

Changes in Network Socioeconomic Diversity, and Market Justice Preferences: Longitudinal Evidence from Chile

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This study investigates how changes in the socioeconomic composition of individuals' social networks influence support for market justice principles over time in Chile, a context characterized by pronounced economic inequality and a predominantly market-oriented welfare system. Drawing on longitudinal data from the Chilean Longitudinal Social Survey (ELSOC, 2016–2023), the research examines whether increased exposure to socially and economically diverse acquaintances correlates with declining endorsement of the notion that access to social services should depend on individual income. Theoretically grounded in the intersection of moral economy, empirical justice theory, and network sociology, the study posits that as individuals become embedded in more socioeconomically diverse networks, they are likely to revise their perceptions of fairness and legitimacy concerning market-based distributions of welfare services.

Chile provides a compelling case for this analysis due to its historically neoliberal policy orientation, widespread privatization of welfare services, and persistent inequality despite periods of economic growth. Against this backdrop, the study underscores the role of network diversity as a channel of social learning that potentially tempers neoliberal attitudes in contexts where institutional arrangements normalize inequality.

Empirical analysis is conducted using fixed-effects regression models to capture within-individual changes, thereby controlling for time-invariant characteristics. The findings reveal that upward occupational mobility from low to middle status increases support for market justice, reflecting adaptation to new structural positions. However, a notable counteracting effect is observed: a statistically significant negative relationship between increased network socioeconomic diversity and market justice support. Individuals whose networks become more diverse over time exhibit a corresponding decrease in their endorsement of income-based access to education, healthcare, and pensions.

These results substantiate the market skepticism hypothesis, which proposes that cross-class embeddedness fosters critical awareness of inequality by broadening exposure to diverse economic realities and life conditions. The findings align with theoretical frameworks that highlight social networks as informational environments where individuals form and revise political attitudes through cumulative experiences and interpersonal exchanges. Furthermore, the study contributes to emerging scholarship on dynamic attitude formation by incorporating a longitudinal perspective on how life-course events and network transformations shape distributive preferences.

The implications of this research are twofold. First, it underscores the importance of incorporating network-level variables into studies of political and distributive preferences, especially in stratified societies. Second, it suggests that fostering institutional mechanisms—

such as integrated education, inclusive civic spaces, and urban desegregation—that increase socioeconomic diversity in daily interactions may contribute to more egalitarian attitudes. Future research should further explore the long-term trajectories of network change and assess whether certain social groups are more susceptible to the influence of diverse ties. By emphasizing the socially embedded and dynamic nature of preference formation, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how individual attitudes toward economic justice evolve over time in unequal societies.