

UK: Survey charts emergence of new class system

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The traditional view of a Britain made up working, middle and upper class people is no longer accurate, according to one of the largest studies of its kind.

The Great British Class Survey of 161,000 people, has charted the emergence of a new class system comprising seven groups in Britain, blurring the conventional boundaries between the 'middle' and 'working' classes.

It was led by BBC LabUK, and leading [sociologists](#) Professor Fiona Devine from The University of Manchester and Professor Mike Savage from the London School of Economics

The results of the web survey are published in this month's issue of the journal *Sociology*.

According to GBCS, only 39% of [Britons](#) now fit the [stereotypes](#) of middle and working class – those in the 'Established [Middle Class](#)' and the 'Traditional Working Class'.

Professor Savage said: "Occupation has been the traditional way to define a person's class, but this is actually too simplistic.

"In fact, social class goes far wider than that: economic, social, and cultural dimensions all play an important role.

"So economic capital: income, savings, house value; social capital: the number, and status of people we know; and cultural capital: the extent and nature of cultural interests and activities all play a part."

The 'Technical Middle Class' a small, distinctive new class group that is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital is distinguished by its [social isolation](#) and cultural [apathy](#).

'Emergent Service Workers', a new, young, urban group is relatively poor but has high social and cultural capital.

They appear to be the children of the traditional working class, which has been fragmented by de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, immigration and a shift from manufacturing to service-based employment.

And 'New Affluent Workers' is another young class group, which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of [economic capital](#).

Professor Devine said: "Many people think that the problem of social and cultural engagement is more marked in poorer class groups, but the GBCS shows that our levels of social and cultural capital don't always mirror our economic success.

"The 'Technical Middle Class' score low for social and cultural capital but is quite well off, while the 'Emergent Service Workers' score highly for cultural and social capital but are not very prosperous.

"The 'Elite and Precariat groups' at the extremes of our class system have been missed in conventional approaches to class analysis, which have focussed on the middle and working classes."

Professor Savage added: "The Elite group is shown to have the most

privileged backgrounds also is an important demonstration of the accentuation of social advantage at the top of British society.

"But a relatively old and small traditional [working class](#) is fading from contemporary importance."

More information: The paper 'A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment', published in the journal *Sociology*, was presented in a plenary at the British Sociological Association annual conference. It is available.

Provided by University of Manchester

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