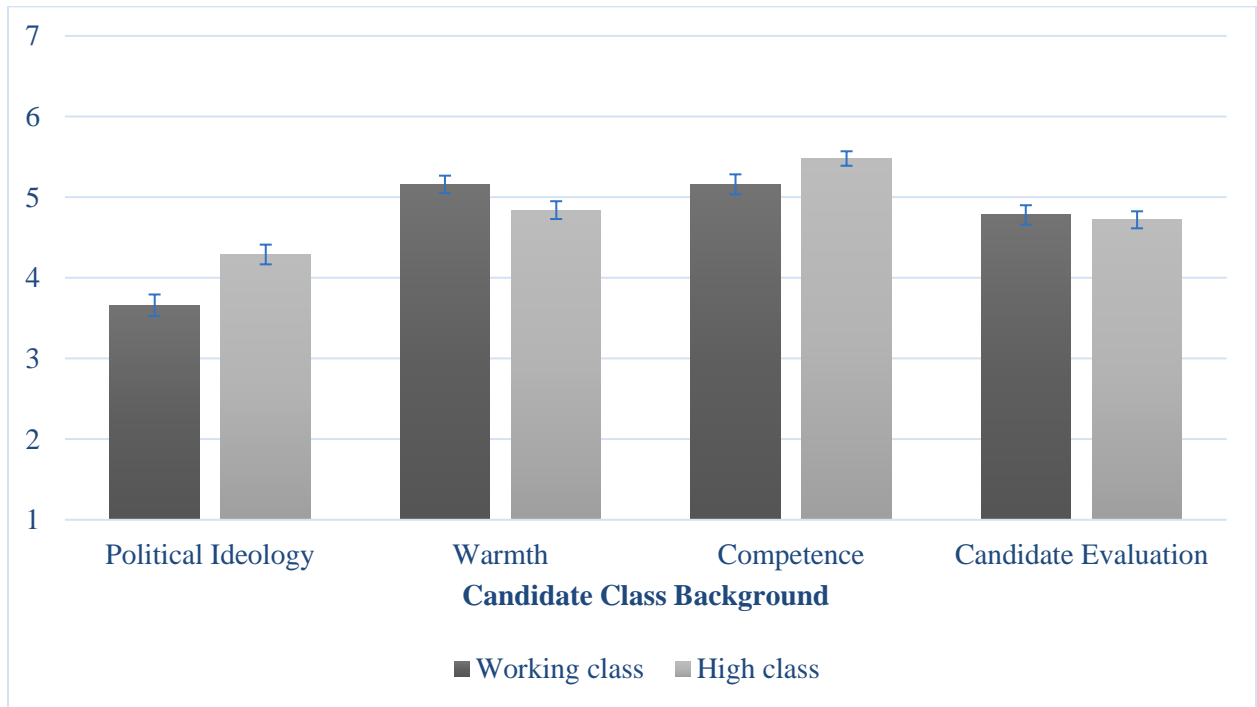
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Figure 1

