**More Diverse, More Skeptical? How Changes in Class-based Network Diversity Shape Public Support for Commodified Welfare Services: Longitudinal Evidence from Chile**

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# Introduction

The recent rise of income inequality in contemporary societies has drawn attention to how it affects social relations and networks, as well as their relationship with attitudes toward inequality (Iturra-Sanhueza, 2025; Lindh and Andersson, 2024). In addition to class positions—defined as the structural positions in the labor market and authority within production units, usually studied through occupations —the role of class-based social networks in preference formation has gained increasing attention (Otero and Mendoza, 2023). These studies argue that social influence plays a role in shaping attitudes by exposing individuals to the information and experiences of others (Lindh, Andersson, & Völker, 2021). Prior research shows that class profiles—understood as ties to specific occupational-class positions—can either heighten or diminish attitudes towards inequality, depending on the class position of the network tie (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh et al., 2021). Similar evidence suggests that simultaneous exposure to different class positions through network ties is linked to more skeptical views of economic inequality (Otero & Mendoza, 2023; Paskov & Weisstanner, 2022). Network *diversity*—defined as the extent to which individuals maintain ties across different occupational classes—provides a broader window through which individuals learn about others’ living conditions and experiences of economic inequality (Mijs & Usmani, 2024). Despite recent efforts to address this link from a longitudinal perspective (Plaza, Beck, Iturra-Sanhueza, Otero, & Muñoz, 2026), a key research gap is still the longitudinal relationship between social networks and the justification of economic inequality. The present study examines the *market skepticism hypothesis*, which posits that class-based network diversity may reduce the justification of the commodified distribution of welfare services over time (Castillo, Iturra, & Carrasco, 2025; Immergut & Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015). This may be particularly the case because the legitimization of economic inequality is often anchored in social networks, where localized “referential structures”—rooted in others’ lived experiences—provide concrete empirical benchmarks of fairness (Shepelak & Alwin, 1986).

Recent studies have argued that theories of class-based attitude formation have mainly relied on cross-sectional evidence, and only a few efforts have addressed the class-attitude link longitudinally. The relevance of this claim emphasizes the role of “class experiences” – understood as the socialization processes linked to individual experiences within the class structure across the life course (Ares, 2020; Helgason & Rehm, 2024; Langsæther, Evans, & O’Grady, 2022). They show that preference formation is neither completely shaped by the class of destination nor origin, where those immobile in their class positions are much more aligned with class-based interests than the mobile. A compelling argument is that mobile individuals are exposed to more diverse “class experiences” through changes in their interpersonal networks, which provide varied socializing experiences as they navigate different positions throughout the life course (Ares, 2020; Helgason & Rehm, 2023, 2024). Thus, it is unclear whether networks play an additional role in the process when accounting for individual mobility (Ares and Van Ditmars, 2025). The relevance of this claim requires scrutinizing whether changes in social networks contribute to attitude formation, independently of the class experiences linked to the claimed relationship with social mobility (Ares, 2020; Helgason & Rehm, 2023, 2024). Class-based network diversity represents cross-class embeddedness through ties with family, friends, and acquaintances (Paskov and Weisstanner, 2022). These diverse connections provide access and expose individuals to a qualitative spectrum of others’ class experiences. Thus, *diversity* rises in importance, rather than the volume of information represented by network size (Contreras, Otero, Díaz, and Suárez, 2019; Plaza, Beck, Iturra-Sanhueza, Otero, and Muñoz, 2026), or the influence of single class-based network tie represented by network class profiles or average occupational status of the network (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh, Andersson, and Völker, 2021).

Most of the longitudinal studies on the class-attitude link have been focused on Western industrialized democracies (Ares, 2020; Helgason and Rehm, 2024; Langsæther, Evans, and O’Grady, 2022). There is a scarcity of longitudinal studies linking changes in socioeconomic positions (Castillo, Laffert, Carrasco, and Iturra-Sanhueza, 2025) or class-based networks with political attitudes (Otero and Mendoza, 2023; Otero, Völker, Rözer, and Mollenhorst, 2022). Studying the network-attitude link in countries with modest public provision of welfare and high inequality, such as the Latin American context, offers a substantial comparative contrast with Western industrialized countries. A key feature that shaped the development of the social policy regimes in Latin America has been the pivotal role of market institutions and principles in the provision of welfare (Huber and Stephens, 2012). From the 1970s onward, neoliberal reforms—marked by deregulation and privatization—transformed welfare systems in Latin America by transferring market logics to social domains that were previously publicly covered (Arrizabalo, 1995). From a moral economy perspective, market mechanisms in resource allocation have coexisted with economic redistribution and reciprocity, crystallized in welfare state institutions and family norms, in conjunction with their manifestation in popular views on these domains (Koos and Sachweh, 2019). This set of principles and norms, including the role of individual effort and productivity as a central criterion for resource allocation, has been addressed as of *market justice* (Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener, 1999; Lane, 1986). As these principles emphasize self-reliance and minimal government intervention, they function as a legitimizing mechanism of economic inequality by framing it as the result of fair competition (Svallfors, 2007). The empirical distributive justice literature shows that market justice attitudes are salient in contexts of high inequality and modest public provision of welfare, where the capacity of citizens to contribute or pay constrains access to welfare services (Immergut and Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015; von dem Knesebeck, Vonneilich, and Kim, 2016).

