Class identity in times of social mobilization and labor union revitalization: evidence from the case of Chile (2009–2019)

Abstract

Over the past decade, there has been a revival of social protest and labor union activity in Chile. In this article, we examine the effects of this phenomenon to analyze its influence on working-class identity. Using ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) surveys from 2009 and 2019, we investigate whether class location and union membership affect people's subjective identification with the working class, and how that effect may have changed over the decade. Our findings suggest that subjects who are situated in a "subordinated" class position (unskilled workers or informal self-employed workers) are more likely to identify with the working class compared to subjects located in a privileged class position (employers, experts, or managers). However, surprisingly, our analysis does not indicate that working-class identity is reinforced by union membership. In addition, our results do not demonstrate that the effect of class or union membership has strengthened over the past decade. At the end of this article, we offer some possible explanations for these findings.

Keywords: working-class identity; social class; union membership; social mobilization; neoliberalism; Chile

Introduction

For decades Chile has been considered a successful model of democratic transition, political stability, and neoliberal economic development. However, some of these ideas have been called into question by the rebirth of social mobilization that began in the 2010s (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017). This awakening can be seen in the public emergence of student and feminist movements, as well as massive demonstrations in which millions of Chileans have critiqued the institutional legacies of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990). These phenomena have coincided with a rebirth of labor union activity. In spite of their weakness, over the past decade unions have become more inclined to use strikes to exert pressure, both at the company level and for political purposes through general strikes (Aravena and Núñez, 2009; OHL, 2016, 2020). Similarly, over the past ten years trust in labor unions has grown, along with union membership rates (Dirección del Trabajo, 2018; Latinobarómetro, 2018). All of these trends reached a peak in November 2019, after a series of massive spontaneous protests sparked the so-called "*estallido social*" (social upheaval), when various unions called for the largest general strike of the past 35 years (if not more) in Chile.

These phenomena have prompted class analysts in Chile to revisit and reconsider a series of claims made in the 1990s and 2000s. Some researchers challenge the notion that

Chile is a "middle-class" country, demonstrating that class inequality is still highly persistent (Barozet, 2017; Gayo et al., 2016). Furthermore, others have demonstrated that, far from being a country defined by middle class identity, Chile has a very prevalent working-class identity, even more so than other countries like Argentina (Elbert and Pérez, 2018).

In line with these studies, we aim to examine the determinants of class identity in Chile. Using data from the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) survey conducted in 2009 and 2019, we use several logistic regression models to analyze how an individual's class location affects their probability of identifying with the working class. Next, we consider the possible impact of the union revitalization observed over the past decade, examining whether union membership status positively correlates to working-class identity. Finally, we investigate whether the effects of class position and union membership have increased in the past decade as a result of the growing social mobilization and union activity. Our findings suggest that class position is a significant determinant of class identity. However, contrary to our hypothesis, we cannot conclude based on these results that union membership status significantly impacts working-class identification, nor that the effects of class and union membership on class identity have grown in this time period.

Class inequality and labor union revitalization in Chile

Despite high levels of socioeconomic inequality and the increasing concentration of wealth (Espinoza and Núñez, 2014; Torche, 2005), between 1990 and 2010 the neoliberal economic model in Chile was not seriously challenged. The lack of large-scale anti-neoliberal social movements and the relative weakness of traditional class-based actors (like a labor movement) made the emergence of "contentious politics" unlikely in Chile at the time (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017). In this context of neoliberal hegemony, the emergence of "traditional" class-based collective identities and actions appeared, to many scholars, improbable (Espinoza et al., 2013; León and Martínez, 2007; Ruiz and Boccardo, 2015). Following much international literature (Collier and Handlin, 2009; Roberts, 2002; Stillerman and Winn, 2007), these studies demonstrated how the de-industrialization of the economy in the transition away from an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model weakened the traditional labor union movement, which was anchored in the industrial manufacturing sector.

In Chile as well as in the rest of Latin America, these lines of reasoning were essential to understanding the weakening of "traditional" class identities. In Chile, some scholars argued that the weakening of traditional class identities was an effect of the expansion of the middle class. According to this argument, the neoliberal transformation

led to growth for the private sector service industry and, as a result, an increase of "middle-class" occupations. This resulted in the adoption of middle-class identities, values, and attitudes, in addition to the entrenchment of political conformism among the majority of Chilean workers (Castillo et al., 2013: 171; Espinoza et al., 2013: 179–181; León and Martínez, 2007; Ruiz and Boccardo, 2015: 156). Yet, the demise of working-class identities has also been interpreted as an effect of "downward" mobility. In some Latin American countries, for example, scholars hypothesized that due to the growth of the informal sector, traditional "worker" (*obrera*) class identities were being replaced by "popular" identities that went beyond the labor relations inherent in the ISI model (Collier and Handlin, 2009; Roberts, 2002). Similarly, several scholars noted how the neoliberal turn in Chile implied the transformation of industrial relations through, for example, the enactment of labor-repressive and flexibilizing policies (particularly those articulated in the 1979 Labor Plan). These policies not only made the labor market more flexible and precarious, but also decentralized collective bargaining and undermined labor power by increasing union fragmentation (Rojas, 2017).

