Weberian Social Status Reimagined: A Sociological and Empirical Critique of Existing Status Measures and a Viable Alternative

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Purpose

- Social Status is a theoretically important component of social stratification research
- Often laypeople and academics alike confuse the terms social class and social status
- There are few social status measures that currently exist that also adhere to a separation of class and status
- The intent of this paper is to improve upon these existing measures and demonstrate the viability of a measure of social status for sociological inquiry

What is Social Status?

- One of the ‘Big Three’ in Weberian Sociology
  - Class, Party, Status
- Social Status groupings are ‘real communities’ compared to social class categories that are not (Weber, [1921] 2019).
- The culmination in an individuals positive and negative estimation of social honour produces a person’s status position
- Such an estimation derives itself from an expected style and behavior of life in accordance with a similar social circle, the formal mode of cultivation, and the prestige of birth and/or occupation (Weber, [1921] 2019).

Weber and Social Status

- Homophilic Association
- Social Intercourse
- Cultural Consumption
- Monopolistic Acquisition

Homophilic Association

- Intermarriage
- Social closure via occupational sorting and material goods and opportunities

Social Intercourse

- An individuals' social circle

- Not simply our friends, but who do we share meals with, intimate details and moments

Cultural Consumption

- The types of things that individuals choose to invest their resources in

Monopolistic Acquisition

- Monopolisation of key resources and opportunities
- Performance of specific occupational labour
  - For example, manual over non-manual labour contracts

The Chan-Goldthorpe Approach

- Chan and Goldthorpe have developed over the course of several papers a measure of social status (2004; 2007; 2010)
- “return to Max Weber’s distinction between class and status…” (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007: 512)
- This paper contends that improvements can be made to this existing measure of status
- Primarily the Chan-Goldthorpe scale of social status only utilises one pillar of Weberian social status in its measurement construction
  - If a measure is produced that can include all pillars, it will be better placed to capture social status

The Chan-Goldthorpe Approach

- Solely operationalised around the occupational group and friendship associations
- It is an entirely occupational based measurement justified by:
- “in modern societies occupation is one of the most salient characteristics to which status attaches” (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2004: 385).
- “return to Max Weber’s distinction between class and status…” (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007: 512)

Primary contention

- Social Status is best understood through a Weberian lens
- Current measures can use some improvement
- A Weberian measure of social status ought to contend with all aspects of a Weberian definition of social status
- The occupation-only approach to construct social status presents collinearity issues if implemented alongside the occupation-only approach used to construct the dominant Weberian social class schema in Britian – the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification scheme (NS-SEC)

Methods

- Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDSCAL)
- Exploratory Factor Analysis
- Duplication analysis
  - Using a variety of OLS models
  - Comparing goodness-of-fit statistics etc

Methods

- The construction of a new measure of social status which I term ‘Stände’ after the original Weberian meaning of the term is compared against the Chan-Goldthorpe scale and another common measure of social distance (the Cambridge Scale)

- so termed Stände as a direct reference to the medieval German guilds that Weber references as key status groups (Weber, [1921] 2019)

MDSCAL

- A contingency table constructed of current occupational title of individual versus current occupational title of partners.

- This contingency table then provides a matrix of dissimilarity that is used in MDSCAL methods.

- First ‘outflow’ percentages are calculated from the contingency table, which are used to construct a matrix of marriage partners by occupational title. This provides the index of dissimilarity using the half-matrix at the diagonal to input into MDSCAL analysis.

Comparison procedures

- Due to the need to make direct comparisons across different scales (which have themselves different ranges, means, and standard deviations) a process of z standardisation allows like-for-like comparisons to be made

Data

- This paper predominantly uses the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) wave 10 (University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2025). The dataset used by Chan and Goldthorpe (2004).

- Analysis is restricted to individuals aged 20-64 to study the working age population.

- This paper also makes use of the British Social Attitudes Survey 2001-03 in order to duplicate some findings from Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) (National Centre for Social Research, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

Step 1: MDSCAL

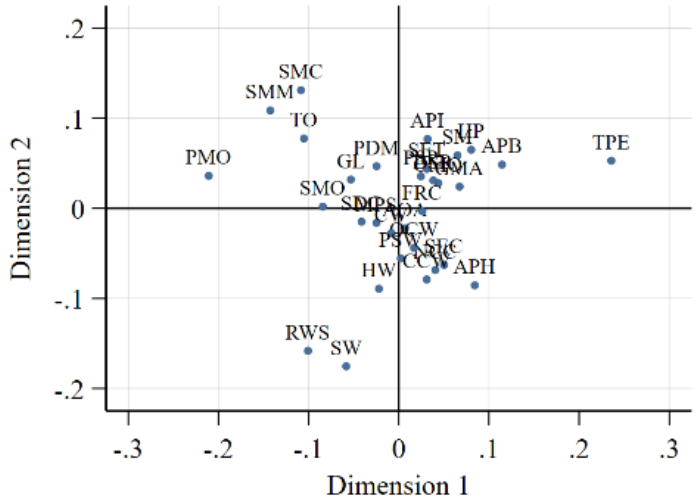
- Using Standardised occupational groups (SOC) 1990

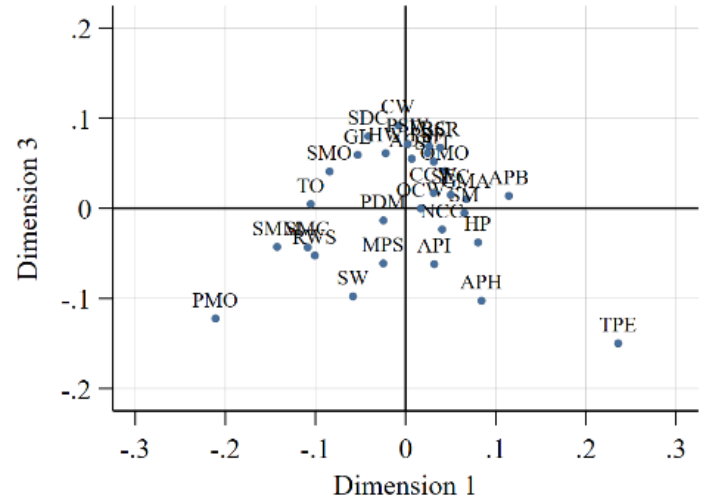
- There are too many Three-digit SOC 90 groups so they are instead collapsed into Major Occupational Groups (MOGs)

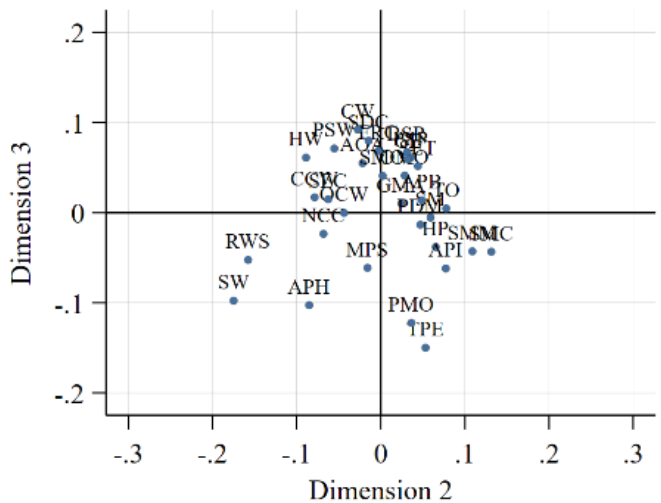
Occupational categories and their minor occupational groups