Against this backdrop, the main question of this paper is: to what extent do individual changes in the socioeconomic composition of social networks affect changes in support for market justice principles? Drawing on three waves of data from the Chilean Longitudinal Social Survey (ELSOC, 2016–2023), I test whether increases in network diversity reduce individuals’ support for the commodification of welfare provision. Despite being one of Latin America’s more prosperous nations, Chile has one of the highest levels of economic inequality in the region. At the same time, the institutional architecture of the social policy regime in Chile is characterized as a welfare model heavily reliant on private provision. This study contributes to the literature by providing evidence from a Latin American developing country, emphasizing how socioeconomic changes in personal networks shape economic preferences over time.

# Theoretical views on structural positions, social networks, and market justice preferences

## Does time matter? The role of (changes in) individual structural position and networks on attitudes towards inequality

We know that individual socioeconomic position plays a key role in shaping attitudes toward inequality. People in higher-status positions—those with higher education, better-paid, and more secure jobs—tend to favor market-based over state-based distributions because such systems align with their self-interest and sense of merit-based fairness (Lindh and McCall, 2020; Svallfors, 2007). Empirical evidence consistently shows that socioeconomically advantaged individuals are more likely to support the idea that those with higher incomes should pay more for better-quality social services in education, healthcare, and pensions (Castillo et al., 2024; Immergut and Schneider, 2020; Lee and Stacey, 2023). By contrast, individuals in disadvantaged positions—whose livelihoods depend more on public provision—tend to favor universal and redistributive arrangements. In this way, class position and educational attainment not only determine one’s material interest in redistribution but also shape the underlying belief that market outcomes reflect merit and personal effort (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander, 2015; Kluegel et al., 1999).

In addition to the widely recognized attitudinal differences between socioeconomic positions, recent longitudinal studies highlight that the link between structural position and attitudes toward inequality also unfolds as a gradual process of adaptation. These studies show that political attitudes evolve alongside changes in individuals’ structural locations, reflecting both material interests and learned experiences over time. As Helgason and Rehm (2023, 2024) argue, attitude formation can be explained by different mechanisms. In their perspective, political attitudes can be accounted through (i) *socialization,* which posits stability according to early-life experiences in the family of origin; (ii) *anticipation*, where attitudes can be aligned with expected future income; (iii) *myopic self-interest,* which focuses on immediate income effects; (iv) *learning* highlights cumulative changes from past and current experiences; and (v) *status maximization* links attitudes to the highest structural position achieved over time. Accordingly, change is typically slow and cumulative, suggesting that class-based attitudinal divides emerge not only from static group differences but also from differential exposure to upward or downward mobility experiences. Empirical evidence supports this view: individuals experiencing upward mobility, especially through changes in wages or occupational class, tend to become more supportive of unequal economic distribution, as they benefit more directly from unequal outcomes (Ares, 2020; Ares and Van Ditmars, 2025; Helgason and Rehm, 2023; Langsæther et al., 2022; Stegmueller, 2013). Yet, mobile individuals also display more nuanced and ambivalent preferences than those with stable class trajectories, indicating that class-based mechanisms of learning and adaptation underlie how inequality attitudes evolve over time.

Beyond the temporal structural position, recent literature has argued that the socioeconomic composition of social networks also contributes to attitude formation in different manners. This implies social networks play an additional role in attitude formation, in addition to the already documented material self-interest and value-driven explanations of political preferences (Kulin and Svallfors, 2013; Maldonado, Olivos, Castillo, Atria, and Azar, 2019). Recently, studies on the role of *network class profiles* – understood as the share of ties toward specific social classes have found that higher ties to working-class (service-class) positions are associated with higher (lower) perceived income inequality (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022) and stronger (weaker) support for inequality reduction (Lindh and Andersson, 2024). In this sense, it is argued that networks shape attitudes and political preferences through social influence, implying that individuals adjust their views accordingly based on the social interactions through their network ties (Lindh, Andersson, and Völker, 2021).

