**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

Recent changes in income distribution in contemporary societies have drawn attention to how these differences may impact interactions and social networks, as well as to their connection with political attitudes toward inequality (Lindh and Andersson, 2024). Within this literature, it is argued that beyond individual social class, understood as the individual labor market position and their authority within production units traditionally studied through occupations, the role of class-based social networks in preference formation (Otero and Mendoza, 2023; Plaza, Beck, Iturra-Sanhueza, Otero, and Muñoz, 2026). These studies have theorized that as interpersonal networks provide information and experiences of other individuals (Lin, 2001), this can affect attitudes in the form of a social influence mechanism, which is contingent on the class composition of these ties (Lindh, Andersson, & Völker, 2021). Empirically, studies have shown that class profiles – understood as single ties to certain occupational-class positions can affect perceived economic inequality and support for redistribution (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh et al., 2021). Moreover, recent studies have suggested that being connected to a diverse range of class positions within interpersonal networks is linked to more critical perspectives on economic inequality (Otero & Mendoza, 2023; Paskov & Weisstanner, 2022). Specifically, it has been argued that socioeconomic *diversity* in interpersonal networks—defined as the extent to which individuals are *simultaneously* connected to others in different occupational classes provides a broader window through which individuals learn about others’ life conditions and views on economic inequality (Mijs and Usmani, 2024). Within this discussion, a remaining research gap refers to the longitudinal relationship between networks and attitude formation *within* individuals. Despite the recent efforts addressing the link between class-based networks and economic attitudes from a longitudinal perspective (Plaza, Beck, Iturra-Sanhueza, Otero, & Muñoz, 2026), a shortcoming of this research is that it has mainly relied on short-span longitudinal data, but also there is still a pending theorization on the processes behind changes in the descriptive aspect of *perceptions* and the normative adaptation reflected in *preferences* (Castillo, Iturra, Maldonado, Atria, and Meneses, 2023). In this context, beyond inequality perceptions or redistributive preferences, the present research aims to study the role of social networks in the justification of a market-based mechanism for the distribution of welfare services (Castillo, Iturra, and Carrasco, 2025; Immergut and Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015).

Recently, longitudinal studies have argued that theories of class-based attitude formation have mainly relied on between-group differences based on cross-sectional evidence. The theoretical relevance of this claim is that the hypotheses on attitude formation have underscored 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). These studies have shown that preference formation is neither completely shaped by the class of destination nor origin, showing that, indeed, those immobile in their class positions are much more aligned with class-based economic interests than the economically mobile. A related argument is that mobile individuals are exposed to more diverse “class experiences” through changes in their interpersonal networks, which offer varied information as they navigate different social positions throughout their lives that contribute to the class-based socialization process (Ares, 2020; Helgason & Rehm, 2023, 2024).

In addition to all the above, I suggest that an understudied aspect is whether the claimed network-attitude link has an independent contribution in attitude formation beyond occupational mobility trajectories (Ares and Van Ditmars, 2025). This implies that within-individual changes in the class composition of social networks through network diversity contribute to attitude formation, independently of the class experiences linked to the previously claimed contribution of individual occupational mobility (Ares, 2020; Helgason & Rehm, 2023, 2024).

Specifically, class-based network diversity plays a pivotal role, as it represents cross-class embeddedness through ties with family, friends, and acquaintances (Paskov and Weisstanner, 2022). These diverse connections provide access to a broad range of class experiences, contributing to preference formation by exposing individuals to a wider spectrum of experiences. Thus, I argue that the relevance of *diversity* rises as it represents the exposure to broader range of qualitative spectrum of views, 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 socioeconomic position of a network tie represented by network class profiles or average occupational status (Cobo-Arroyo, 2022; Lindh, Andersson, and Völker, 2021).

The mentioned gap on the role of network changes on political attitudes is especially relevant, as 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). By contrast, in other regions of the world, such as Latin American countries, only a few studies have addressed the link between class-based networks and political attitudes (Otero and Mendoza, 2023; Otero, Völker, Rözer, and Mollenhorst, 2022), which also contrasts with the scarcity of longitudinal studies on attitudinal changes (Castillo, Bonhomme, Miranda, and Iturra, 2023; Castillo et al., 2025).