Code	Title	SOC codes
GMA	General managers and administrators	10, 13, 15
PDM	Plant, depot and site managers	11,14,16
SM	Specialist managers	12
MPS	Managers and proprietors in services	17
OMO	Managers and officials, not elsewhere classified	19
SET	Scientists, engineers and technologists	20,21
HP	Higher professionals	22,24,25,26,27,29
TPE	Teachers and other professionals in education	23
API	Associate professionals in industry	30,31,32,33,39
APH	Associate professionals in health and welfare	34,37
APB	Associate professionals in business	35,36,38
AOA	Administrative officers and assistants	40
NCC	Numerical clerks and cashiers	41
FRC	Filing and record clerks	42
OCW	Other clerical workers	43
SDC	Store and dispatch clerks	44,49
SEC	Secretaries and receptionists	45,46
SMC	Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance	50,52
SMM	Skilled and related manual workers in metal trade	51,53,54
SMO	Skilled and related manual workers not elsewhere classified	55,56,57,58, 59
PSP	Protective service personnel	60,61
CW	Catering workers	62
PSW	Personal service workers	63,66,67,69
HW	Health workers	64
CCW	Childcare workers	65
BSR	Buyers and sales representatives	70,71
SW	Sales workers	72, 73,79
PMO	Plant and machine operatives	80,81,82,83,84,85,86,89
TO	Transport operatives	87,88
GL	General labourers	90,91,92,93,99
RWS	Routine workers in services	94,95

Multi-Dimensional Scaling Configuration Over Three Plains







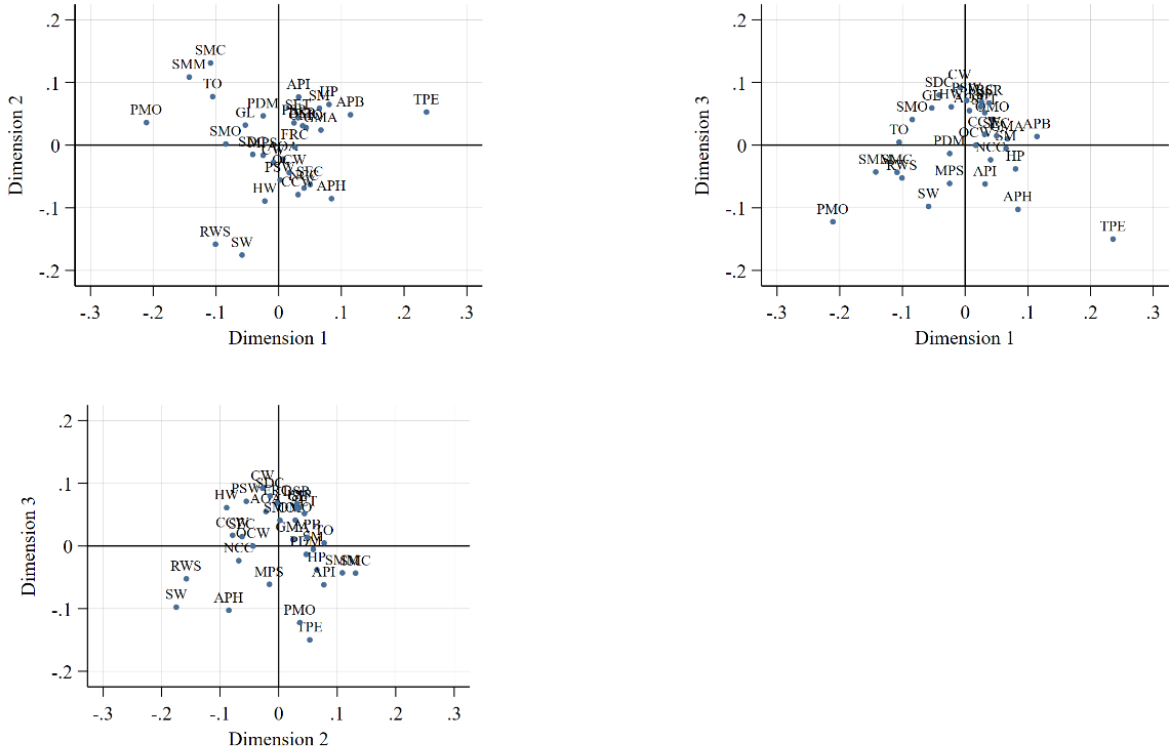
Data from BHPS wave 10. N=4,769

Data taken from indiviudal and partner occupational titles (MOGs)

- Dimension 1 of the MDSCAL analysis appears to clearly represent a dimension of homophily. For example, occupations RWS and SW, (routine service workers and sales workers) are very close within dimension 1 but are some of the furthest apart from TPE, (teachers and other professionals in education).

- What Chan and Goldthorpe (2004) express as a prima facie expression of status can at this stage be described as homophily. These results line up with Chan and Goldthorpe (2004) and Chan *et al* (2011).

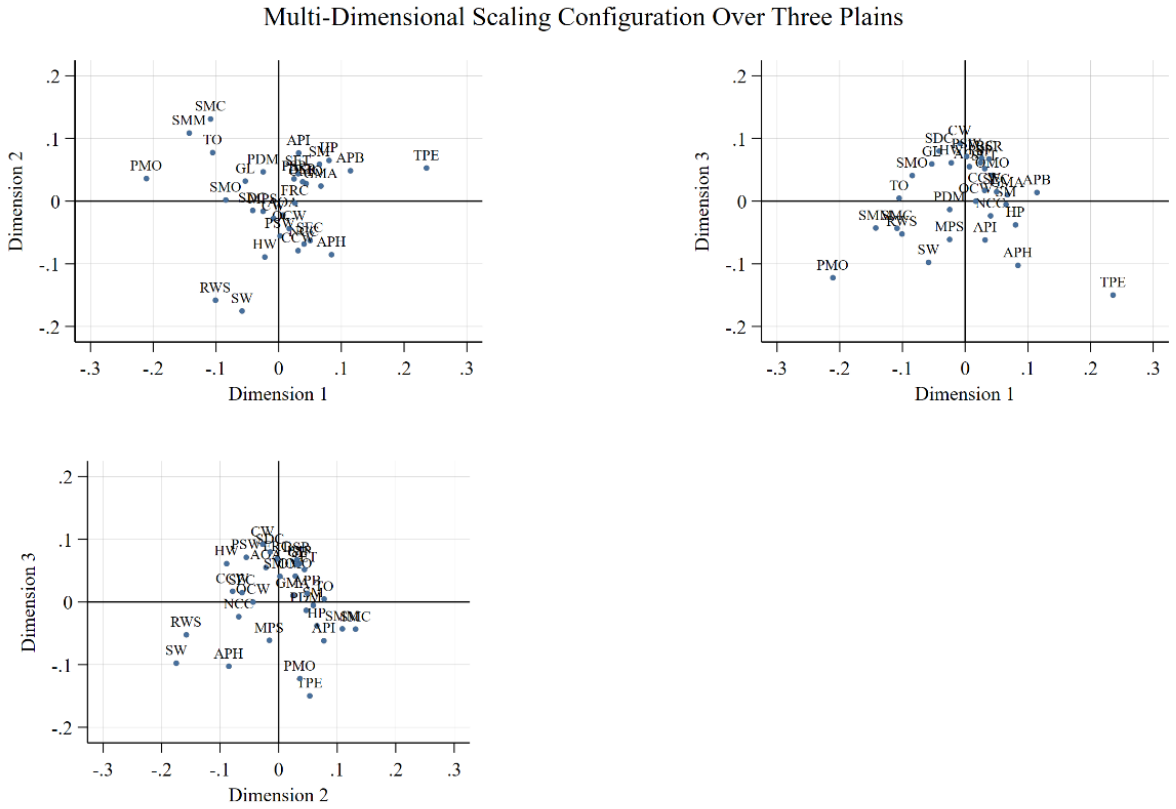
Multi-Dimensional Scaling Configuration Over Three Plains



