Dear Dr. Zucca,

We are pleased that the reviewers recognized our paper's methodological innovation, its transparent use of network models, and its relevance to understanding belief systems on inequality.

We have organized the reviewers' comments into bullet points and, in the following letter, provide a detailed account of how we addressed each of them.

Comments from the Editor

Rationale for Focusing on the US Sample:

1. The paper uses the ISSP, an international data source, but focuses solely on the US sample. The authors should clarify why they chose this focus. Are there assumptions that the network structure and dynamics in the US differ from those in other countries? If so, the authors should discuss these assumptions and justify their focus on the US. Additionally, they could consider comparing the US data with data from other countries to confirm these differences.

We thank the editor for the thoughtful comment regarding our focus on the United States. To address this, we have added a paragraph to the Introduction clarifying our rationale:

"Inequality is one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary societies, particularly in the United States, where economic disparities are among the highest in Western nations (Atkinson et al., 2011; Neckerman & Torche, 2007). Over recent decades, rising disparities have created significant gaps in living conditions (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), with the richest 10% controlling about 70% of wealth while the bottom half owns less than 2% (Chancel et al., 2022). These issues are exacerbated by strong socioeconomic segregation (Mijs & Roe, 2021) and limited social mobility (Hout, 2018; OECD, 2018). Despite these economic gaps, public concern about inequality has not risen proportionately (Kenworthy & McCall, 2007; Lierse et al., 2022), with individuals often misunderstanding or underestimating its extent (Chambers et al., 2014; Trump, 2023). The U.S. is an especially relevant context for studying attitudes towards inequality due to its deep disparities and a long tradition of research in this field (e.g., Kluegel & Smith, 1981; McCall, 2013). Prior studies highlight the U.S. public's strong belief in meritocracy (Mijs, 2018b) and relatively low support for redistribution (Alesina et al., 2001; Hoy & Mager, 2021)."

We also expanded the Discussion section to interpret the results within the unique U.S. context, aligning them with key studies on inequality and redistribution. While cross-country comparisons are an interesting avenue, this study focuses on the U.S. to provide a deeper understanding of attitudes dynamics.

Network Approach:

1. On page 22, the term "cross-dimensional" is used, despite earlier criticism of the dimensionality and latent variable approach. The network approach generally opposes the latent variable and dimensions approach for attitudes and social constructs. The authors should clarify why they use this term in the results section and also explain their use of "multidimensionality" in the discussion on page 29.

We appreciate the editor's observation regarding our use of the terms "cross-dimensional" and "multidimensionality." To address this, we have revised the manuscript to replace them with "multifaceted" throughout the results and the discussion section to better align with the network approach, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of attitudes without relying on latent variables or dimensionality.

2. In Figure 1, data from the GGM and the Ising model are presented. The authors should explain the differences between these models in more detail and indicate which model they believe is superior or more relevant.

We thank the editor for pointing out the need to clarify the differences between the MGM and Ising models in Figure 1. In response, we have improved the Methods section to provide a clearer explanation of each model. On page 11, we describe how the MGM (mixed graphical model) estimates linear associations across mixed data types, offering a nuanced representation of belief system structures. On page 13, we introduce the Ising model as a binary-specific method derived from the MGM, which estimates logistic regression-based associations and incorporates parameters like thresholds, enabling the simulation of systemic dynamics. Additionally, the MNM (moderated network model) is explained on page 13 as a powerful innovation for comparing belief systems across groups.

In the Conclusions section (pages 23–24), we emphasize how each method contributes uniquely to belief system research. The MGM is highlighted for its ability to model mixed data types, while the Ising model is underscored for analyzing binary networks and simulating changes within belief systems. Together, these methods offer complementary insights, advancing the methodological tools available for studying belief systems and inequality attitudes.

3. The paper only presents the strengths of centrality, not the betweenness and closeness of the nodes. Including these measures would provide a more comprehensive view of the network.