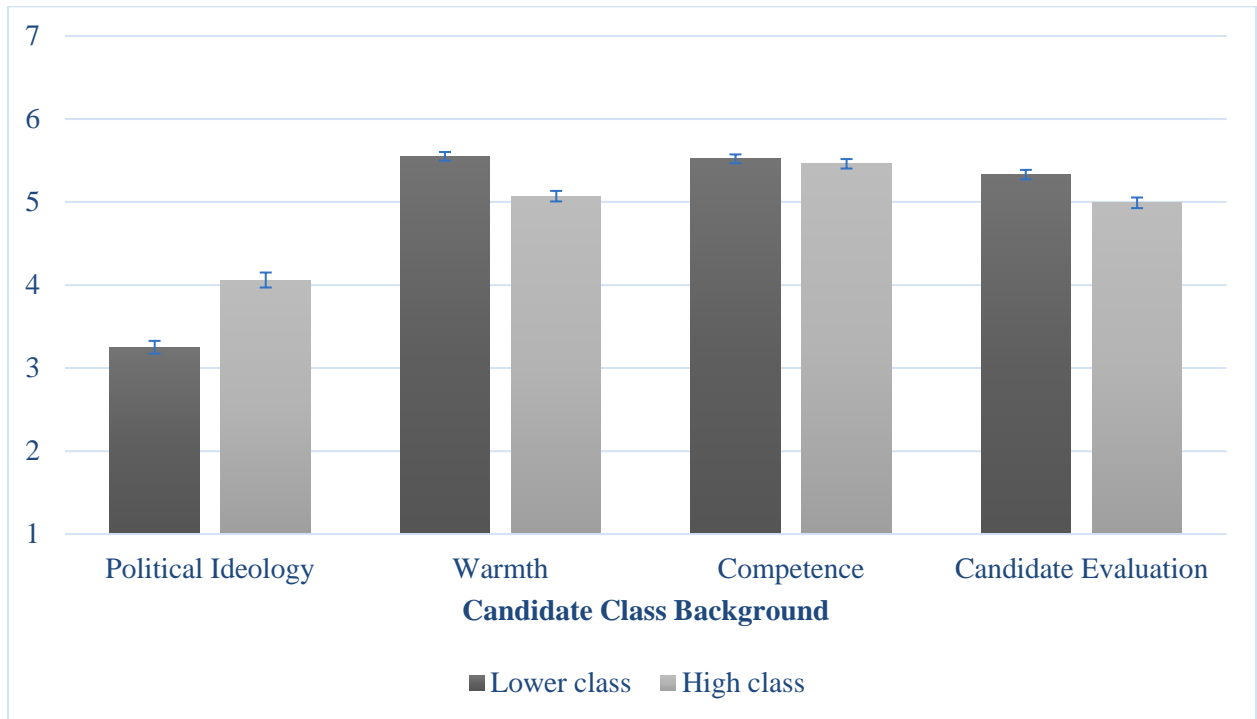
Study 1: Mean perceptions of the candidate’s political ideology, warmth, and competence, and candidate evaluation across class backgrounds.



Note: Error bars represent the standard error.

Figure 2

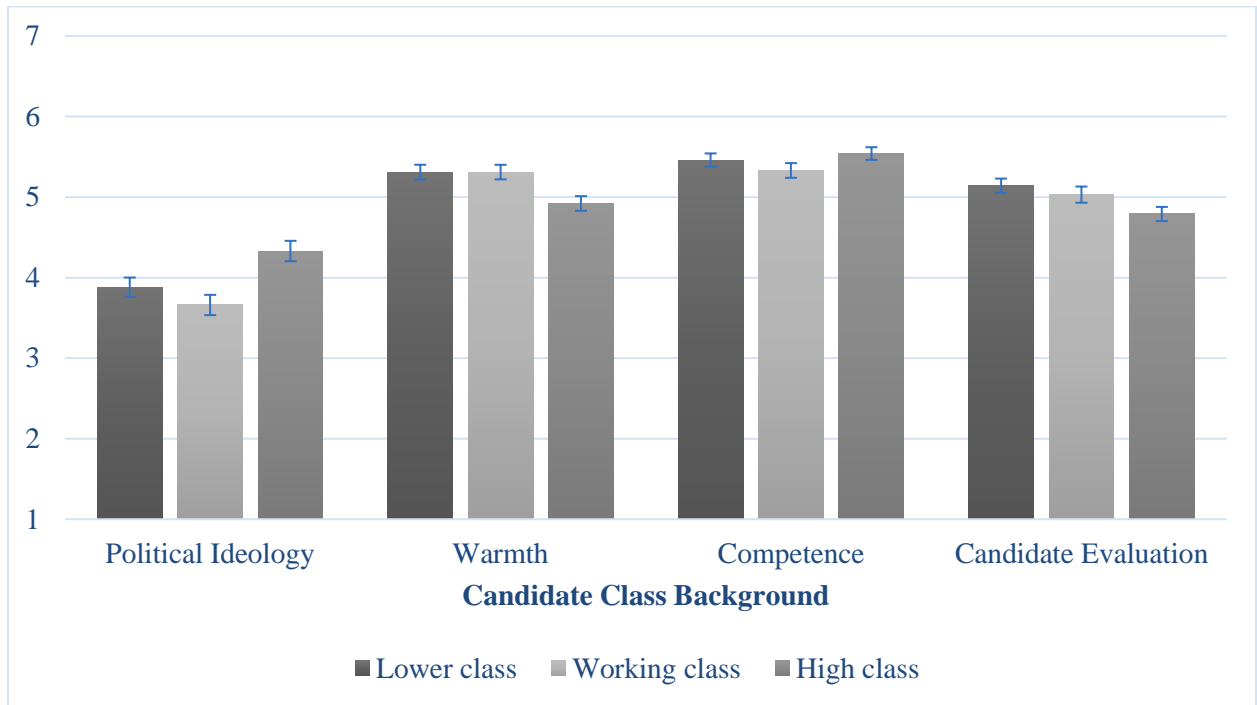
Study 2: Mean perceptions of the candidate’s political ideology, warmth, and competence, and candidate evaluation across class backgrounds.