Another part of the literature on class-based networks has taken a step forward with the single-class profile approach and shown that *simultaneous* connection to diverse socioeconomic status positions is associated with more critical views on economic inequality. In particular, socioeconomic diversity in interpersonal networks (*diversity* onwards)— understood as the degree of connectedness to dissimilar socioeconomic positions (e.g., occupational classes) has been brought into the discussion of how networks contribute to the formation of attitudes toward economic inequality (Otero and Mendoza, 2023). In this sense, it has been argued that dissimilarity within networks refers to cross-cutting social circles, implying access to diverse life experiences and broader exposure to information (Blau, 1977). Additionally, another argument is that network ties act as inferential spaces (Mijs, 2018). This implies that individuals who reason and experience more diverse networks are much more likely to learn and comprehend about magnitude and causes of inequality (Mijs and Usmani, 2024). This diversity of experiences can leverage the connection between economic inequality and labor market rewards, as cross-class contact provides more diverse information and life experiences of others that may foster empathy toward those in economic despair (Sachweh, 2012) or, conversely, legitimize inequality as cross-class contact fades (Vargas Salfate and Stern, 2023).

The empirical distributive justice literature has stated that social networks are a relevant part in the formation of preferences. Accordingly, *existential standards*—understood as context-dependent benchmarks of fairness that emerge from individuals’ lived experiences and exposure to prevailing institutional arrangements and patterns of social inequality—develop through both informational and socialization processes (Castillo, 2011; Immergut and Schneider, 2020). On the informational side, people form expectations by observing how income, status, and opportunities are allocated within everyday contexts, such as workplaces or neighborhoods. These localized “referential structures” provide concrete, empirical benchmarks for fairness, rooted in the experiences of others in similar life situations (Shepelak and Alwin, 1986). Over time, the socialization process transforms these observations into normative beliefs: people internalize the distribution patterns they witness as legitimate and come to accept them as how things ought to be. This dual process anchors fairness judgments in the concrete realities of social life rather than being exclusively caused by normative ideals (Immergut and Schneider, 2020). Furthermore, those embedded in structurally diverse networks—especially in bridging positions across otherwise disconnected groups—are more likely to encounter contrasting experiences and interpretations of inequality. These ties can offer access to non-redundant information and unfamiliar perspectives, broadening understandings of inequalities and might promote more nuanced attitudes toward justice (Burt, 2004; Vedres, 2022). As such, both the content and normativity of fairness evaluations are deeply conditioned by exposure to diverse social settings, particularly as it unfolds over time (Christensen, Dinesen, and Sønderskov, 2024).

Empirically, the claim that diversity is associated with more critical views on economic inequality has received empirical support in cross-sectional studies. For instance, Paskov & Weisstanner (2022) found that more diverse networks lead to dis-aligned class-based redistributive preferences in Europe, where working-class individuals with parental and partner ties to the upper-middle classes nuance their preferences compared to “pure” working-class connections. By contrast, upper-middle-class individuals with more ties toward the working class are more likely to support redistribution. More straightforwardly, Otero & Mendoza (2023) found that individuals with more socioeconomically diverse acquaintance networks are associated with higher perceived inequality, higher economic egalitarianism, and more critical views on the current equality of opportunities and meritocracy in Chile. Hereby, individuals with more diverse and cross-cutting social ties are more likely to receive information about labor market processes, such as job seeking and wage differences, from diverse sources (Contreras, Otero, Díaz, and Suárez, 2019; Plaza, Beck, Iturra-Sanhueza, Otero, and Muñoz, 2026; Svallfors, 2006). This can also be linked to the attributed importance of structural or non-meritocratic factors, such as inherited wealth or social connections, in the process of getting ahead in life in contexts of rising (or high) economic inequality (McCall, Burk, Laperrière, and Richeson, 2017).