In contexts of high income inequality and modest public provision of welfare, such as the Latin American countries, offer a litmus test for the relevance of individual class positions and class-based networks on political attitudes. 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 the architecture of the public institutions of Latin American welfare systems, reinforcing the centrality of contractual relations in the marketplace, and extending market logic to social domains that previously were mainly attended by the state (Arrizabalo, 1995). In consequence, the role of public provision was reduced and counterbalanced with a stronger presence of market actors in the provision of social services (Harvey, 2020). From a moral economy perspective, the role of the market mechanisms in the allocation of resources has coexisted with principles of economic redistribution and reciprocity, crystallized in welfare state institutions and family norms, in conjunction with their manifestation in popular views on each of these domains (Koos and Sachweh, 2019). In the literature, the set of principles and norms related to how the public embraces individual effort and productivity as the central criteria for resource allocation has been addressed under the concept 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 has shown that market justice attitudes are particularly salient in contexts of high inequality and modest public provision of welfare, where the capacity of citizens to contribute or pay largely constrains access to welfare services (Immergut and Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015; von dem Knesebeck, Vonneilich, and Kim, 2016). Under these circumstances, individuals in structurally advantaged positions in the labor market tend to be more supportive of market justice principles compared to those in occupations with greater labor market risk, low-demanded skills, and lower income (Castillo, Salgado, Carrasco, and Laffert, 2024; Lee and Stacey, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the main question of this paper is: to what extent do individual changes in the socioeconomic composition of social networks affect preferences for the commodification of welfare provision? Using longitudinal data from the Chilean Longitudinal Social Survey (ELSOC, 2016–2023, three waves), this paper aims to scrutinize how changes in the socioeconomic composition of social networks affect changes in support for market justice principles in Chile. Thus, I hypothesize that positive changes in network diversity will reduce support for the commodification of welfare services. 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

### Socioeconomic status and attitudes toward inequality

Most of the studies point out that individual socioeconomic position is an important predicting factor of attitudes towards economic inequality. This has been explained mainly – but not exclusively, by self-interested motivations on the expected desirability of market-based distributions over state-based redistribution among the socioeconomically advantaged groups (Lindh and McCall, 2020). To this extent, higher-status individuals, with higher educational credentials in better-paying and secure labor market positions, are less likely to challenge market-based distribution, as they justify to a greater extent that access to welfare should be determined by one's ability to pay, compared to those with disadvantaged labor market positions (Svallfors, 2007).

Empirically, it has been consistently demonstrated that those in socioeconomically advantaged positions endorse the idea that those with higher incomes should be able to pay more for better social services in the domains of education (Lee and Stacey, 2023), healthcare (Immergut and Schneider, 2020; von dem Knesebeck et al., 2016) and old age pensions (Castillo et al., 2024). Similarly, Lindh (2015) argues that upper-class individuals support market-based social service distribution because they benefit from systems that align with their financial independence, without relying on public support. In contrast, working-class individuals, often dependent on public services, prefer equitable access rather than market-driven systems. Hereby, market-based social insurance and services can be appealing to higher-income individuals as an alternative, as they involve no redistribution (Busemeyer and Iversen, 2020). From a self-interest perspective, it has been shown that higher-income and educated individuals, who often benefit from market-based distributions, are more likely to view income inequality as fair and merit-based (Kluegel et al., 1999; Svallfors, 2007). Also, higher educational credentials are associated with greater acceptance of meritocratic ideals and the belief that the market rewards personal achievement (Castillo, Madero-Cabib, and Salamovich, 2013; Castillo et al., 2024) as well as more financial stability given their highly valuable skills in the labor market (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander, 2015).