Note: Error bars represent the standard error.

Figure 3

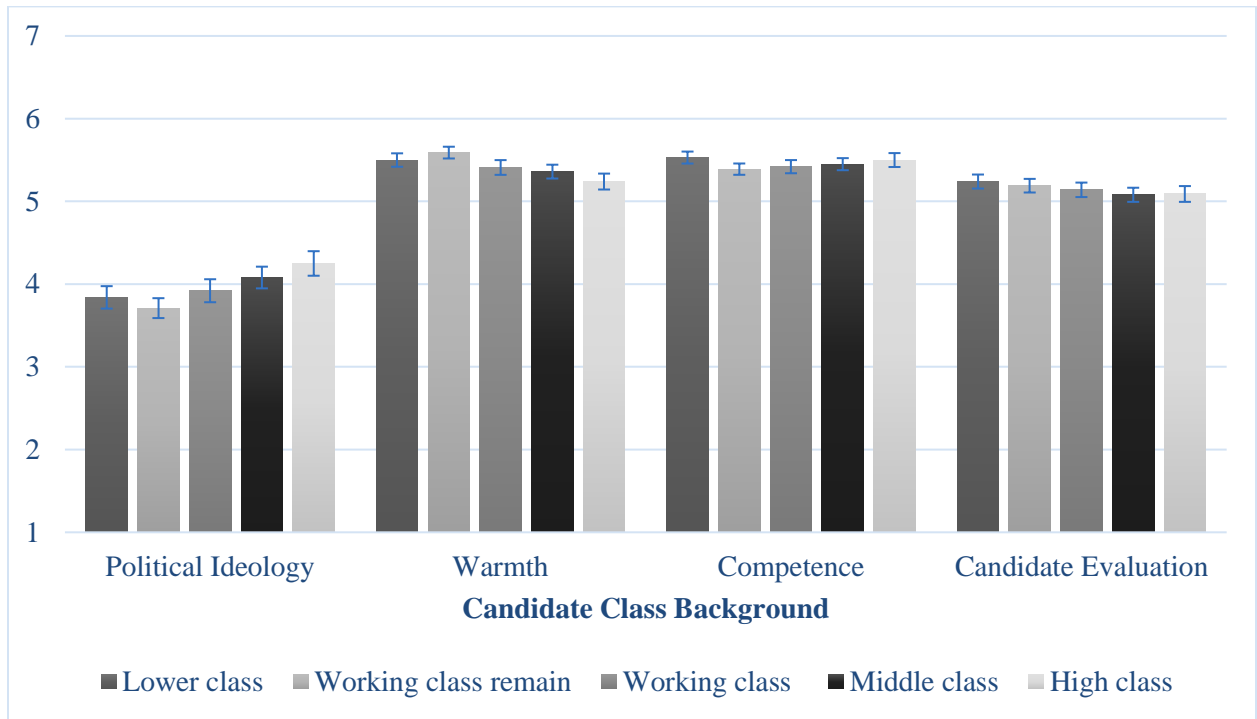
Study 3: Mean perceptions of the candidate’s political ideology, warmth, and competence, and candidate evaluation across class backgrounds.