Despite the efforts to unfold the network-attitude link, little is known about whether political attitudes are affected by *changes* in network composition, particularly concerning network diversity. From the perspective of individual change, social networks, by providing access to information—in this case, diversity—are likely to contribute to social learning processes (Druckman and Lupia, 2000; Lin, 2001). Theoretically, networks can represent a “social convoy” (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980) of social relationships understood as a structure where information and support are embedded (Hollstein, 2023). The social ties within this convoy can be modified according to life-course events, such as changes in employment status, marriage, or geographic position (Rözer, Hofstra, Brashears, and Völker, 2020) Additionally, it is usually assumed that acquaintanceship ties tend to change more over time and be nurtured from more diverse social positions in contrast to the more stable, strong ties, composed of family and friends (Völker, 2022)

There might be different explanations for how individual *changes* in network diversity might influence attitudes toward economic inequality. One argument posits that those changes in the socioeconomic composition of social activities nurture constraints and opportunities to meet and create new ties that contribute to diversity (Feld, 1981). For instance, it has been shown that desegregation in schools explains changes in the socioeconomic composition of friendship ties and can cause changes in attitudes towards inequality, in line with greater skepticism regarding the fairness of labor market outcomes and opportunities for social mobility (Londoño-Vélez, 2022). Another aspect is that social mobility processes may expose individuals to different class positions relative to their class of origin. This increased exposure to diverse social ties and ideas could challenge the culture and values of the class of origin and lead to changes in political attitudes (Ares, 2020). In addition, political attitudes may evolve through socialization processes as individuals acquire new "class experiences" within a different social milieu (Helgason & Rehm, 2024). These experiences may provide (i) new perspectives and (ii) more accurate insights into their own class of origin, as well as the values and interests associated with other class positions.

Despite the efforts present in the literature, research has primarily focused on the relationship between social networks and perceptions of inequality or public support for redistributive policies (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh et al., 2021; Otero and Mendoza, 2023). However, we know little about how networks might influence other attitudinal domains, particularly those tied to how the public opinion considers the role of private actors in the provision of welfare in specific areas that have traditionally been part of public welfare services, such as education, healthcare, or old-age pensions (Busemeyer, Garritzmann, and Neimanns, 2020; Castillo et al., 2024; Immergut and Schneider, 2020).

## Inequality and support for the commodification of welfare

In this study, I will focus on public support for the commodification of welfare services. While redistribution in market societies mainly focuses on the capacity of the state to reallocate resources from those in more advantageous positions to those in greater vulnerability, market institutions also play a role in shaping the distribution of economic resources (Koos and Sachweh, 2019; Lindh and McCall, 2020). Hereby, the legitimacy of resource allocation based on market principles has been referred to in the literature as *market justice*. In his seminal work, Lane (1986) defines *market justice* as a distributive principle that mainly focuses on rewards based on "earned deserts". At the same time, this contrasts with political justice, more closely related to the social policy architecture that prioritizes the principles of equality and need. In this line, he argues that individuals perceive market outcomes as fair because they are directly linked to individual effort, which in turn reinforces the importance of self-reliance and individual responsibility (Lane, 1986). These principles advocate efficiency through competition, minimal government intervention, and voluntary asset exchange. Additionally, market justice underscores the protection of individual rights, particularly those related to private property, allowing individuals to control resources and benefit from their labor.

Theoretically, I conceive *market justice* preferences as individual beliefs that legitimate inequalities associated with market outcomes, such as wage inequality among groups or unequal access to welfare services based on personal income (Kluegel et al., 1999). In this sense, the market is understood as a self-regulating arena, which coordinates economic exchanges based on supply and demand, where rewards are distributed according to individual contributions and efforts (Kluegel and Smith, 1981). This idea is grounded in the belief that the market promotes procedural fairness, where everyone has equal opportunities to compete, yet individual capabilities determine the outcomes (Lane, 1986). Unlike systems based on political justice, which emphasize equality and need, market justice is seen as a process where just outcomes are achieved through the fair competition of agents (Lane, 1986). This notion of justice stems from the assumption that outcomes are deserved, as they reflect individual effort and ability, fostering a sense of fairness (Svallfors, 2007). However, achieving perceived fairness depends on maintaining open and responsive systems, where equal opportunities are a precondition for an outcome to be considered just (Kluegel et al., 1999). Through this lens, inequalities are accepted—even seen as necessary—because they incentivize innovation and productivity, reinforcing societal prosperity by rewarding individual achievements and self-responsibility (Castillo, Madero-Cabib, and Salamovich, 2013). Thus, market justice values individual responsibility, linking economic rewards to personal contributions rather than redistributive mechanisms based on the principles of equality and need.