An important point is that most of the theoretical approaches to preference formation, including attitudes toward public and private alternatives to social welfare (Lindh and McCall, 2020) and economic inequality justification (Janmaat, 2013) have been conceived as theories that aim to explain *between-group* differences instead of being theories of individual change. While related evidence has shown that upward intragenerational mobility is associated with greater individual well-being (Reche, König, and Hajek, 2019), the impact of such changes on economic preferences remains underexplored. In this sense, extensions of the self-interest model have considered the role of optimistic economic prospects or intergenerational mobility on economic preferences (Jaime-Castillo and Marqués-Perales, 2019). Nonetheless, I suggest that only a little literature has grasped the consequences of *changes* in socioeconomic status more directly.

The main theories on political attitude formation offer distinct perspectives on how changes in socioeconomic positions shape political attitudes over time. In a recent study, Helgason & Rehm (2023) reviewed and empirically scrutinized how different income mobility profiles differed in their “core political values” over time in Britain. They differentiate between five possible expectations according to the current self-interest-based mechanism – prospective income mobility or income expectations (Benabou and Ok, 2001; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2019), as well as preference formation based on informational updates (Druckman and Lupia, 2000). In their perspective, political attitudes can be explained 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. In this sense, Helgason & Rehm (2024) argue that attitudinal change is a gradual adaptation process. This process tends to be slow and cumulative, especially in learning and updating beliefs. As a result, differences in political attitudes between groups (by, e.g., income or occupations) are often more pronounced than changes in attitudes within the same individual over time (Helgason and Rehm, 2024).

Empirically, longitudinal evidence hints that as individuals experience rising structural positions, particularly through occupational class and income, they become more conservative in their political views and demand less redistribution as they benefit more directly from unequal distributions (Helgason and Rehm, 2023; Langsæther et al., 2022; Stegmueller, 2013). It is also noteworthy that mobile individuals show more nuanced preferences when compared to those with homogeneous-stable working or service-class mobility trajectories (Helgason and Rehm, 2024). Similarly, in the British case, it has been shown that upwardly mobile individuals are more prone to vote for the conservative party, known for its pro-market stances in terms of welfare provision (Helgason and Rehm, 2023).

Although the above evidence focuses on economic preferences in general, it offers useful insights into how these preferences may relate to other aspects within the economic domain. One resulting prediction is that individuals who have remained in advantaged (or disadvantaged) positions over time are more likely to justify unequal economic distributions to a greater (or lesser) extent. In contrast, those who have experienced either upward or downward occupational mobility are expected to fall somewhere in between—holding preferences that lie between those in stable positions at the top and bottom of the occupational ladder.

### Network structure and attitudes towards economic inequality

Beyond the individual structural position, the literature has argued that social networks also contribute to attitude formation in different manners. In this regard, a stronger justification of inequality is not solely explained by individual self-interest or normative value-driven explanations (Kulin and Svallfors, 2013; Maldonado, Olivos, Castillo, Atria, and Azar, 2019). Recently, it has been scrutinized the role of network class profiles – understood as the share of ties toward specific social classes and has been 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 information obtained through their network ties (Lindh, Andersson, and Völker, 2021).

Other literature has taken a step forward with the single class profile approach and shown that the *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).

Additionally, the empirical distributive justice literature has stated that social networks are a relevant part in the formation of preferences. In this regard, *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. For instance, Paskov & Weisstanner (2022) found that more diverse networks lead to dis-aligned class-based redistributive preferences, 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 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.

Against this background, I argue that being connected to a diverse range of social positions can significantly broaden exposure to different experiences with inequality. Hereby, individuals with 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; 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). As follows, 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.

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). Additionally, ties within this convoy can be modified according to life-course events, such as changes in employment status, marriage, or geographic position (Rözer et al., 2020; Völker, 2020). At the same time, 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 stable strong ties, such as family or friendships (Granovetter, 1973).

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 et al., 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.