We appreciate the editor's suggestion to include additional centrality measures such as betweenness and closeness. To address this concern, we have included a detailed footnote on pages 12 and 13 to justify our decision to focus solely on Strength centrality. Specifically, we explain that metrics like betweenness and closeness assume influence flows along the most efficient network paths—a problematic assumption for belief networks, where nodes represent attitudes that lack agency (Bringmann et al., 2019). Furthermore, Dablander and Hinne (2019) demonstrate that Strength centrality, unlike Betweenness and Closeness, strongly correlates with causal influence in directed networks, making it particularly relevant for belief network analysis, and our H4 tapping into attitude change.

The footnote reads: "*We avoid using additional centrality metrics due to concerns about their assumptions, which may not apply to belief networks. Bringmann et al. (2019) highlight that metrics like betweenness and closeness assume influence flows along the most efficient network paths. This assumption is problematic in belief systems, where nodes represent attitudes—constructs deprived of agency. Moreover, Dablander and Hinne (2019) showed that Strength centrality, unlike Betweenness and Closeness, strongly correlates with causal influence when combined with Directed Acyclic Graphs. Based on these findings, we use Strength centrality to evaluate H2 and H4, ensuring theoretical and methodological alignment with belief network analysis.*"

Based on these theoretical and methodological considerations, we opted to use Strength centrality as the most appropriate measure to evaluate our hypotheses (H2 and H4). This approach ensures alignment with the belief system literature and avoids potential misinterpretations of influence dynamics.

4. The authors should also include sum scores of the simulation samples to show the effect of changes in single nodes.

We thank the editor for the suggestion to include sum scores of the simulation samples to demonstrate the effects of changes in single nodes. These scores were already presented in the prior version of the manuscript in Figure 5, titled *"Network sum scores after simulated*

manipulation attempts." **However, to improve readability and enhance comprehension for readers, we have now added the label *"Mean sum scores"* to the figure.**

This modification ensures that the representation of the results is clearer and more accessible to readers, while maintaining the robustness of our analysis. We appreciate the opportunity to refine the manuscript further.

Presentation of the Results:

1. The results section is currently not very reader-friendly, as it uses many abbreviations for the nodes that are not immediately clear. This makes the results hard to understand, and the core findings are not very apparent.

We appreciate the editor's feedback regarding the readability of the Results section. In response, we have thoroughly revised this section to enhance its clarity and accessibility. Specifically, we replaced the abbreviations for the nodes with their substantive labels, ensuring that the findings are more immediately understandable to readers. Additionally, we streamlined the text by reducing the use of parentheses for confidence intervals and other technical details that were not essential to testing the hypotheses.

These changes have significantly improved the readability and comprehension of the Results section, making the core findings more apparent and the narrative more concise. We thank the editor for this valuable suggestion, which has strengthened the manuscript.

2. The authors should more clearly and structurally refer to their four hypotheses in the results and discussion sections, rather than only describing detailed results.

We acknowledge the editor's observation regarding the need for clearer and more structured references to our hypotheses in the Results and Discussion sections. To address this, we have revised the manuscript to explicitly state whether each hypothesis is confirmed or not throughout the Results section. Specifically:

- **In subsection 4.1, *"Modeling the Inequality Belief Systems,"* we address Hypotheses 1 and 2.**
- **In subsection 4.2, *"Estimating the Impact of Anger in the Inequality Belief System,"* we evaluate Hypothesis 3.**
- **In subsection 4.3, *"Simulating Attitude Change,"* we discuss Hypothesis 4.**

These revisions ensure a clear and systematic alignment between the results and the hypotheses, thereby enhancing the structure and coherence of the manuscript.

3. Including 1-2 graphs showing the network structure, and possibly the community structure, would greatly enhance the clarity and impact of the results.