Part of the empirical distributive justice studies have addressed the extent to which market justice principles are linked to the legitimacy of how market outcomes (e.g., wages) are transferred to other social domains, such as income-based access to welfare services (Castillo et al., 2024; Lindh, 2015). This implies that welfare services are viewed as legitimate commodities that can be traded, evaluated, and priced (Busemeyer and Iversen, 2020). For instance, in the healthcare domain, Knesebeck et al. (2016) and Immergut and Schneider (2020), have assessed whether citizens find it fair that wealthier individuals receive better healthcare services than poorer individuals. In the educational domain, Lee and Stacey (2023) scrutinized Australian citizens' support for income-based access to schooling by gauging whether individuals consider it fair that higher-income families can secure a better education for their children. Similarly, other cross-country comparative studies, such as Lindh (2015) and Svallfors (2007) have combined both indicators as a general indicator for the “market-based distribution” of welfare services. Similarly, a study by Castilo et al. (2024) scrutinized market justice preferences on the student population in Chile in the domains of education, healthcare, and pensions, as well as by employing a single indicator of market justice. As I am interested in the general preferences beyond the specific social policy domains, in this study, I adopted the latter approach to scrutinize market justice preferences as a single dimension.

In line with the above, I expect that network diversity nurtures greater skepticism toward the fairness of market mechanisms in distributing resources, and particularly the legitimacy of market-based distribution of social welfare. Especially regarding individual change, I argue that changes in network diversity can nurture changes in political attitudes as they reflect the influence of new social contexts and the information they provide. As individuals encounter different life experiences, they may develop critical views on the fairness of market distributions and market-based access to social welfare (*market skepticism hypothesis*). Over time, greater network diversity allows individuals to accumulate a variety of experiences and learn from qualitatively new information. Therefore, the main hypothesis of this study reads as follows:

H1: the greater the changes in network diversity, the less support market justice.

# Case of Chile

Chile provides a valuable case study to shed light on how public views regarding the market distribution of social services develop in conditions of decreasing poverty and relatively high income inequality in the context of a residual social policy regime (Ferre, 2023). Since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, Chile’s welfare system has leaned heavily on private provision, where services are often privatized and only accessible to those who can afford them (Arrizabalo, 1995). This "crowded-out" welfare model benefits higher-income groups, leaving lower-income individuals to rely on limited public options. Despite economic growth, it remains one of the most unequal countries in the OECD, with a high Gini index and concentrated wealth among the top deciles (Rodríguez Weber, 2017). Scholars studying social stratification have suggested that Chile exemplifies a society with upward mobility from lower classes to intermediate classes, yet with limited access to the upper classes (Torche, 2005). Although research indicates that while the class structure in Chile shows greater fluidity regarding occupational class and educational attainment, it does not reflect the same pattern when it comes to income mobility (Espinoza and Núñez, 2014). These inequalities are evident in the high levels of residential segregation found in large urban centers (Garreton, Basauri, and Valenzuela, 2020), which have also influenced individuals' interpersonal networks (Otero, Völker, and Rözer, 2022). Specifically, it has been noted that the upper classes in Chile can be described as "open but segregated," as they display high levels of segregation while still able to connect with a diverse range of social classes within their networks (Otero, Völker, and Rözer, 2021).

Regarding public opinion, the International Social Survey of 2019 shows that Chile has a moderate-low support for the idea that it is fair that those with higher incomes can buy better health care and/or education for their children with around 22%, which contrasts with high support in countries like Taiwan (48%) or the low support in Germany (9%). Against this background, a cycle of mass protests known as the “social outburst” started in October 2019. Initially, the protests were sparked by the mobilization of high school students, which progressively triggered different sectors of society to join the demand for greater equality in access to education, health care, and old age pensions. These protests were interpreted by the political system as a demand for a public shift toward a "crowded-in" welfare model, with greater public provision of social services (Somma, Bargsted, Disi Pavlic, and Medel, 2021). In sum, Chile is an illustrative case where marketization has been predominant compared to public provision of social services. This institutional arrangement has coexisted with changes in the living conditions of citizens during the past decades, which have been accompanied by shifts in public opinion for a more inclusive and public-based welfare system.

# Data, variables, and method

# Data

The primary data source is the Chilean Longitudinal Social Survey (ELSOC, 2022) from 2016 to 2023, including three-time measures, designed to annually assess how individuals think, feel, and behave regarding social issues related to conflict and cohesion in Chile. Using a probabilistic, stratified, clustered, and multistage sampling design, the survey covers major urban centers (Santiago, Valparaíso, and Concepción) and smaller cities. The first wave included 2,927 participants aged 18 to 75, representing populations in the north and south, covering 77% of Chile’s total population and 93% of the urban population, with a response rate of 62.4% (Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies, 2022). After listwise deletion, the analytical sample includes 6,562 observations nested within 2,884 individuals. In 2018 (Wave 2), a refreshment sample was added to the study, consisting of 1,519 cases, while 2,229 cases corresponded to the original sample from 2016 (Wave 1). I decided to exclude this refreshment sample to focus on longer-term trends. The initial sample included 2,757 respondents in wave 1. Of these, 2,136 (77.5%) completed wave 3, corresponding to an attrition rate of 22.5% from wave 1. By wave 7, 1,669 respondents remained (60.5% of the original sample), yielding an overall attrition rate of 39.5%. Between wave 3 and wave 7, attrition was 21.9%.