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=4,769

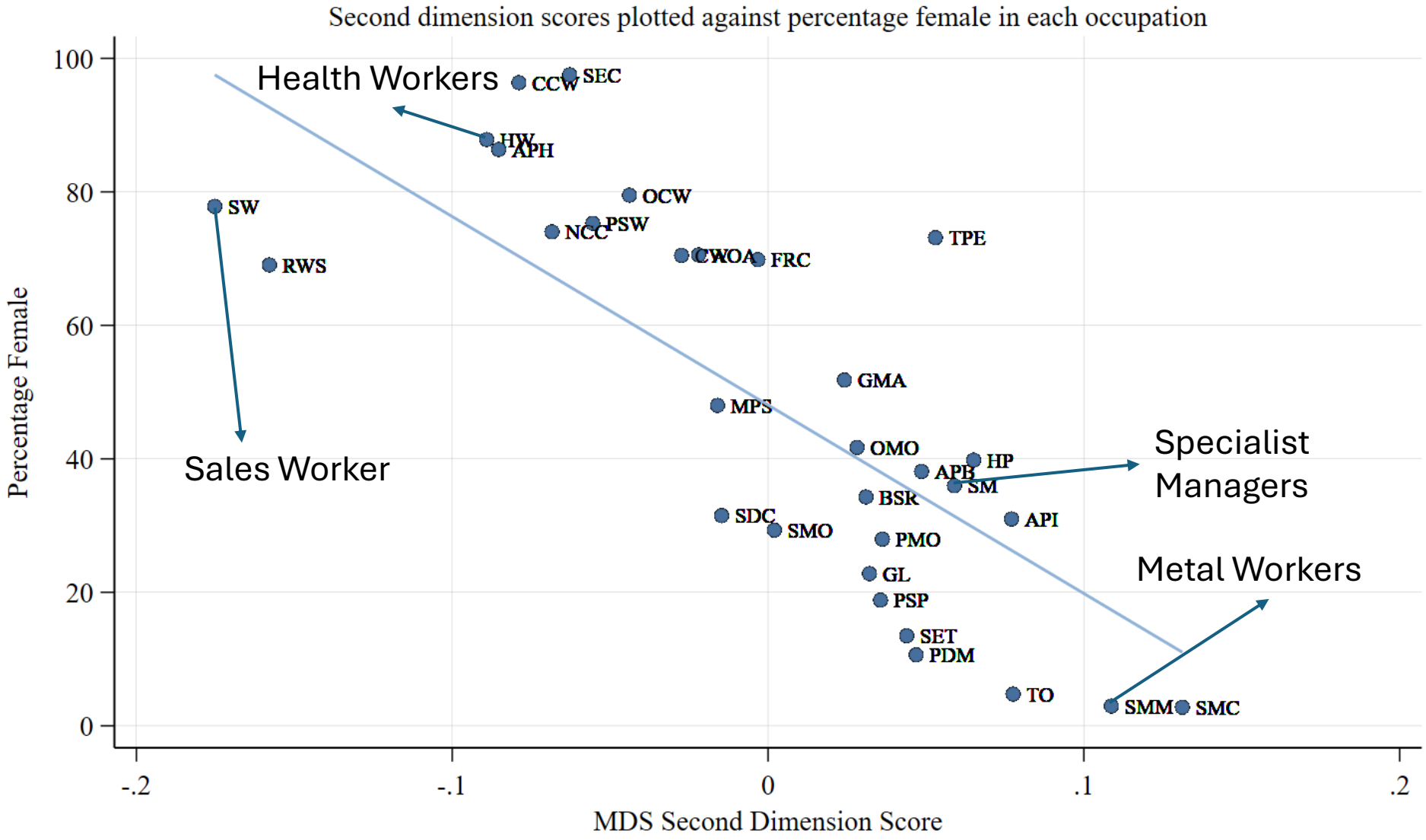
Data taken from indiviudal and partner occupational titles (MOGs)

- Dimension two appears to, like prior analysis conducted by Chan and Goldthorpe (2004) and Chan et al (2001) to be an expression of sex-segregated occupations



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=4,769

Data taken from indiviudal and partner occupational titles (MOGs)

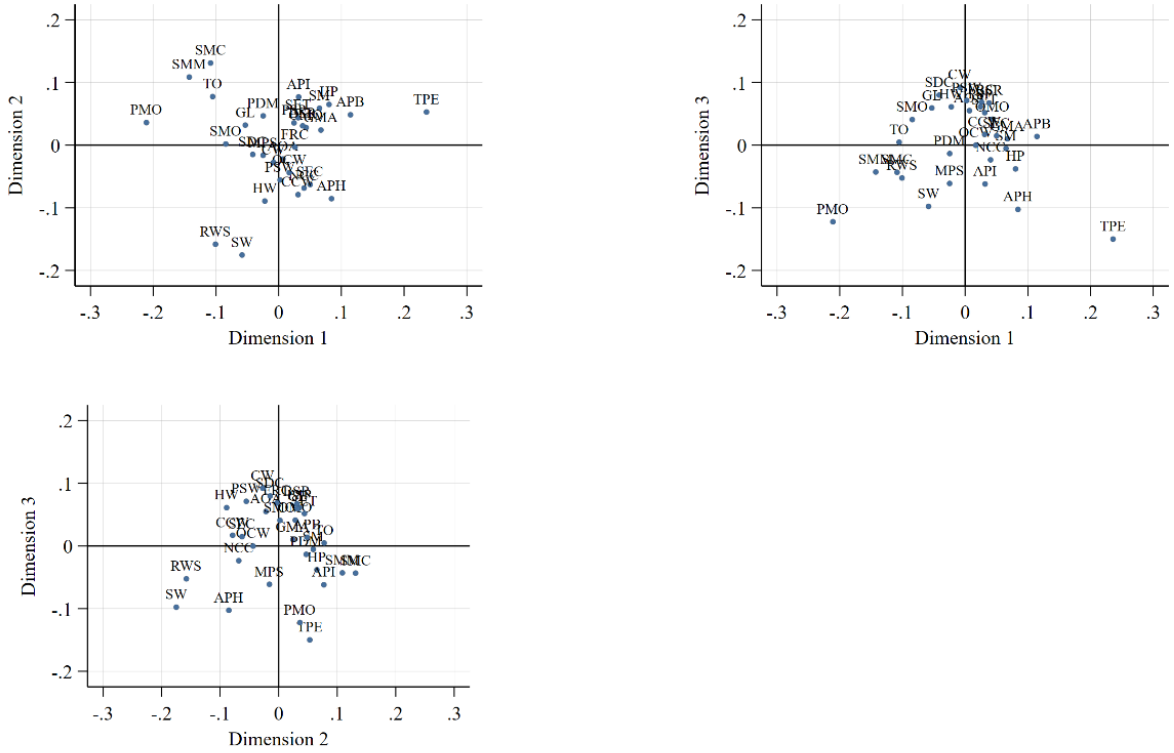


Data from BHPS wave 10. N=8,448

Correlation: -0.78

- Dimension three appears to be a ‘noisy’ leftover dimension, concurring with similar findings from Chan and Goldthorpe (2004).

Multi-Dimensional Scaling Configuration Over Three Plains



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=4,769

Data taken from indiviudal and partner occupational titles (MOGs)

Improving the Chan-Goldthorpe Scale

- Factor analysis provides a solution to extract the relevant latent attributes of these variables that this paper defines as: Homophily, Cultural Consumption, Friendship Closeness, and Monopolistic Acquisition.

- The first of these measures has already been constructed via MDSCAL analysis and the first dimension is reasonably assumed to be a measure of social distance.

Improving the Chan-Goldthorpe Scale: Cultural Consumption

- Cultural consumption is created through the work of Bourdiusian inspired consumption practices (Savage, Warde and Devine, 2005; Bourdieu, 2013; Payne, 2013; Savage *et al.*, 2013). Two summary measures are created that produce a sum of highbrow cultural consumption and emerging cultural consumption.

- Emerging = an individual watches sport, goes to the cinema, goes out drinking, and does DIY around the house.

- Highbrow = playing sport, going to the theatre, eating out at restaurants, gardening, attend evening classes, attend local groups, and volunteer.

Improving the Chan-Goldthorpe Scale: Social Intercourse

- Closeness to friends was created through three identical measures of friendship relations. Each variable asks the individual how often do you interact with your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd closest friends. This was generated into a summary measure of closeness.