We appreciate the editor's suggestion to include visual representations of the network and community structure to enhance the clarity and impact of the results. In response, we have incorporated the community structure into Figures 1, 3, and 4 by coloring the nodes according to their community membership. Additionally, we have updated the figure legends to explicitly describe these community groupings, providing readers with a clear visual representation of the network structure.

<u>Comments from the Reviewer 1</u>

Your manuscript is well-written and provides a comprehensive overview of using network analysis to study attitudes toward inequality.

1. To support your methodological approach, please provide the rationale for focusing on the US sample and/or compare the network with other national contexts.

We thank the reviewer 1 for the thoughtful comment regarding our focus on the United States. To address this, we have added a paragraph to the Introduction clarifying our rationale:

"Inequality is one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary societies, particularly in the United States, where economic disparities are among the highest in Western nations (Atkinson et al., 2011; Neckerman & Torche, 2007). Over recent decades, rising disparities have created significant gaps in living conditions (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), with the richest 10% controlling about 70% of wealth while the bottom half owns less than 2% (Chancel et al., 2022). These issues are exacerbated by strong socioeconomic segregation (Mijs & Roe, 2021) and limited social mobility (Hout, 2018; OECD, 2018). Despite these economic gaps, public concern about inequality has not risen proportionately (Kenworthy & McCall, 2007; Lierse et al., 2022), with individuals often misunderstanding or underestimating its extent (Chambers et al., 2014; Trump, 2023). The U.S. is an especially relevant context for studying attitudes towards inequality due to its deep disparities and a long tradition of research in this field (e.g., Kluegel & Smith, 1981; McCall, 2013). Prior studies highlight the U.S. public's strong belief in meritocracy (Mijs, 2018b) and relatively low support for redistribution (Alesina et al., 2001; Hoy & Mager, 2021)."

We also expanded the Discussion section to interpret the results within the unique U.S. context, aligning them with key studies on inequality and redistribution. While cross-country comparisons are an interesting avenue, this study focuses on the U.S. to provide a deeper understanding of its dynamics.

2. With regard to the network approach, ensure consistency in network terminology (avoid terms such as dimensionality).

We appreciate the reviewer's observation regarding our use of the terms "cross-dimensional" and "multidimensionality." To address this, we have revised the manuscript to replace them with "multifaceted" throughout the results and the discussion section to better align with the network approach, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of attitudes without relying on latent variables or dimensionality.

3. The results section would benefit from clearer presentation and reduced reliance on abbreviations.

We appreciate the reviewer's feedback regarding the readability of the Results section. In response, we have thoroughly revised this section to enhance its clarity and accessibility. Specifically, we replaced the abbreviations for the nodes with their substantive labels, ensuring that the findings are more immediately understandable to readers. Additionally, we streamlined the text by reducing the use of parentheses for confidence intervals and other technical details that were not essential to testing the hypotheses.

These changes have significantly improved the readability and comprehension of the Results section, making the core findings more apparent and the narrative more concise. We thank the reviewer 1 for this valuable suggestion, which has strengthened the manuscript.

4. Structurally refer to your hypotheses throughout, and incorporate additional visual aids to illustrate the network structure.

We thank the reviewer for their valuable suggestions to improve the manuscript's clarity and structure. To address the need for clearer references to our hypotheses, we have revised the Results section to explicitly state whether each hypothesis is confirmed or not. Specifically:

- **In subsection 4.1, *"Modeling the Inequality Belief Systems,"* we address Hypotheses 1 and 2.**
- **In subsection 4.2, *"Estimating the Impact of Anger in the Inequality Belief System,"* we evaluate Hypothesis 3.**
- **In subsection 4.3, *"Simulating Attitude Change,"* we discuss Hypothesis 4.**

Additionally, to enhance the clarity and impact of the results, we have incorporated the community structure into Figures 1, 3, and 4 by coloring the nodes according to their community membership. We also updated the figure legends to describe these community groupings explicitly.