# Variables

*Market justice preferences*

The main dependent variable of this study is *market justice preferences*: ‘It is fair that people with higher incomes have better pensions than people with lower incomes’, ‘It is fair that people with higher incomes have access to better education for their children than people with lower incomes’, and ‘It is fair that people with higher incomes can access better healthcare than people with lower incomes’. These items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha is close to 0.8 in all time points (αt1 =.82, αt2=.86, αt3=.83). Here, the three items are combined in a single indicator where higher values indicate stronger support for market justice principles (M = 2.06, SD = 0.86).

*Occupational socioeconomic status*

For measuring socioeconomic status (SES), I use the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, 2010). This indicator assigns continuous scores to occupations based on their required education and associated income levels. The ISEI synthesizes information on occupational hierarchies, educational attainment, and earnings to reflect the socioeconomic positioning of individuals within the labor market. The ISEI scores range from 16 (lowest status) to 88 (highest status). Following Langsæther et al. (2022, p. 963), I argue that including other socioeconomic factors, such as income, can be considered a post-treatment variable of occupational positions in a longitudinal context, as it results from occupational mobility. Therefore, all model specifications include ISEI scores based on occupations as the main SES measurement. In line with comparative research (Otero, Völker, Rözer, and Mollenhorst, 2024), those individuals classified as "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET) have been assigned an ISEI score of 10[[1]](#footnote-2).

*Class-based network diversity*

In this study, respondents were asked about the socio-economic diversity of their acquaintances in Chile. An acquaintance was defined as someone they could recognize by name and could converse with if encountered in public. Respondents were asked to approximate the number of people they knew in each occupation (see occupations in Table S1). The network diversity index was calculated to capture the socio-economic diversity of respondents’ networks. Following recommendations in social network literature (Otero and Mendoza, 2023; Sapin, Joye, and Wolf, 2020), a single dimension was used to represent network diversity, incorporating two indicators through a Principal Component Analysis (see Figure S1). With this strategy, I consider both the possible ties to the available occupations jointly and how these ties are distributed across each group (Koopmans and Schaeffer, 2015). First, generalized entropy measures the degree of *balance* across groups based on the number of acquaintances in each occupation[[2]](#footnote-3). The second indicator is extensivity, which aims to capture the degree of *variety* of known groups, in this case, the number of occupations with which the individual declares to have acquaintances. I use this information to create a composite measure representing class-based diversity in social networks. This index has a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 and will be used in all subsequent analyses throughout the article. Thus, higher values on this index represent higher socio-economic *diversity* in social networks.

# Method

First, to examine the extent to which changes in network diversity predict market justice preferences, I estimated two-way fixed-effects linear models (Andreß, Golsch, and Schmidt, 2013). I analyzed the data using the R library “plm” (Croissant and Millo, 2008). In the context of panel data, within-person effects capture how changes in individual-level variables (e.g., network diversity) between waves are associated with preferences for market justice while controlling for the influence of time-invariant characteristics. Additionally, to account for non-linear relationships on network diversity, I included a quadratic term under the assumption that for those with greater changes in network diversity, the theorized relationship might be stronger as they are exposed to others’ class experiences more widely than individuals experiencing smaller changes. As the sample is an unbalanced individual panel, all models include longitudinal panel-weights[[3]](#footnote-4).

In Equation 1, the description of the regression model is depicted. Here, the focus variable is represented by the linear (within-person) effect of diversity and quadratic (within-person) effect of diversity. In addition, are individual fixed effects (unit-specific unobserved heterogeneity), represents time fixed effects, and the idiosyncratic error term.