Until the early 2010s, this interpretation functioned well to explain why, despite high levels of inequality, the neoliberal regime remained largely unchallenged in Chile. Yet since 2011 there has been a rebirth of "contentious politics" in the form of emergent social

movements that have, through massive protests, demanded profound institutional changes to Chile's neoliberal model (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017). Scholars maintain that this revival of protest in Chile can be explained by the prevalent feelings of unease and discontent among the Chilean population that derive from the persistent economic and power disparities between classes (Luna, 2016; PNUD, 2015; Somma, 2017).

One important aspect of this cycle of social mobilization is its relation to the revitalization of the labor movement. Since the late 2000s, this revitalization has been evidenced by the substantial increase in strike actions and activity (Aravena and Núñez, 2009). Between 2005 and 2015, the number of strikes per year grew from 186 to 230 (OHL, 2016). As seen in Figure 1, this increase is also reflected in the average yearly number of workers involved in strike (382 in 2005 versus 3,425 in 2015) as well as the total worker-days lost to strikes (867 in 2005 versus 35,847 in 2015).

Figure 1: Average yearly number of workers involved in strikes and total worker-days lost to strikes between 1990–2017. Source: Observatorio de Huelgas Laborales (1990–2017).

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Empirical evidence reveals that this growth in strike activity is, in large part, a reflection of the increase in strikes happening outside of legally regulated collective bargaining (OHL, 2020). As shown in Figure 2, this increase in extra-legal labor mobilization took place particularly in sectors with strong organizing traditions, like mining, healthcare, and education. These are not isolated phenomena, but rather are connected to broader processes that began taking hold at the end of the 2000s. Clear examples of these trends include the successful, highly disruptive, national strikes organized by subcontractors in the mining and forestry sectors in 2007–2008 and dockworkers in 2013–2014, as well as the notable uptick in union and strike activity in the commercial sector, which encompasses almost 20 percent of the workforce.

Figure 2: Worker-days lost to strikes, by sector and legality, between 1980–2018.
Source: Strikes in Chile Repository (Ratto and Andrade, 2021)
[FIGURE 2 HERE]

These visualizations of the upward trends in union activity should not lead us to overestimate the real power of the Chilean labor movement. Compared to other social

movements (e.g., the student movement), the level of labor mobilization throughout the 2010s continued to be modest, and Chile's National Confederation of Workers (the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT) continued to play a marginal role in Chilean politics. The CUT has been unable to overcome recurrent political and organizational crises, which have severely undermined its legitimacy. As a result, throughout the 2010s, the CUT' capacity to mobilize rank-and-file workers and build associational power remained as weak as in the 1990s (Autor, 2021). Despite this, these data do suggest that, at least at the sectoral and workplace level, unions have revitalized in recent years.

This offers an understanding of the role played by unions in the social upheaval of October 2019, when the labor movement organized massive general strikes. These successful actions were key to politicians' eventual willingness to sign a pacted agreement to hold a plebiscite for a new constitution (Santibáñez, 2019). But these general strikes were not isolated incidents. Over the past 10 years, the general strike has become a strategic tool used with increasing frequency by Chilean unions; since 1990 there have been 18 general strikes, 17 of which occurred between 2011–2019, and at least 5 of which took place in 2019 (OHL, 2020).

Effects of union revitalization

The trends described above have manifested in a sustained increase in union membership over the years. Official records indicate that, while the proportion of workers who engage in collective bargaining remains low (less than 10%), the rate of union membership has been slowly but steadily climbing since the late 2000s. For example, in 2006 only 13 percent of Chilean workers were members of a trade union, but in 2019 that rate had grown to 17 percent, or 1,193,104 workers (Dirección del Trabajo, 2020). If this trend continues, it is possible that in a few years Chile could surpass the height of union membership rates since the democratic transition, 18 percent in 1991. The rise in union membership coincides, understandably, with rising public trust in unions. Data from the Latinobarómetro surveys, for example, show that the percentage of Chileans who have "a lot" or "some" confidence in unions grew from 31 percent in 2003 to 51 percent in 2015 (Latinobarómetro, 2018).