Note: Error bars represent the standard error.

Figure 4

Study 4: Mean perceptions of the candidate’s political ideology, warmth, and competence, and candidate evaluation across class backgrounds.



Note: Error bars represent the standard error.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales ($N_{Study1} = 200$; $N_{Study2} = 537$; $N_{Study3} = 352$; $N_{Study4} = 654$)

| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------------------|------|------|---------|--------|--------|------|
| STUDY 1 | | | | | | |
| 1. Warmth | 5.00 | 1.10 | - | | | |
| 2. Competence | 5.33 | 1.08 | .23*** | - | | |
| 3. Pol ideology | 3.99 | 1.32 | -.26*** | .12 | - | |
| 4. Evaluation | 4.75 | 1.13 | .76*** | .50*** | -.16* | - |
| STUDY 2 | | | | | | |
| 1. Warmth | 5.33 | .97 | - | | | |
| 2. Competence | 5.49 | .90 | .56*** | - | | |
| 3. Pol ideology | 3.63 | 1.42 | -.11* | .11* | - | |
| 4. Evaluation | 5.17 | 1.00 | .81*** | .72*** | -.00 | - |
| 5. P-Political ideology | 3.52 | 1.76 | -.01 | -.05 | .21*** | -.07 |
| STUDY 3 | | | | | | |
| 1. Warmth | 5.17 | 1.00 | - | | | |
| 2. Competence | 5.45 | .91 | .49*** | - | | |
| 3. Pol ideology | 3.96 | 1.37 | -.23*** | .02 | - | |
| 4. Evaluation | 4.98 | 1.01 | .83*** | .63*** | -.14** | - |
| 5. P-Political ideology | 3.46 | 1.74 | .09 | .06 | .23*** | .11* |
| STUDY 4 | | | | | | |
| 1. Warmth | 5.42 | .97 | - | | | |
| 2. Competence | 5.46 | .87 | .69*** | - | | |
| 3. Pol ideology | 3.96 | 1.55 | -.07 | .11** | - | |
| 4. Evaluation | 5.15 | 1.00 | .81*** | .76*** | .07 | - |
| 5. P-Political ideology | 3.80 | 1.86 | .05 | .02 | .42*** | .08 |

Note: P-Political ideology= Participants' political ideology;

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2*Conditional means and standard deviations for outcomes in Study 4.*

| Condition | Social class background | Social class presently | Political Ideology | Warmth | Competence | Evaluation |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Low class | 4.56(2.38) | 7.31(1.36) | 3.84(1.55) | 5.50(.93) | 5.53(.83) | 5.24(.97) |
| Working class REMAIN | 5.58(1.58) | 7.10(1.23) | 3.71(1.37) | 5.59(.81) | 5.39(.78) | 5.19(.94) |
| Working class | 5.65(1.77) | 7.44(1.37) | 3.92(1.59) | 5.41(1.02) | 5.42(.91) | 5.14(1.00) |
| Middle class | 6.33(1.58) | 7.47(1.31) | 4.08(1.49) | 5.36(.95) | 5.45(.83) | 5.08(.97) |
| High class | 8.04(1.36) | 8.16(1.18) | 4.25(1.71) | 5.24(1.11) | 5.50(.97) | 5.09(1.10) |