(1)

# Changes on network diversity and market justice preferences

[Table 1 about here]

A table with numbers and symbols

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The results from the fixed effects models are presented in Table 1. First, Model 1 includes the individual changes in occupational status, showing that increasing the socioeconomic status has a negative but non-significant relationship with support for market justice preferences (β = -0.011, *p*>0.05). Second, Model 2 includes other network characteristics of size and average network status, showing a non-significant negative association with market justice preferences. In Model 3, I introduce network diversity to account for how changes in the socioeconomic diversity of acquaintance networks affect market justice preferences. The results indicate that a one standard deviation increase in diversity drives a decrease of -0.067 in the market justice scale (β = -0.067, p<0.001). In the following estimation presented in Model 4, the relationship between network diversity and market justice preferences remains relatively unaffected, even when controlled for changes in occupational status, network average ISEI, and network size. Additionally, I included a quadratic term to consider a non-linear relationship between changes in network diversity with market justice preferences. However, the coefficient shows a negative but non-significant quadratic effect of network diversity (β = -0.019, p>0.05).

Figure 1 presents the average predicted values of market justice preferences across levels of network diversity. Here, I included predicted means of market justice preferences according to the linear (Model 3) and quadratic (Model 4) terms of network diversity. Based on Model 3, when network diversity is at the 20th percentile, the average predicted market justice preference is 2.20 (95% CI: 2.12 – 2.28), and it decreases to 2.08 when it is at the 80th percentile (95% CI: 2.02 – 2.14). These results indicate that a shift from a low-diversity to a high-diversity network is associated with an average decrease of approximately 0.12 points in support for market justice. According to the original scale (1 to 5) of the market justice preferences index, this difference represents a change of around 3% [0.12 / (5 − 1)], which is considered rather low but still relevant, as it has been argued that political attitudes in the economic domain do change, but it is a rather slow process of adaptation (Ares, 2020; Helgason and Rehm, 2023). In this sense, when considering the meaning of the scale values, the results suggest that individuals are shifting within the “agreement” range (i.e., between “Strongly disagree” [1] and “Disagree” [2]).

Thus, the observed changes indicate that, on average, increased exposure to diversity leads individuals to disagree more strongly with the idea that income should determine access to welfare services in Chile. All the above evidence supports the *market skepticism hypothesis* (H1), suggesting that individuals embedded in more socioeconomically diverse networks tend to express more critical views of market-based distributive principles.

[Figure 1 about here]

A graph of a network diversity

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Figure 1: Predictive Estimates of Market Justice Preferences by Network Diversity

# Discussion

The findings presented here provide empirical support for the market skepticism hypothesis: increasing socioeconomic diversity of personal networks is associated with declining support for market-based principles in the distribution of welfare services.

According to my theoretical expectations, the evidence presented here suggests that changes in network diversity influenced changes in attitudes. This relationship may operate through two (non-exclusive) mechanisms. *Information* — exposure to non-redundant environments may independently foster attitudinal change, in line with inferential or social learning approaches (Druckman and Lupia, 2000; Mijs, 2018); or *Socialization* — over time, individuals normatively adapt to their new social environments, and these adaptations are reflected in their attitudes (Ares, 2020; Helgason and Rehm, 2024; Otero and Mendoza, 2023). This relationship is consistent in a longitudinal context, suggesting that exposure to heterogeneous social environments—particularly across socioeconomic lines—plays a central role in shaping individuals’ views on market justice principles in the provision of social services.

Two interrelated theoretical explanations can account for this relationship. First, from a life-course perspective, interpersonal networks evolve in part, but not exclusively, due to changes in individuals’ occupational trajectories. This perspective aligns with the notion of the *social convoy* (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980), a changing configuration of social relationships that accompanies individuals over time. Importantly, shifts in these convoys are not solely driven by social mobility. Rather, this might also reflect broader life transitions—such as entering or leaving the workforce, changes in marital status, or geographical location. As individuals accumulate more varied experiences through these evolving social ties, they gain access to different sources of information, jointly with others' views on the distribution of economic opportunities or labor market outcomes, such as the procedures related to educational opportunities, wage inequality, or living conditions of pensioners. These experiences may challenge previously held assumptions about the legitimacy of market-based distributions.

Second, drawing from empirical justice theories, it is argued that exposure to socioeconomic diversity transforms the *existential standards* individuals use to evaluate distributive fairness (Immergut and Schneider, 2020; Shepelak and Alwin, 1986). These standards refer to what people perceive as normal, expected, or acceptable within their social context. When individuals interact with others who are situated differently within the social structure and who may face distinct constraints in accessing better education, healthcare, or pensions, they are confronted with contrasting experiences of inequality. Over time, these encounters may destabilize the moral foundations of market justice by exposing individuals to realities that contradict the assumption that outcomes are solely the result of individual effort (Otero and Mendoza, 2023).