Improving the Chan-Goldthorpe Scale: Monopolistic Acquisition

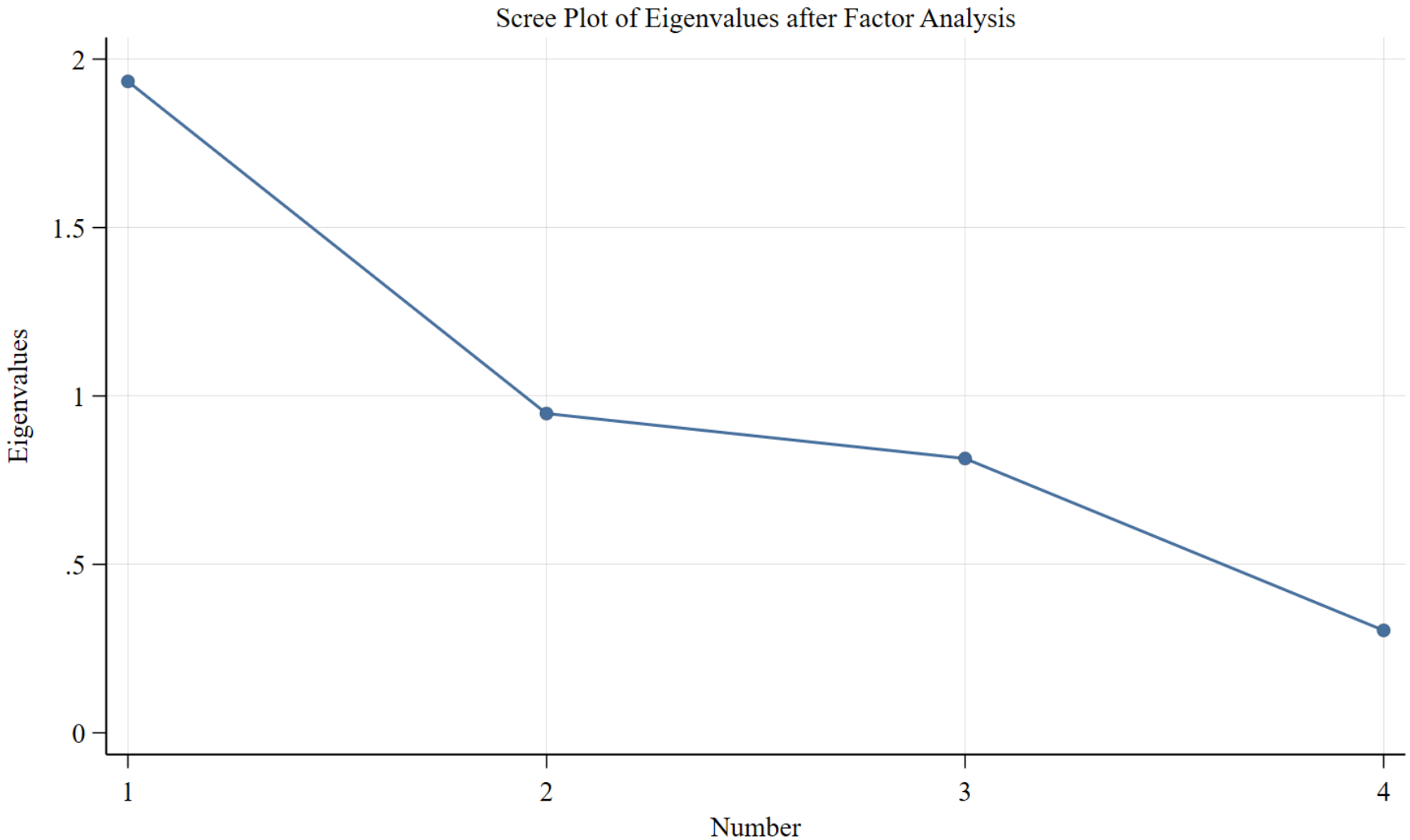
- Monopolistic acquisition measure is produced via sum measure of monopolistic traits on certain rewards and resources

- Degree ownership, salary versus hourly worker, manual versus non-manual, welfare versus non-welfare recipient, member of political party, union, or religious organisation

- In addition to these initial measures, Weberian Stände has a direct linkage to German medieval guilds – in other words, licences of specific guilds/clubs that are directly linked to employment relations. Whilst this question is not asked explicitly within the BHPS using SOC codes and linking these to the UK regulated professions list that requires specific occupations to be licensed and regulated allows a measure of licence to be created (Department for Business and Trade, 2025).

Factor Analysis

- Z standardised to provide equal weighting
- rotated using orthogonal varimax rotation
  - This involves scaling the loadings by dividing them by the corresponding communality
- Factor one loads all variables well except for emerging cultural consumption. Emerging cultural consumption was dropped from the measure due to poor loading and the factor analysis was re-run with only one factor being retained
- Recent analysis by Friedman and Reeves (2024) suggests that emerging cultural consumption has become a universal practice, though highbrow consumption is still a key indicator of elite status, which provides some evidence towards the weak loading



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=6,370

Data taken from standardised homophily, social closeness, highbrow consumption, and monopolistic acquisition measures

Stände

- The resulting measure provides a social status position

- This scale can be mapped back onto MOGs to provide a rank order of status positions by occupational titles

Rank order of MOGs for Stände measure

Rank	Occupation	Mean
1	TPE	2.08
2	HP	1.28
3	APH	1.04
4	APB	0.93
5	GMA	0.71
6	SM	0.69
7	SET	0.64
8	API	0.55
9	OMO	0.54
10	NCC	0.22
11	SEC	0.22
12	AOA	0.21
13	PSP	0.20
14	FRC	0.19
15	CCW	0.19
16	PDM	0.18
17	BSR	0.12
18	OCW	0.08
19	MPS	-0.13
20	HW	-0.37
21	PSW	-0.43
22	SDC	-0.47
23	GL	-0.63
24	CW	-0.72
25	TO	-0.73
26	SMO	-0.81
27	SW	-0.82
28	SMC	-0.89
29	RWS	-1.11
30	SMM	-1.14
31	PMO	-1.49

Similarities and Differences between existing measures of status and social distance

Comparison of Stände by MOGs rank following MDSCAL

Rank	Chan-Goldthorpe Scale	z mean	Stände Scale	Rank Change from Chan	z mean	Cambridge Scale	Rank Change from Chan	z mean
1	HP	1.22	TPE	↑3	2.35	TPE	↑3	1.86
2	APB	1.19	HP	↓1	1.45	HP	↓1	1.83
3	SM	1.01	***APH***	***↑10***	***1.18***	***OMO***	***↑6***	***1.23***
4	TPE	2.05	APB	↓2	1.05	SET	↑2	1.19
5	GMA	0.97	GMA	-	0.81	GMA	-	1.13
6	SET	0.85	SM	↓3	0.78	SM	↓3	1
7	API	0.71	SET	↓1	0.73	***APB***	***↓5***	***0.78***
8	FRC	0.45	API	↓1	0.63	***BSR***	***↑9***	***0.56***
9	OMO	0.75	OMO	-	0.61	APH	↑4	0.55
10	PSP	-0.05	NCC	↑4	0.25	***PDM***	***↑10***	***0.53***
11	PSW	-0.42	SEC	↑4	0.24	API	↓4	0.52
12	AOA	0.37	AOA	-	0.24	SEC	↑3	0.48
13	APH	0.95	PSP	↓3	0.23	AOA	↓1	0.23
14	NCC	0.48	**FRC**	**↑6**	**0.22**	NCC	-	0.19
15	SEC	0.51	CCW	↑3	0.22	MPS	↑4	0.04
16	OCW	0.3	PDM	↑4	0.21	OCW	-	-0.02
17	BSR	0.16	BSR	-	0.14	CCW	↑1	-0.1
18	CCW	-0.06	OCW	↓2	0.09	SW	↑3	-0.34
19	MPS	0.1	MPS	-	-0.14	***PSW***	***↓7***	***-0.36***
20	PDM	0.3	HW	↑2	-0.42	***FRC***	***↓12***	***-0.48***
21	SW	-0.93	***PSW***	***↓10***	***-0.49***	***PSP***	***↓11***	***-0.51***
22	HW	-0.72	SDC	↑3	-0.53	CW	↑2	-0.63
23	RWS	-1.26	***GL***	***↑8***	***-0.71***	***SMM***	***↑6***	***-0.68***
24	CW	-0.81	CW	-	-0.82	HW	↓2	-0.72
25	SDC	-0.33	TO	↑2	-0.83	SMO	↑1	-0.77
26	SMO	-1.1	SMO	-	-0.92	SMC	↑2	-0.77
27	TO	-1.09	***SW***	***↓6***	***-0.92***	SDC	↓2	-0.99
28	SMC	-0.99	SMC	-	-1.00	***RWS***	***↓5***	***-1.19***
29	SMM	-1.31	***RWS***	***↓6***	***-1.26***	TO	↓2	-1.2
30	PMO	-1.78	SMM	↓1	-1.29	PMO	-	-1.22
31	GL	-0.71	PMO	↓1	-1.69	GL	-	-1.3

The return of the manual/non-manual divide?