5. Discuss broader implications for social science research and suggest directions for future research.

We appreciate the reviewer's suggestion to discuss broader implications and future research directions. In response, we have restructured the Conclusions section to highlight the study's methodological contributions, such as the use of advanced network models (e.g., mgm, MNM, Ising) to analyze belief systems, and its substantive findings on the central role of attitudes like income inequality perception and public redistribution in shaping broader belief dynamics. Additionally, we provide novel insights into the role of anger in polarizing inequality belief systems, emphasizing the importance of emotional dynamics in public attitudes.

We also outline key limitations and future research directions, including the need for panel data, improved simulation methods for real-world scenarios, and cross-contextual comparisons of inequality belief systems. Expanding the analysis to include other emotions could further illuminate how affect shapes attitudes. These revisions strengthen the manuscript's relevance and contribution to the field.

<u>Comments from the Reviewer 2</u>

1. I think the overall nature of the contribution to the literature should be clarified better. My understanding is that the article primarily offers a methodological contribution (which would also, I think, be the right fit for the audience of Network Science), but this is not made explicit. Instead, my sense is that, in the way the article addresses the literature (the levels versus structure of attitudes distinction), it is framed as an empirical contribution or both. For it to be a more solid methodological contribution, I think the following should be elaborated:

We greatly appreciate the thoughtful comments from the reviewer and have carefully addressed this important point. We believe that our work contributes both methodologically and substantively to the literature. To enhance this aspect of our manuscript, we have revised the abstract, introduction, and discussion sections. In the abstract, we now clearly state that:

"*scholars often compare belief systems using split-sample approaches without examining how emotions, such as anger, shape these systems. Moreover, they rarely test Converse's seminal idea that changes in central attitudes can lead to broader shifts in belief systems*".

The first part of the sentence highlights the methodological limitations of previous studies, while the second emphasizes the substantive contribution we aim to provide. In the introduction, we now state:

"*The network approach to studying attitudes towards inequality has two major limitations. First, researchers often split samples into groups to examine belief systems, either by grouping individuals with similar attitudinal structures (DiMaggio & Goldberg, 2018; Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019; Kesberg et al., 2024) or by comparing the belief systems of individuals with different socio-demographic characteristics (Franetovic & Bertero, 2023; Schlicht-Schmälzle et al., 2018).*

***While useful, this reduces statistical power and assumes belief systems differ only between groups, ignoring variations within them. Second, studies rarely examine attitude change, overlooking Converse's (2006) key proposition that shifts in one belief can realign others. For instance, heightened awareness of income inequality might lead to stronger support for redistributive policies, yet this dynamic remains largely unexplored (Brandt & Sleegers, 2021)*.**"

We further remark on this point in the discussion and conclusion sections.

2. A more systematic engagement with other kinds of methods that use latent or clustering approaches to understand co-occurence of attitudes and a brief discussion of how this field has dynamically evolved over the past years. The article offers some very interesting insights in this regard and discusses the Causal Attitude Network approach, but I think it would profit from embedding this into a more general discussion of where this methodological journey is heading and what kinds of assumptions are overcome in this way and why.

We have expanded the theoretical section of the article to provide a more comprehensive discussion of related techniques utilizing a network approach to attitudes. Specifically, we now include discussions on Relational and Correlational Class Analysis, along with a broader range of studies employing partial correlation networks and similar methodological variations:

"***Researchers in this field have primarily used two methodologies. On the one hand, scholars have used Correlational Class Analysis (CCA; Boutyline, 2017) or Relational Class Analysis (RCA; Goldberg, 2011). These techniques group individuals based on similar correlational patterns among their attitudes, mapping belief systems as networks of associations without assuming shared normative positions. For example, Kesberg et al. (2024) applied CCA to examine the validity of system justification theory (Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012), finding that social status negatively correlates with support for the status quo only within specific population segments, not universally. Using RCA, DiMaggio and Goldberg (2018) identified three distinct ways the U.S. public organizes attitudes towards the market: an "economistic" class favoring markets as beneficial, a "hostile worlds" class supporting markets but restricting morally contentious transactions (e.g., organ sales), and a "progressive" class endorsing markets with regulatory interventions to address market failures and protect public welfare.***