From a longitudinal perspective, *skepticism* is likely amplified when networks bring together individuals from otherwise disconnected segments of the class structure. In such cases, people are more likely to access divergent and often non-redundant information about how social systems function across different positions (Burt, 2004). Prior research suggests that these types of ties are especially valuable for broadening individuals’ perspectives, as they provide access to unfamiliar and sometimes conflicting interpretations of economic and institutional realities (Vedres, 2022). In the context of preferences for commodified welfare, these contrasting experiences and informational flows may encourage individuals to question the fairness of allocating public goods according to income and purchasing power. Thus, the presence of socioeconomic diversity in personal networks serves not only to increase exposure to inequality but also to deepen understanding of its structural roots.

Building on previous research on the role of social heterogeneity in networks (Mijs and Usmani, 2024; Otero and Mendoza, 2023; Paskov and Weisstanner, 2022) a theoretically relevant contribution of this research is to distinguish more clearly between the role of *class profiles* (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh and Andersson, 2024; Lindh et al., 2021) as the pure single-connection to certain classes and the role of being connected simultaneously to more than one class-position, as network *diversity*. In line with my theorization, an assumption is that changes in network ties entail shifts in both the type and amount of information individuals receive. It is noteworthy that my results suggest network diversity plays an independent—and partially more significant—role than either network size or status. In theoretical terms, this implies that, beyond the volume of information associated with larger networks and the dominant narratives conveyed by higher status ties, it is the qualitatively different nature of information arising from heterogeneous connections that contributes more robustly to attitudinal change.

Taken together, these insights point to the social embeddedness of distributive preferences. Attitudes toward market justice are not merely reflections of fixed individual characteristics or ideological predispositions; rather, they emerge through social interaction and exposure. Socioeconomic diversity in networks—rising over time —appears to be a critical site for political learning and normative re-evaluation.

Evidence from Chile, a country with entrenched inequality and a market-oriented welfare system, provides a particularly compelling context in which to examine these phenomena. The results contribute to a growing body of literature emphasizing the role of social networks of attitudes toward inequality. They suggest that attention to network composition—and to the diversity of perspectives it enables—may be crucial for understanding how individuals come to accept or reject market-based principles of social organization.

Future research could further explore the temporal and cumulative aspects of diverse social exposure, as well as the conditions under which such exposure is most likely to generate attitudinal change. It also remains to be seen whether certain individuals—depending on their position within the social structure—are more or less susceptible to the influence of diversity in their networks. Moreover, identifying patterns of network change over time could offer important insights into how social learning processes unfold and consolidate.

One possible vein for future research is whether network ties, besides being linked to changes in political attitudes, trigger shifts in other social domains. For instance, one could argue that rising exposure to socioeconomic diversity might have a “cohesive” effect as it bridges those who were previously segregated (Otero, Völker, Rözer, et al., 2022). That said, does social trust strengthen as interpersonal networks become more diverse? (Lancee, 2017). It can be hypothesized that a rise in trust in others might have behavioral consequences, such as cooperation-based activities like participation in voluntary associations that aim to foster social welfare (Uslaner and Brown, 2005; Yamamura, 2012). Nonetheless, the assumption of the cohesive influence of exposure to social diversity still needs further research to clarify whether the claimed relationships hold for the attitudinal and behavioral expressions of social cohesion (Chan, To, and Chan, 2006; Delhey, Dragolov, and Boehnke, 2023).

Finally, these findings raise relevant implications for public policy. If exposure to socioeconomic diversity fosters more critical attitudes toward market-based inequality, then institutional arrangements that promote cross-class contact—such as integrated schooling, urban desegregation, or inclusive civic participation—may contribute to the development of more egalitarian social attitudes. In this regard, the everyday spaces of sociability that shape individuals’ understanding of inequality deserve closer attention—not only as outcomes of stratification, but also as potential instruments for its contestation.

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1. Alternative operationalizations and modeling strategies were implemented as robustness tests. First, I used a categorical version of ISEI, dividing respondents into bottom, intermediate, top tertiles, plus a NEET group. Second, I estimated a within-between multilevel model that distinguishes between time-varying and time-invariant characteristics. Third, instead of assigning an ISEI score of 10, I tested an alternative specification with a lower value of 0. Across all these strategies, the coefficient for network diversity remained robust. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The formula is depicted as , where pj​ is the **proportion** of ties in category *j* (e.g., the proportion of social ties that belong to occupation *j*). This excludes observations with no network ties (which represent around 3% of the total sample). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. More details about the construction of the panel weights can be found at <https://coes.cl/elsoc/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)