Class-based network segregation, Economic Inequality and Redistributive Preferences across societies

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1 Introduction

[~500 words]

2 Theoretical views on class, social networks, and redistributive preferences

[~3000 words]

2.1 Class divide in the economic domain

The link between social class and political attitudes constitutes one of the most relevant findings in sociology. Theoretically, studies in the social mobility field have defined classes as structural positions given their difference in labor market situations distinguished by employment relations, skills level, and authority within the workplace, which traditionally has been represented by occupations instead of relative income or educational credentials (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Erikson et al., 1979). Besides the social stratification studies, political sociologists have systematically demonstrated that classes trace distinctions in other domains of social life as well, including ideological preferences (G. Evans, 1993), cultural consumption behavior (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) and attitudes toward redistribution and welfare (Svallfors, 2006). Regarding the latter, during the last decades, the research on class and political attitudes has developed more extensively regarding the economic domain, addressing the economic interests of classes with an emphasis on redistribution, social security, and social service functions of the welfare state (Lindh & McCall, 2020, p. 421).

Critical views have suggested that economic development and modernization have eroded the link between social class and political attitudes. Around the debate of the "death of class" thesis, it has been argued that due to the increase of material welfare in post-industrial societies, the distributive struggle between classes has been waning, resulting in the salience of

other group identities as more relevant, reorienting the political debate towards post-material concerns (Clark et al., 1993; Inglehart, 1990). However, although modernization has led to changes in citizens' concerns, it is feasible to argue that the distributive struggle between classes has not been wholly displaced but cohabits with people's attitudes in the sociocultural domain (Lindh & McCall, 2020). Empirically, the claimed blurring of the class cleavage has not been strongly supported, whereas class divides indeed shape attitudes in the economic domain in general, such as perceived class conflicts (Edlund & Lindh, 2015; Pérez, 2023), attitudes toward market-based inequality (Andersen & Yaish, 2018; Lindh, 2015), and redistributive preferences in particular (Brooks & Svallfors, 2010; Curtis & Andersen, 2015; Langsæther & Evans, 2020). In the broader context, scholars have identified two competing mechanisms to elucidate the relationship between social class and attitudes towards inequality, commonly referred to as the self-interest and normative value-driven motives perspectives.

Theoretically, self-interest has served as the canonical model to explain redistributive preferences, where the material interests of those with the most to gain from redistribution conflict with those in positions of greater material well-being (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). Similarly, extensions of the model have paid more attention to occupation as a representation of potential unemployment risk, arguing that social classes with greater risk exposure are prone to support redistributive policies as they reduce labor market insecurity (Rehm, 2009). Differently, part of the scholarly discussion has stressed the role of cognitive processes in preference formation for understanding why, even in contexts of greater economic disparities, the lower classes oppose redistributive policies, arguing that misinformation plays a crucial role in linking material conditions with the redistributive policies (Bartels, 2005; Druckman & Lupia, 2000). Similarly, it has been argued that contexts of greater segregation affect the inferences about social and economic inequality (Mijs, 2018) that ultimately contribute to the decoupling of material interests from economic preferences (García-Castro, González, et al., 2022; Hvidberg et al., 2020).

As material interests might prevail in scarcity, normative or value-driven motivations emerge as an alternative explanation in preference formation when pure self-interest weakens. Thus, values such as self-transcendence or humanitarianism share a common spirit regarding their desire for equality and concern for human dignity, providing the common ground for altruism that ultimately motivates political preferences (Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Kulin & Svallfors, 2013). Despite the protagonism of values, these are indeed conditioned to risk exposure and resource availability, becoming salient under conditions of greater security against market risks and material prosperity and weakening under conditions of greater vulnerability and material precariousness (Maldonado et al., 2019). Besides, it has been argued that occupations play a role in political attitude formation as they represent a set of specific skills and work logic that convey particular normative views (Oesch, 2006). Thus, workspaces are conceived as socializing agents, considering that economically active people spend a substantial part of their time at work, including the social relations involved in providing goods and services. Hence, empirical evidence has suggested that technical and managerial professionals hold more conservative political views than occupations in interpersonal services (Lindh & McCall, 2020; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). Despite this, it is challenging to disentangle if the class differences

are indeed explained through work experiences because it is feasible to argue that political preferences are the result of early-life internalization of social norms, which might be crystalized in career self-selection paths, which also might be influenced by the organizational hiring requirements for specific jobs (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014).