A second class of network methods, introduced by Boutyline and Vaisey (2017) and refined through advancements in network psychometrics (Borsboom et al., 2021) and political psychology (Brandt, 2022; Brandt et al., 2019), represents attitudes as nodes within weighted and signed networks, with edges indicating partial correlations between survey items. Franetovic and Bertero (2023) applied this approach to study inequality attitudes in Chile, revealing an integrated belief system with a small world structure. They also found that lower social groups exhibit higher connectivity, a feature linked to attitude strength (Dalege et al., 2019). Combining CCA with partial correlation networks, Bertero et al. (2024) identified two distinct types of belief systems in the U.S. and the Netherlands, showing that the organization of these systems significantly predicts support for public redistribution. "

3. How is "anger towards inequality" measured in the ISSP, and what does it meant to translate this variable into the specific methodological approach pursued by the author(s) here?

We sincerely thank the reviewer for bringing this oversight to our attention. We have clarified this point in the methods section:

" ***Finally, the 2019 ISSP Social Inequality module measures, for the first time, individuals' anger towards inequality. This item is addressed with the following survey question: "Some people feel angry about differences in wealth between the rich and the poor, while others do not. How do you feel when you think about differences in wealth between the rich and the poor in the U.S.?"***.

4. Are all three steps pursued in this analysis - modeling attitudes, estimating the role of anger, and simulating changes - necessary for the methodological contribution? These are very interesting and rich analytical steps, but my sense is that the manuscript doesn't yet achieve to show why and how they are logically and organically related towards a single contribution.

We believe that all analytical steps were essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of how attitudes towards inequality are structured at the full sample level ("modeling"), at varying levels of anger towards inequality ("estimating"), and when "simulating" attitude change. However, we appreciate the reviewer's suggestion that this point required further clarification. We have now addressed this in the introduction and revised the title of our manuscript to emphasize our primary contributions, which focus on the estimation of anger's impact and the simulation of attitude change. In the introduction, we now state:

"***We craft a tripartite analytical strategy to address the limitations in the study of inequality belief systems. First, we model U.S. attitudes towards inequality as a belief system using ISSP data, creating a weighted and signed network that captures the relationships between perceptions, beliefs, and judgments of inequality. Second, we estimate how this structure varies across the population, focusing on the role of anger towards inequality. By applying a Moderated Network Model, we show that angry individuals possess more interconnected and polarized belief system structures. Finally, we simulate attitude change to investigate whether altering central nodes leads to broader adjustments within the belief system.***"

5. With regard to the methodological versus empirical contribution, on p.2, the authors note: "Researchers working in this field have usually focused either on a single dimension of this construct or on a limited number of indicators per dimension, neglecting important interactions between a larger set of cognitive evaluations of this phenomenon." I think the article could do a better job of convincing the reader that these interactions are important sui generis, and not just for specific empirical questions. Or are they particularly important for specific empirical purposes? If so, this should be spelled out more clearly.

We fully agree with the reviewer that these interactions are indeed significant. To address this, we have revised the literature section to provide a more comprehensive account of the key associations we expect based on the social justice literature. The revised text is included in our response to the next comment.

6. The theory / literature discussion should be streamlined. The distinction between perceptions, beliefs, and judgments is made clear (though of course one should, in the context of the literature on inequality beliefs, ask to what extent questions on beliefs can ever be free of normative judgments). The discussion of relevant empirical insights, however, seems a bit confusing, likely because there are are so many issues (and a host of variables) presented here.