- Contemporary social class measures, particularly NS-SEC makes a strong case that the British labour market and class structure has moved away from a manual/non-manual divide
  - One of the many reasons why NS-SEC was developed and moved away from RGSC

Mean Ständer by Example Occupations and Degree of Manual Labour

Rank	Own Analysis	Example Occupations	Level of Manual Labour
1	TPE	College lecturers, education officers and inspectors, school teachers	1
2	HP	chartered accountants, clergy, medical practitioners, solicitors	1
3	APH	Community workers, nurses, occupational therapists, youth workers	2
4	APB	Journalists, investment analysts, insurance brokers, designers	1
5	GMA	Bank and building society managers, general managers in industry, national and local government officers	1
6	SM	company treasurers, financial managers, computer systems managers, personnel managers	1
7	SET	Civil and structural engineers, clinical biochemists, industrial chemists, planning engineers, software engineers	1
8	API	Computer analysts and programmers, quantity surveyors, vocational and industrial trainers	1
9	OMO	Security managers, cleaning managers	2
10	NCC	Accounts assistants, bank clerks	2
11	SEC	Personal assistants, receptionists, secretaries, word processor operators	2
12	AOA	Clerical officers in national and local government	2
13	PSP	Service and police officers, security guards	3
14	FRC	Conveyancing clerks, computer clerks, library assistants	2
15	CCW	Educational assistants, nursery nurses	2
16	PDM	Clerks of works, farm managers, maintenance managers, transport managers, works managers	2
17	BSR	Buyers and purchasing officers, technical sales representatives, wholesale representatives	2
18	OCW	General assistants, commercial and clerical assistants	2
19	MPS	Catering managers, hoteliers, publicans, shopkeepers and managers	2
20	HW	Ambulance staff, dental nurses, nursing auxiliaries	3
21	PSW	Caretakers and housekeepers, hairdressers and beauticians, travel attendants, undertakers	3
22	SDC	Dispatch and production control clerks, storekeepers	3
23	GL	Agricultural workers, factory labourers, goods porters, refuse collectors	4
24	CW	Bar staff, chefs, cooks, waiters and waitresses	3
25	TO	Bus and coach drivers, lorry and van drivers, taxi drivers	4
26	SMO	Gardeners and groundsmen, printers, textile workers, woodworkers	4
27	SW	Cash desk and check-out operators, sales and shop assistants, window dressers	3
28	SMC	Bricklayers, electricians, painters and decorators, plasterers, roofers, telephone repairmen	4
29	RWS	Car park attendants, cleaners, counter-hands, couriers and messengers, hotel porters, postal workers	3
30	SMM	Fitters, setters, setter-operators, sheet metal workers, turners, welders	4
31	PMO	Assemblers, canners, fillers and packers, food processors, moulders and extruders, routine inspectors and testers	4

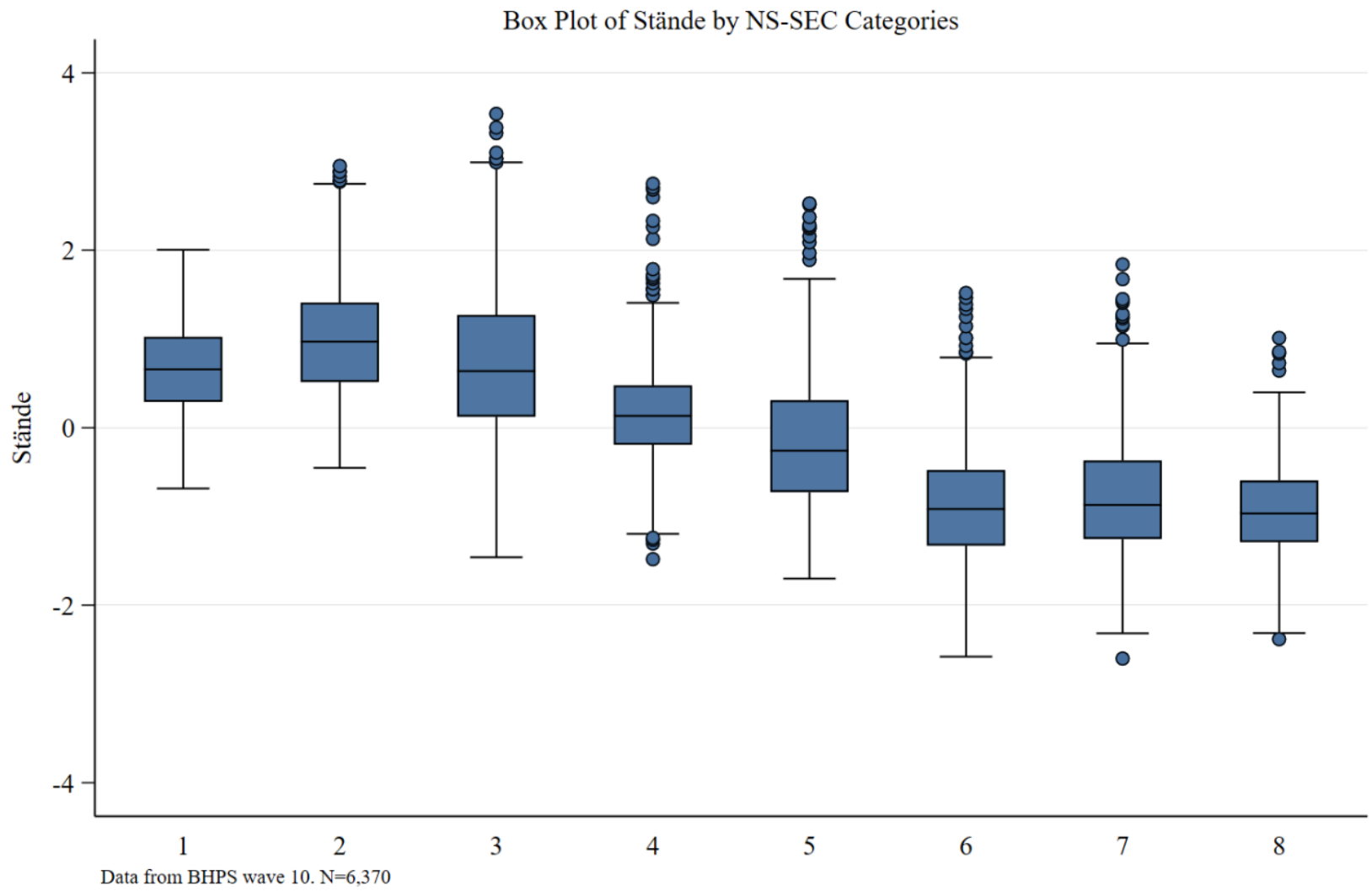
Social Status, Epiphenomenal Measures, and Construct Validity