While prior research has predominantly concentrated on examining the impact of social class through an individualistic lens, it is noteworthy that more attention needs to be devoted to understanding the role of social environments in class relations. This omission is particularly surprising given that class positions are fundamentally rooted in production relations that make them inherently relational, not only in their economic underpinnings but also in the power dynamics entwined within class conflicts (Wright, 1989). Besides, the normative basis of class relations introduces the relevance of the dimensions of solidarity and reciprocity, which have been argued to provide the moral basis of the legitimacy and popular support for welfare schemes (Mau, 2003). Hereby, we argue that the scope of class analysis in attitude formation urges to be extended further to the individual or household situation, stressing the role of social ties and segregation as part of the socialization processes involved in the internalization of shared norms, class identity formation, conflict, and cooperation between classes.

2.2 Class relations and social networks

As social relations within the occupational structure serve as the foundation for class analysis, widening the examination to other dimensions of social life, such as family dynamics, the development of friendships, and diverse social activities, can significantly enrich the scope of class analysis, particularly concerning its relation to attitude formation. In this sense, social stratification scholars have paid attention to the intersection of status positions and group membership as the observable patterns of association referred to as relational networks (Blau, 1977b). Empirically, homophily is one of the most significant findings in network research, whereas the likelihood of tie formation between individuals of similar characteristics is strong (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson et al., 2001), such as age and gender in tracing friendship and family ties, as well as the segregated social environments alongside ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Bargsted et al., 2020; Plaza et al., 2022). In addition, psychosocial factors such as socialization preferences and group dynamics also play a role in segregation processes, considering that isolated social environments decrease the interchange of world views, reinforcing preferences towards in-group members and polarizing attitudes (Diprete et al., 2011; Visser & Mirabile, 2004). Nonetheless, without denying the relevance of socialization preferences, segregation has been predominantly explained through the lens of social differentiation in social activities as foci of contact opportunities that ultimately consolidate social networks (Feld, 1981; McPherson & Smith, 2019). From this scope, we argue that class relations not only represent resources-based distinctions, but patterns of sociability and exchange observed in the differentiation of social ties.

How classes are formed also provides insights regarding their social relations and sociability practices. In sociology, classes are understood as the everyday basis for action, given

their labor market situation, that ultimately shapes their access to opportunities and resources (Weber, 1978). According to habitus theory, classes incur a series of distinctive practices pivoted in cultural capital as the basis for mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, classes seek to improve their position through the intergenerational transmission of resources, whereas similarities in friendship and family choices play a crucial role in the reproduction privilege. Additionally, while symbolic resources reinforce status distinctions, access to exclusive social activities in the upper class increases segregation at the expense of excluding the lower classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1981). Ultimately, classes consolidate their demographic and cultural identities by mobilizing resources and shared sociability practices, ensuring intergenerational reproduction of their structural positions (Goldthorpe, 1992). Hence, the socialization of common lifestyles and shared worldviews facilitates the consolidation of social classes, whereas social resources embedded in social networks follow a pattern of accumulation and exclusion that ultimately leads to social segregation in both the upper and the lower bounds of the social structure.