We have completely revised our results section, eliminating the use of abbreviations and labels to enhance clarity. Additionally, we have streamlined the theory section, reducing its length to make it more concise and focused. The only part of paragraph "2.1: Attitudes towards inequality" that remains unchanged is the section praised by the reviewer, which distinguishes between perceptions, beliefs, and judgments. The new sections now highlight the main associations identified in the literature:

"***Inequalities stem from various social, economic, and political arrangements (McCall & Percheski, 2010), making several interconnected fields crucial for understanding attitudes towards inequality (McCarty & Pontusson, 2011). The way welfare states collect and redistribute resources through social programs and transfers significantly shapes societal inequality***

(Esping-Andersen & Myles, 2011; Korpi & Palme, 1998; Volscho & Kelly, 2012). Additionally, evaluations of taxes, redistribution, and wages are closely tied to perceptions, beliefs, and judgments about inequality (Bartels, 2005; Berens & Gelepithis, 2019; Bussolo et al., 2021; Choi, 2021; Fatke, 2018; García Sánchez et al., 2020; Iacono & Ranaldi, 2021; Trump, 2023). Understanding inequality thus requires delving into subjective perceptions of these interconnected issues. Indeed, the literature highlights various connections between perceptions, beliefs, and judgments about inequality, taxes, redistribution, and wages. For instance, individual perceptions of inequality influence normative ideas about how society should be structured (Pedersen & Mutz, 2019), support for public redistribution (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018; Kuhn, 2011; Kuziemko et al., 2015; Trump, 2023), and attitudes towards progressive taxation (García-Sánchez et al., 2020)."

Then, we discuss the role of anger:

"***Anger plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards inequality, yet remains understudied in social justice research. U.S. citizens with lower social status report higher levels of anger, often driven by frustration, inferiority, and perceived injustice (Park et al., 2013). Anger not only reflects personal grievances but also has broader societal implications. Comparative studies reveal that angry individuals are less likely to support conservative economic parties and more likely to back progressive ones (Gonthier, 2023). It strengthens the link between perceptions of inequality and the willingness to engage in political action (Leach et al., 2006) and mediates the relationship between perceived inequalities and psychological well-being (Vezzoli et al., 2023). These findings suggest that anger amplifies connections between distributive evaluations, moderating the structure of inequality belief systems and underscoring its importance in understanding attitudes.***"

Finally, we discuss attitude change in this realm:

"***Beyond cross-sectional studies, researchers have also examined how attitudes towards inequality evolve, yielding mixed results. Cruces and colleagues (2013), using an experimental survey in Argentina, demonstrated the significant role of perceptions in shaping distributional beliefs. Their findings revealed that individuals who overestimated their relative social position became more supportive of redistribution when informed of their actual placement in the social hierarchy. Similarly, Campos-Vazquez et al. (2022) conducted an experimental study in Mexico, providing participants with objective information about income inequality and social mobility. Unlike the Argentine study, their results showed that altering perceptions of inequality did not lead to changes in participants' normative beliefs about income distribution, social mobility, or tax rates.***"

7. In my understanding, the finding on the "inconsistency" of beliefs going back to Kluegel and Smith is particularly relevant for the contribution. I would urge the author(s) to go into more detail of this particular aspect and also the ways in which the inequality belief literature has addressed it in the past, since Kluegel and Smith's important intervention. I also think that consistency within a particular survey instrument is not quite the same as mental consistency. This point could also be discussed in relation to the sociological literature (which introduces context, and possible social explanations for holding "inconsistent" views), not just the more narrowly psychological literature.