Based on this evidence, we analyze whether this surge in union mobilization has affected subjective perceptions of class inequality. We therefore focus on class identity, which we understand as the conjunction of perceptions and feelings through which people define themselves as part of a social class (Wright, 1997). Upon the basis of the evidence presented thus far, as well as theories proposed in recent literature (which we discuss

below), we advance three primary aims. First, we will study how class location affects a working-class identity. Second, we will analyze whether being a member of a union has a positive impact upon said working-class identity. And finally, considering the hike in union activity and social protest over the past few years, we will examine whether the effects of class and union membership have gotten stronger over the past decade. In the following section we define the concept of class identity and the hypotheses that direct our investigation. Then, we will outline our data and methods, as well as the results of our analysis. In the final section we present our conclusions and implications for future research.

Class identity and its determinants

The concept of class identity is central to research on class inequality and its subjective effects (Andersen and Curtis, 2012; Elbert and Pérez, 2018; Oddsson, 2018). Taking up the Marxist perspective espoused by Wright (1997), we define class identity with a consideration for the ways that it generates not only feelings of belonging within classes, but also antagonistic interests between classes. We thus understand class identity to be a conjunction of subjective feelings through which people define "who is similar to and who is different from themselves, who are their potential friends and potential enemies within

the economic system" (Wright, 1997: 396). Building upon this idea, we maintain that when class identity is strong, people are more aware of social inequality, of antagonistic interests between classes, and, sometimes, of the necessity for collective action to change the status quo (Wright, 1997).

The quantitative study of class identity has focused on its structural determinants, examining in particular how an individual's class location may affect their self-identification with a social class (Andersen and Curtis, 2012; Elbert and Pérez, 2018; Hout, 2008; Oddsson, 2018). Some of these studies have gone further to consider how class identity is itself a mechanism reinforcing the awareness of class interests (Robison and Stubager, 2018; Wright, 1997). All of this literature demonstrates that people who are in more disadvantaged positions socially and economically are more likely to self-identify as part of a "lower" or "working" class (Andersen and Curtis, 2012; Elbert and Pérez, 2018; Hout, 2008). Building upon these findings, we hypothesize that:

H_1: Subjects who are situated in a working-class or a subordinated class location (e.g., workers who are self-employed in the informal sector) are more likely to self-identify with the working class than are people in "privileged" class positions (such as employers, expert managers, or high-level supervisors).

It is important to mention that in this study we adopt a structural approach to class, i.e., one that focuses on how class, measured through people's 'objective' location in relations of exploitation (Wright, 1997), shapes their *subjective* identification with a certain class. This approach has been criticized from different points of view. Przeworski (1977) questions this structural approach by arguing that classes are not only 'objective positions' but also effects of political struggles. Likewise, Carchedi (1987: 127) criticizes this approach claiming that it is based on a 'deterministic' understanding of the relationship between class location and class consciousness. While these critiques are theoretically challenging, we believe that our approach should not be conflated with deterministic explanations. When analyzing the effect of class location on class identity, we do not imply that the relationship between the objective and subjective aspects of class is mechanical. Instead, we argue that such a relationship is complex as it is mediated through political and socioeconomic factors (Andersen and Curtis, 2012; Elbert and Pérez, 2018).

In addition to analyzing the class determinants of working-class identity, we will examine whether said identity is affected by union membership. According to Fantasia (1988), participating in unions is key to the formation of class solidarity and class consciousness. It is through unions that workers act collectively and, in moments of crisis (e.g., during a strike), build "cultures of solidarity" that reinforce not only their working-

class identity but also their willingness to participate in collective action. Similarly, recent research has shown that union membership also positively affects political awareness and class consciousness. Kerrissey and Schofer (2018) demonstrate that people who are unionized are much more likely to participate in political organizations, to attend marches, and to join in political debate compared to people who are not in a union. Wright (1997) also shows that unionized individuals perceive higher levels of class opposition than do their non-unionized peers. In line with this literature, we propose:

H_2: Unionized workers are more likely to self-identify as working class than their peers who are not union members.

Finally, we analyze to what extent union revitalization and the rise in social mobilization may have affected the impacts of class position and union membership. Scholars have suggested that the surge in social protest has re-politicized Chileans, politicizing the debate on inequality in the country (PNUD, 2015; Roberts, 2017). To test this, we propose two related hypotheses:

$H_{3.1}$: The positive impact of being in a working class or subordinated class position upon working-class identity will be stronger in the 2010s compared to the decade prior.

$H_{3.2}$: The positive impact of union affiliation upon working-class identity will be stronger in the 2010s compared to the decade prior.