Previous research on social class and tie formation has suggested that class permeability, understood as the formation of cross-class social ties, is traced differently across property and authority boundaries. Empirically, evidence from Western industrialized societies has shown that the formation of friendship ties between owners and the working class is very less likely, in contrast to the tendency of higher tie formation between supervisors and workers, suggesting that the authority dimension is much less permeable than authority-based boundaries given that class interests increase the social distance between proprietors and workers, while the intermediate class position of supervisors and contact frequency with workers make friendship tie formation more likely (Wright & Cho, 1992). Similarly, evidence from Chile has shown that the higher permeability of the intermediate classes contrasts with the more homogeneous networks of the working class, suggesting that their limited resources and lower capacity to be socially engaged ultimately result in a lack of social resources that isolate them from others, while the upper class is less permeable and homogenous as a result of its tendency to self-selection as a practice that ultimately seeks to reproduce their privileged status positions (Otero et al., 2021).

In contrast, cross-class embeddedness can be described regarding their social activities as well as through their changes across generations and time. In this regard, Pichler & Wallace (2009) suggest that higher civic engagement in formal organizations increases the chances of bridging with diverse people among the upper class, in contrast to the working class, which tends to be more homogeneous in its civic engagement behavior. Similarly, other studies in Europe and South America have exhibited that the upper and intermediate classes hold increasingly diverse and prestigious social environments than the working classes, where being socially mobile does help to improve both dimensions in tie formation, whereas it does not equalize the weight of class background compared to those intergenerationally stable in the upper class (Carrascosa, 2023; Cepić & Tonković, 2020). Additionally, the few longitudinal evidence suggests that networks change following a dynamic of cumulative advantages regarding its composition in terms of prestige and diversity, where upper classes improve in both

dimensions while the lower class shows more stability across the life course (Volker, 2020).

Theoretically, these studies account for class-based network segregation as the degree of connectedness of an individual to different occupations is meant to represent social resources embedded in social networks vertically in the social structure (Lin, 2007). Drawing on this approach, the attempts of stratification scholars have been focused on how social connections are distributed across the class structure as a matter of social integration (Blau, 1977a). Besides, *homogeneity* is described as the lack of cross-class network ties. It is indeed conceptually more proximate to the homophily principle because it is anchored in ego's class position. At the same time, *diversity* is defined as the rate of dissimilar ties or simply the total ties to certain groups that do not necessarily count with a reference position to describe the network composition. Hence, both approaches provide a set of alternatives for the study of social class from a network perspective that has been increasingly discussed in the stratification literature as well as in the scholarly discussion about social class and political attitudes.

2.3 Network segregation and attitudes toward redistribution

Apart from the individual approach to attitude formation, we argue that people also form their opinions in the economic domain on the basis of their social relations. Despite the limited research on the link between social ties and attitudes in the economic domain, we identify two broad theoretical approaches that have discussed the role of social networks in attitude formation.

On the one hand, the *Reference Groups* approach accentuates the role of beliefs about economic inequality rooted in social comparison processes as an explanation through which people form their opinions about redistributive policies (Condon & Wichowsky, 2020). This hypothesis can be traced to the studies on images of class and perceived class conflicts (M. D. R. Evans et al., 1992; Kelley & Evans, 1995). Here, the initial argument is that people form their beliefs through the individual, family, friends, and coworkers experiences instead of the whole society, which is described as an availability heuristic that systematically biases inferences about inequality based on the homophily of reference groups (M. D. R. Evans et al., 1992, p. 467). From this perspective, how people infer the social world is linked to the degree of segregation in their immediate social environment, which influences the intensity and character of the information, ultimately shaping inequality perceptions (Mijs & Roe, 2021). Thus, conversations with friends, family, and work colleagues shape inequality beliefs through experience sharing. Interestingly, research employing collaborative games has shown that the socioeconomic diversity of participants in conversations contributes to reconstructing more accurate images of income and wealth inequalities than isolated individuals (Summers et al., 2022). However, we argue that this research field has been more focused on the cognitive or informational dimension of preference formation through inequality perceptions (see Cansunar, 2021; García-Castro, García-Sánchez, et al., 2022) or the role of informational treatments (Becker, 2021; see Cruces et al., 2013; McCall et al., 2017), rather than empirically addressing the role of class segregation in social networks and its claimed influence on attitudes towards inequality.

3 Data, variables and method

[1500 words]

4 Results

5 Discussion and conclusion

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