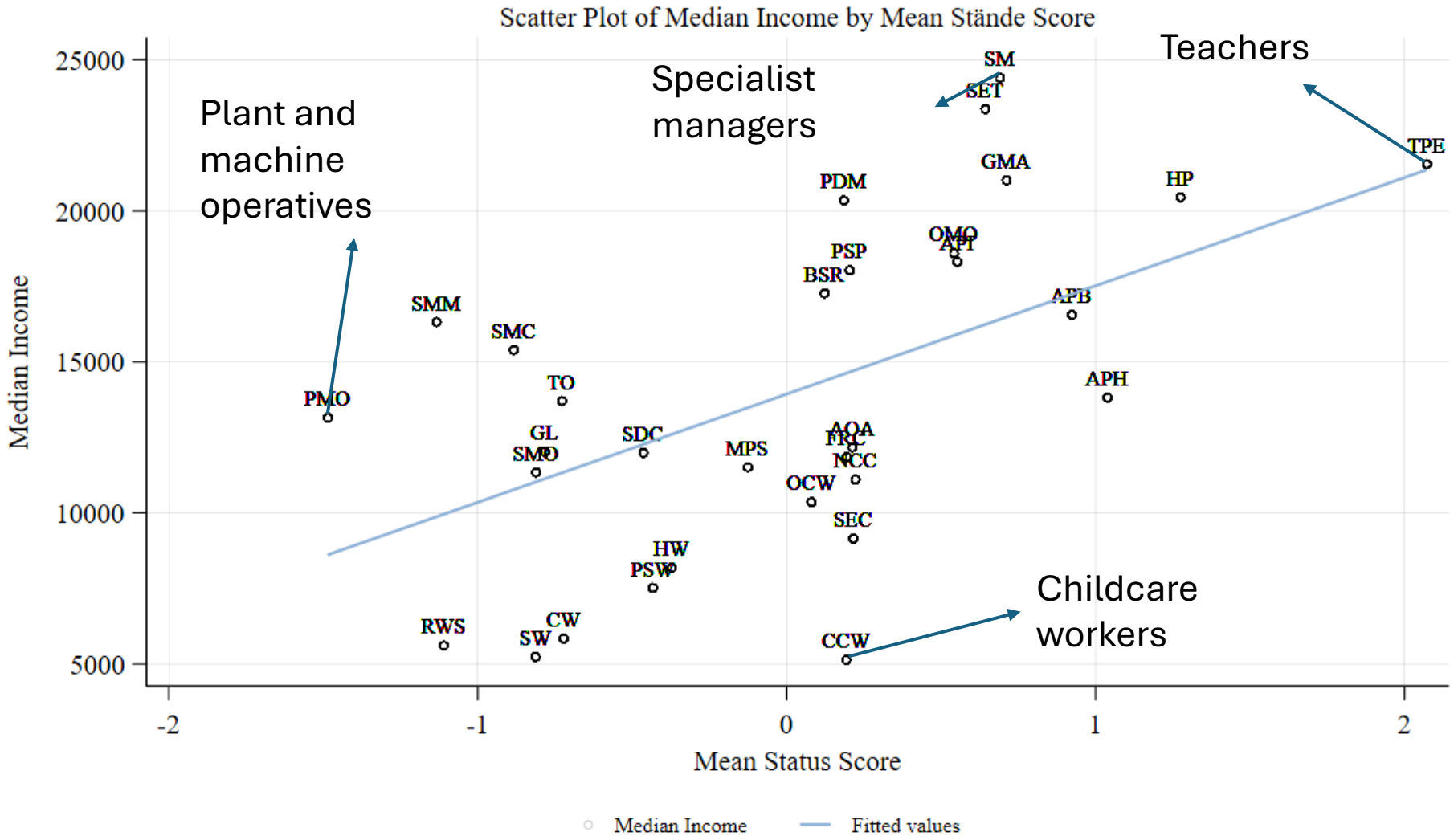
- An appropriate measure of social stratification must be statistically unique from existing measures to avoid collinearity.
- Not only must this paper's social status measure be sociologically derived from Weberian traditions of social status, but it must also be statistically independent from alternative measures of social stratification.

- Income, Education, and Social Class

Comparison of mean Stände scores by NS-SEC category

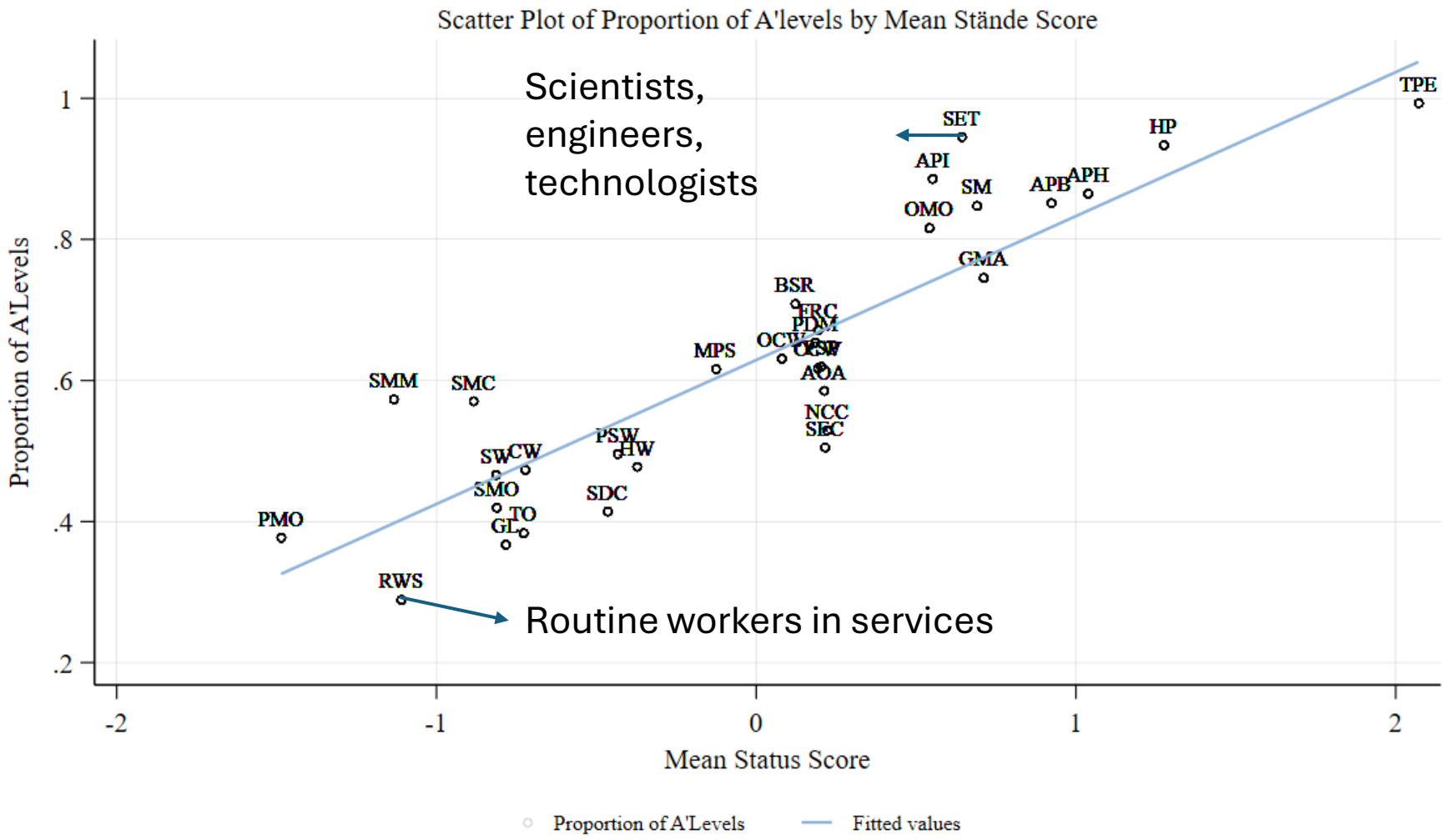
Division of Labour	NS-SEC	Chan-Goldthorpe	Stände Scale	Cambridge Scale
White Collar	1.1	0.89	0.62	0.94
	1.2	1.19	1.13	1.40
	2	0.73	0.85	0.79
	3	0.40	0.16	0.06
Petite Bourgeoisie	4	-0.39	-0.32	-0.18
Blue Collar	5	-1.04	-1.00	-0.74
	6	-0.57	-0.83	-0.67
	7	-0.99	-0.90	-1.10


Box Plot of Stände by NS-SEC Categories
Stände
4
2
0
-2
-4
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
Data from BHPS wave 10. N=6,370



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=6,370

Correlation: 0.58



Data from BHPS wave 10. N=6,370

Correlation: 0.89

Linear Correlation of Status Measures

Linear correlation of measures			
	Chan-Goldthorpe scale	**Stände scale**	**Cambridge scale**
Chan-Goldthorpe scale	1.00		
Stände scale	0.80	1.00	
Cambridge scale	0.81	0.78	1.00

Conclusions so far…

- Stände as a measure is similar, though not the same as the CG scale
- Whilst epiphenomenal to Big Three stratification measures, Stände is not determined by them
- Importantly, social class and Stände are not linear
  - You can have a high status and a relatively underprivileged class location and vice versa

Statistical Modelling

- Duplicates and extends the work of Chan and Goldthorpe (2007). Specifically, the use of the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) is used to measure the impact that social status has upon matters of economic life chances and social life through two dependent measures.