We fully agree with the reviewer, as we believe this point represents one of our most significant contributions. To address this, we have elaborated on this finding in both the results and discussion sections. In the results, we emphasize the consolidation pattern we observed: positive associations become stronger for individuals experiencing anger, while negative associations grow more negative. In the discussion, we now write:

"***The moderated network model reveals that anger moderates nearly one-third of the edges in the inequality belief system, intensifying both positive and negative associations. This suggests that at higher levels of anger, the belief system consolidates, becoming more polarized and contentious. For example, we found that anger amplifies the relationship between the belief in public redistribution and judgments of its failure. As anger increases, individuals who believe strongly in public redistribution also perceive government efforts to address inequality as more inadequate, reflecting heightened skepticism. Additionally, anger sharpens divisions between structuralist and individualist explanations of inequality, such as the negative relationship between race and education. This finding highlights the role of anger as an emotion that reinforces cognitive selectivity, organizing attitudes into denser, more polarized clusters.***

At the full-sample level, our findings align with prior research indicating that individualist and structuralist explanations of inequality typically correlate positively, reflecting a general tendency for people to acknowledge both personal and systemic factors in shaping outcomes (Mijs, 2018). When individuals are content with the level of U.S. inequality, they tend to endorse individualist and structuralist explanations altogether. However, this pattern breaks down among individuals with high levels of anger. In this subgroup, individualist and structuralist explanations exhibit negative correlations, revealing a cognitive divide in how angry individuals reconcile these beliefs. Despite this divergence, the belief in meritocracy—centered on the importance of hard work—consistently correlates positively with other nodes in the inequality belief system, regardless of anger levels. This finding underscores the enduring salience of meritocratic values in the U.S., where such beliefs are deeply ingrained in public attitudes (Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; McCall, 2013; Shariff et al., 2016). Notably, this pattern contrasts with findings from other countries, such as the Netherlands, where the belief in meritocracy is negatively linked to progressive attitudes toward diversity and high perception of inequality (Bertero et al., 2024)."

8. Currently, the literature review discusses a range of associations and causal pathways that emerge from different studies, and my impression is that this leaves the reader a bit confused about which of these relationships the chosen method and the specific data used here can effectively address. I think it should be made more explicit: What does this new way of thinking about causality and the structure of beliefs allow us to understand about the causality issues identified in the existing literature, and what can we learn empirically from the chosen data in this regard?

As outlined in the previous point, we have taken steps to streamline and reduce the length of the theory section. We sincerely thank the reviewer for their valuable feedback and guidance.

9. I think the literature review should also be streamlined with the audience of Network Science in mind, because readers of this journal might not be familiar with the terminology around inequality beliefs. In this regard, I think it is a bit unfortunate to use shorthands like "perceptions of inequality" when what is referred to more specifically is the problem of the extent of economic inequality that people think exists in society, and so on.

As noted above, we have entirely removed the use of node labels when referring to concepts included in the network. We are confident that the revised results section and streamlined theory section are now more accessible and easier to read.

10. Third, it should also be clarified better how the present study goes beyond Franetovic & Bertero, 2023, again with the audience of the journal Network Science in mind.

In comparison to that work, our contribution advances the field in three key aspects. First, we employ innovative methodologies, such as the moderated network model, to estimate structural differences in belief systems, allowing us to identify variations with greater statistical power.

Second, we extend the analysis by demonstrating that belief systems vary not only across individuals with different socio-economic statuses but also among individuals with differing levels of attachment to the issue of inequality. Finally, and uniquely, we test Converse's key proposition regarding attitude change. These points are now clearly emphasized in the conclusions:

"***This study makes key methodological contributions to the belief system literature by employing advanced network models to analyze attitudes towards inequality. Mixed graphical models (mgm) effectively capture the nuanced structure of belief systems using mixed data types, while the moderated network model (MNM) offers a powerful innovation for comparing belief systems across groups, overcoming the limitations of traditional split-sample approaches. The Ising model further proves its utility for analyzing binary data and simulating attitude change, enabling researchers to model systemic dynamics within belief systems. Together, these methods enrich the toolbox of belief system scholars, providing robust techniques for understanding how attitudes interact and evolve. Our simulations add further insights by demonstrating that targeting central nodes, such as the perception of large income inequality and the belief in public redistribution, produces downstream effects throughout the belief system. These findings confirm the theoretical premise that central attitudes drive broader adjustments, supporting Converse's (2006) ideas on belief system dynamics.*** "