Research in empirical distributive justice has diversely addressed the study of the justification of economic inequality. In this landscape, one line of research is the literature on the justification of wage inequality based on salary gaps between occupations (Jasso, 1978; Kelley and Evans, 1993; Osberg and Smeeding, 2006; Wegener, 1987). Additionally, another part of the literature has underscored how the market justice principles permeate other spheres of society, such as the legitimacy of how market outcomes (e.g., wages) are transferred to other social domains, such as income-based access to welfare, such as education, healthcare, or old age pensions (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).

Currently, there are several ways in which researchers have named individual preferences toward income-based access to social services. Nevertheless, their common ground is the use of the survey item which states *“Is it just or unjust – right or wrong – that people with higher incomes can buy better [welfare service] than people with lower incomes?* In this regard, studies on “perceptions of fairness” in access to healthcare, such as 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. Recently, 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. In this paper, I adopted the latter approach to scrutinize market justice preferences, as I am interested in the general preferences beyond specific social policy domain.

In line with the above, I expect that network diversity nurtures greater skepticism toward the fairness of market mechanisms (market skepticism hypothesis) 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 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. I categorized the ISEI scores into bottom, intermediate, and top status groups, as well as an additional category for those who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET).

*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. The answers are categorized based on occupational status and grouped by the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI). Respondents were asked to approximate the number of people they knew in each occupation. 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. 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[[1]](#footnote-2). 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 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, I included the quadratic terms for age and network diversity in the fixed-effect regression.

 = individual fixed effects (unit-specific unobserved heterogeneity)

 = time fixed effects

 εit\varepsilon\_{it}εit​ = idiosyncratic error term

# Longitudinal results on network diversity and market justice attitudes

[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 compared to previously being in an intermediate status occupation (reference category), moving to a low status occupation (β = -0.184, *p*<0.001) and leaving the labor market (β = -0.122, *p*<0.01) decreases support for market justice preferences. In contrast, moving up to a high status occupation compared to previously being in an intermediate status occupation decreased support for market justice (β = -0.187, *p*<0.001). Second, Model 2 includes other network characteristics of size and average network status, showing a non-significant negative association with market justice preferences. These results echo the theoretical assumptions and empirical findings on the role of intragenerational mobility in *market*-*inequality legitimacy* (Ares, 2020; Langsæther et al., 2022)[[2]](#footnote-3). This is the case of experiencing downward changes from intermediate to disadvantaged positions. However, what is shown suggests that moving from an intermediate to a high status occupation is linked to a decrease in support for commodified welfare services.

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 nonlinear 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. When network diversity is one standard deviation below the mean, the average predicted market justice preference is 2.20 (95% CI: 2.12 – 2.28). At the mean level of diversity (0), the predicted value is 2.14 (95% CI: 2.06 – 2.21), and it decreases to 2.07 (95% CI: 1.99 – 2.15) when network diversity is one standard deviation above the mean. These results indicate that a shift from a low-diversity to a high-diversity network is associated with an average decrease of approximately 0.15 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 3.5% [0.13 / (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

AI-generated content may be incorrect.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 explanations can account for this relationship. First, from a life-course perspective, interpersonal networks evolve in response 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, they 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 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.

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.

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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# Supplementary materials

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*Mobility profiles*

To construct the mobility profiles, I used four categories for individuals’ occupational status: low, middle, high, and NEET. The procedure consists of two stages. First, individuals are categorized based on their first and last observed positions to identify profiles of mobility and stability. Second, to ensure a more robust classification of stability, those who participated in the panel for three to four waves and remained in the same position for at least 75% of the time are classified as stable (Class Mode Approach).

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1. 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-2)
2. In an alternative approach, I constructed six intragenerational mobility profiles, categorizing individuals into downward, upward, and stable groups based on low, intermediate, and high occupational status. The results in Table S2 indicate that experiencing upward and downward mobility does not increase support for market justice when compared to those stable in a low-status occupation. In addition, Table S3 shows the relationship between network diversity and market justice preferences by mobility profile. The results indicate that rising network diversity affects those who have experienced upward and downward mobility. For those in stable positions, there are no significant changes in market justice preferences when network diversity rises. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)