- Subsequent modelling uses these dependent variables as determinants of political attitudes on left-right and libertarian-authoritarian scales using ordinary least squares linear regression.

- Whilst Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) use the 2002 BSA survey, this analysis uses the 2001 and 2003 version of the BSA in addition to the 2002 version. This was done to assess the consistency of measures of social status under the same model over time.

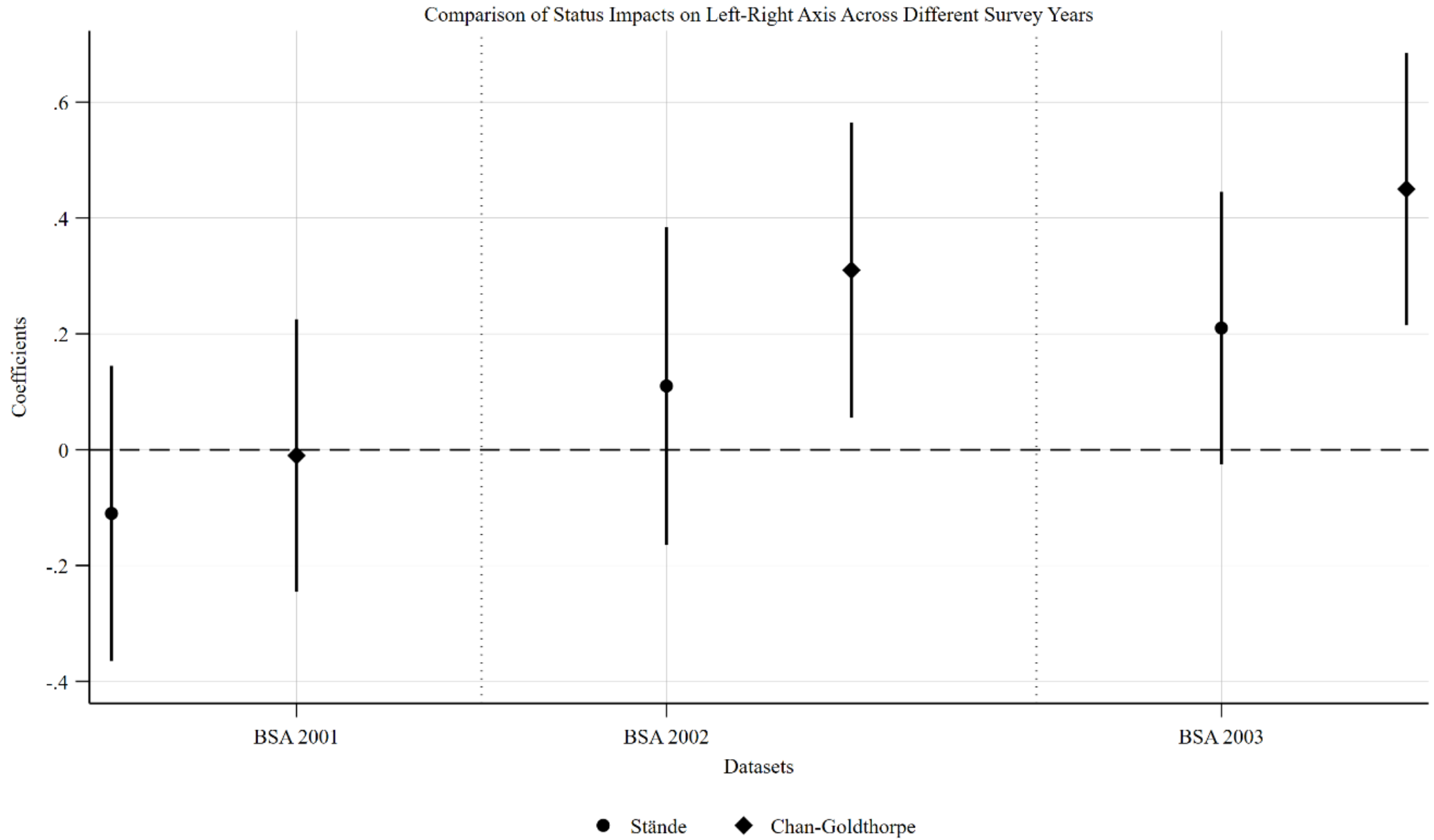
- These models provide a direct 1:1 comparison of the Stände measure versus the CG scale

- Importantly, whilst all attempts were made to replicate their original models, substantial deviations have occurred in the comparison of results…

- Three figures are produced, the first is a coefficient plot that provides the coefficient and 95% confidence intervals for each ‘left-right’ model across all three BSA survey years for the Stände and Chan-Goldthorpe scales (resulting in six models in total).

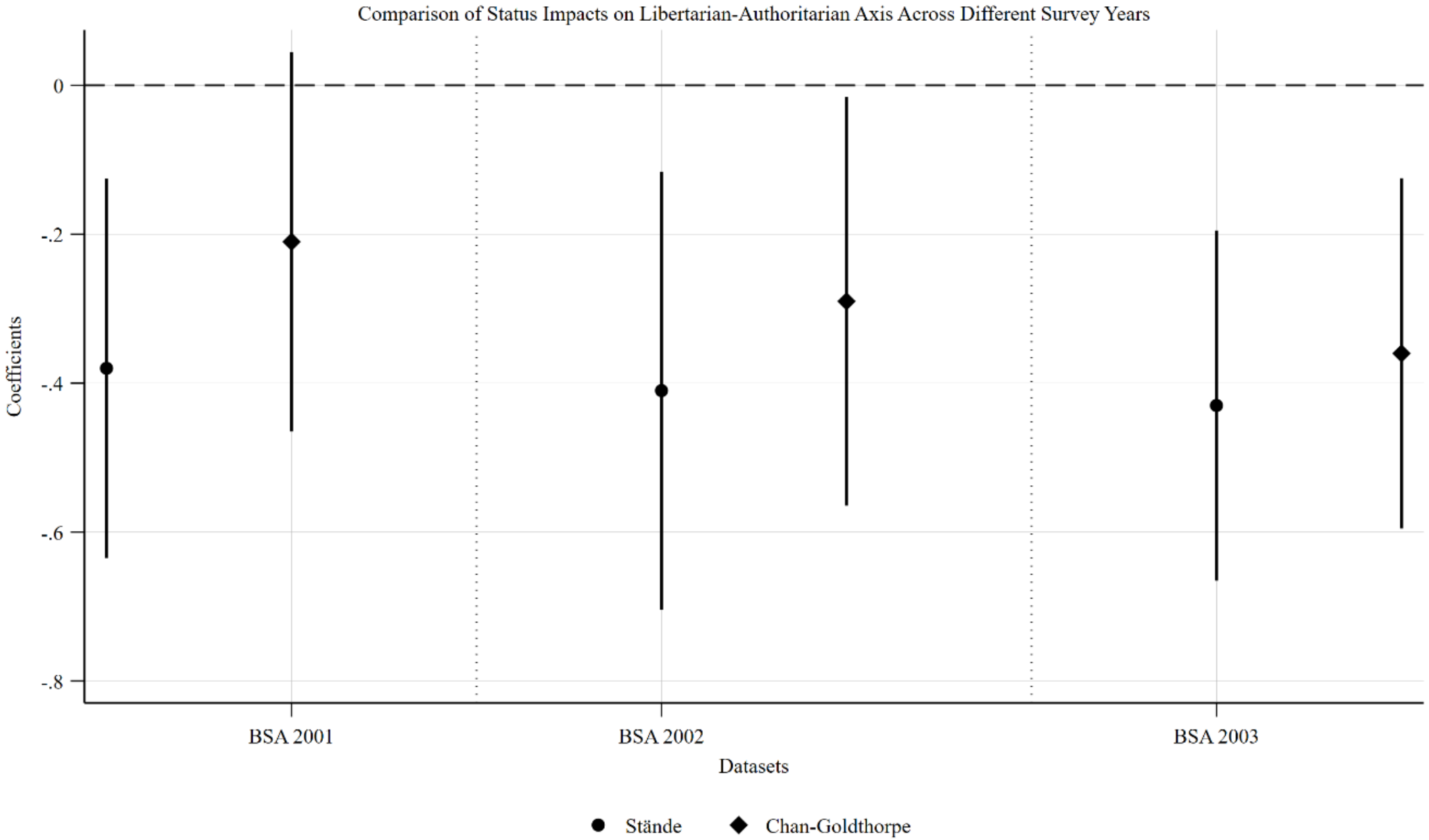
- The second is an identical coefficient plot for the ‘libertarian-authoritarian’ models.

- A third figure produces the marginal effects at means for each status measure across each BSA survey year



Data Source: BSA 2001, 2002, 2003. Appropriate weights applied.

All other covariates controlled for. Status measures standardised for comparison.

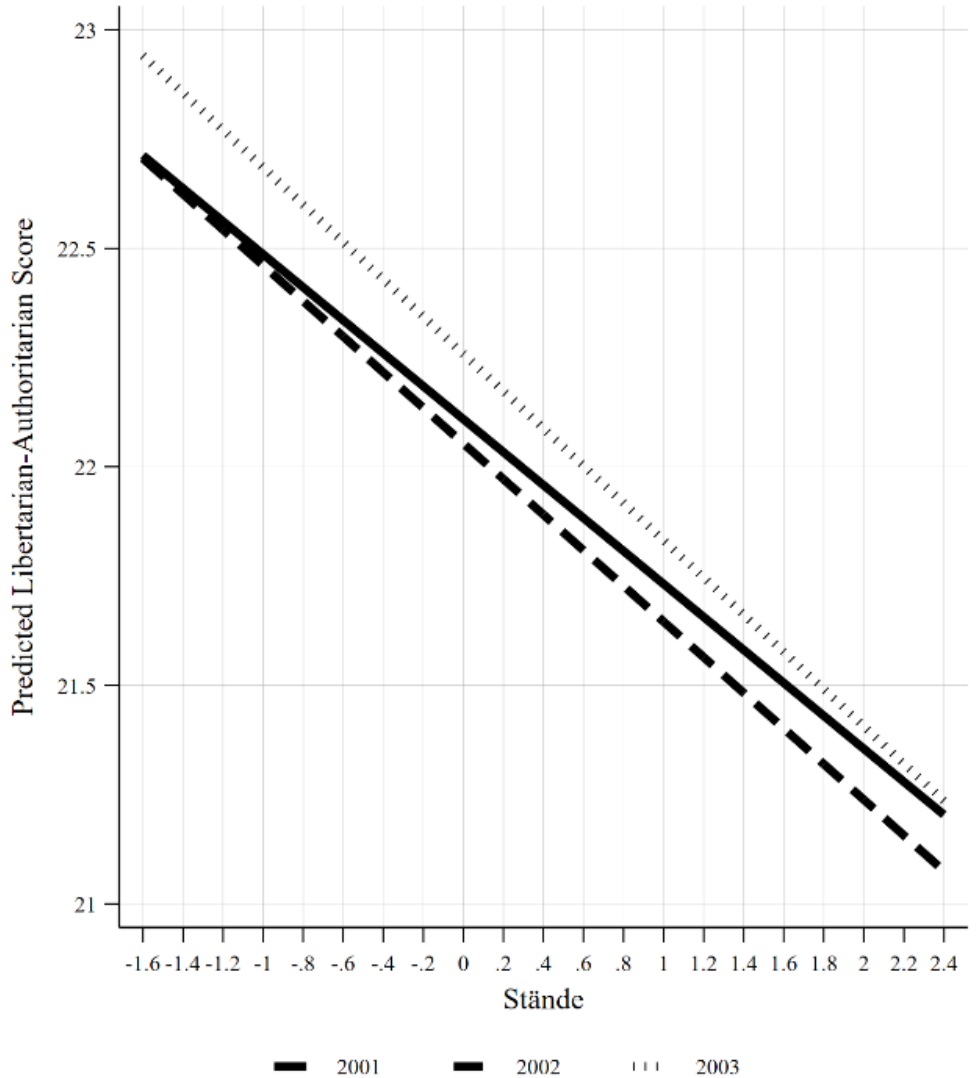


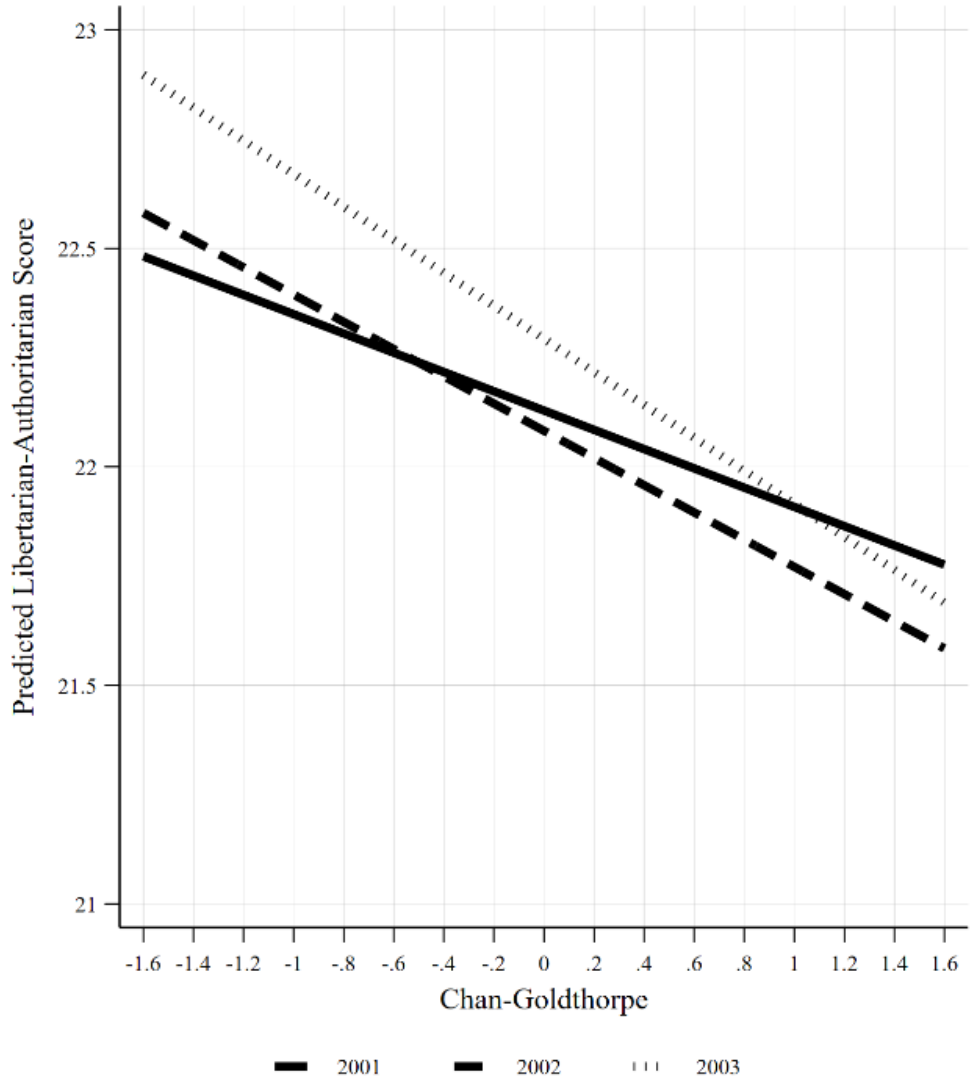
Data Source: BSA 2001, 2002, 2003. Appropriate weights applied.

All other covariates controlled for. Status measures standardised for comparison.

Comparison of Social Status Measures on Libertarian-Authoritarian Axis

Marginal Effects at Means





Data Source: BSA 2001, 2002, 2003. Appropriate weights applied.

All other covariates controlled for. Status measures standardised for comparison.

Conclusion

- This paper has produced a viable alternative to existing Weberian measures of social status for use in quantitative social scientific research

- This new measure provides a consistent scale of social status that adheres to a Weberian theoretical orientation in its construction and in its separation of concepts of class and status.

- The Stände measure thus presents a stable and consistent measure of social status that adheres to Weberian social theory whilst having no compromise on overall model fit.

Questions?