Data and methods

For this article, we analyzed longitudinal data of a nationally representative and probabilistic subsample of Chileans, taken from the ISSP survey module, 'Social Inequalities'. Our time series consists of measurements at two timepoints: 2009 and 2019. The 2019 data was generated at the beginning of the year and therefore does not reflect any effects of the protests that began in October of that year. Nevertheless, we believe that this data does reflect the cumulative effects of mobilizations that kicked off in 2011, as waves of protest continued until 2013 and then reignited toward the end of the decade (especially in 2015 and 2017–2019).

The same ISSP questionnaire was administered at both timepoints. Although a few variables were slightly modified over the years, they both included basic questions that allow us to operationalize our dependent variable (class identity), our predictors (class

location, unionization, and year), and a series of controls typically used in these type of studies (age, gender, employment sector, etc.). When we began our analysis, the 'occupation' variable was still incomplete for the 2019 dataset, as occupations were not yet classified according to the codes dictated by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ILO, 2007). For this reason, we performed the occupation coding ourselves.[1] The final dataset had a sample size of 2,265.

Dependent variable

Class identity was measured using a standard self-identification question incorporated in the two waves of the survey: "Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular class. Please tell me which social class would you say you belong to: The response options were: lower class, working class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class. Based on these categories, we established a dichotomous variable in which 1 = 'working class.' This included those who self-identified as either 'lower class' or 'working class.' The rest of the categories were defined with a value of 0, indicating the absence of working-class identity. We decided to group the 'working' and 'lower' class categories together because previous evidence suggests that Chilean workers tend to use them interchangeably to draw a line between 'them'—i.e., 'hard-working people' who must

struggle ‘to make ends meet’—and those who are ‘really middle-class’ or part of the ‘privileged’ classes. Furthermore, evidence also indicates that such ‘working-class’ identity also comprises those who define themselves as ‘lower-middle’ class (Autor, 2017). Based on this evidence, in their study of class identification Elbert and Pérez (2018) use a variable to measure ‘working-class identification’, which even includes responses that self-identify as lower-middle class. Unlike in the work of Elbert and Pérez, for this study we chose to exclude from the ‘working class’ category any responses that self-identified as lower-middle class. Had we not used this definition, the rate of identification with the working class would have been very high across the majority of classes, obscuring important differences between the categories of our independent variables[2].

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of our dependent variable, by year. In addition to presenting the percentages for the dichotomous measure used as dependent variable in the regression analyses (which groups the ‘lower’ and ‘working’ class categories together), for descriptive purposes this table and other descriptive figures presented below also report a measure that distinguishes ‘lower’ from ‘working’ class identification.

Table 1: Class identification by year (in percentages)

Class identity	2009		2019	
	Three categories	Dichotomous measure (lower + working class grouped together)	Three categories	Dichotomous measure (lower + working class grouped together)
Other class (middle or upper class)	44.4	44.5	45.2	45.2
Working class	37.1	55.6	42.5	54.8
Lower class	18.5		12.4	
Total (n)	1,253			1,012

Independent variables

Class location

Class location was measured using a modified version of Wright's 12-category schema of classes (1997). Wright distinguishes class positions on the basis of three criteria: 1) the private ownership of means of production (to differentiate owners from wage earners); 2) the level of skills expected for work (to differentiate between experts, skilled, and unskilled wage earners); and 3) the possession of "organizational assets" (authority) within the production process (to differentiate between salaried workers who occupy management or supervisory roles versus workers without that authority).

Within the first criterion (ownership of means of production), we distinguish between: 1. Employers (owners of firms with 10 or more employees); 2. Small employers (with between 1 and 9 employees); and 3. Petty bourgeoisie (self-employed). As scholars have done in recent research (Elbert and Pérez, 2018), we restricted the category of 'petty bourgeoisie' to only highly skilled self-employed workers (who have completed higher education). We did so to capture the reality of self-employment in Latin American labor markets. In Latin America, there is a large informal sector that employs poorly skilled workers who tend to work in small firms and especially as independent laborers. Furthermore, the growth of unskilled self-employment is argued to be directly related to the rise of the informal sector in Latin America (Tokman, 2011: 778). Therefore, to distinguish these informal independent workers from the 'truly' (more skilled) petit bourgeoisie, we created a new category for semi-skilled or unskilled self-employed workers (according to their ISCO code and education level). This is the category, 10. Informal self-employed workers.

Based on the second criterion (skill level), we distinguish wage earners according to their condition as experts, skilled laborers, or unskilled laborers. To do so we used the ISCO codes aggregated to two digits. For the 2009 dataset, the codes are based on ISCO-88, while the 2019 data uses ISCO-08. In both cases, the "experts" category was corrected

for education level. Thus, experts were those employed in occupations belonging to ISCO groups 1 and 2 who had also completed some post-secondary education.

Finally, the last criterion (authority) allows us to differentiate between managers/supervisors and wage earners without supervisory authority. Though our dataset does not offer distinctions between the three authority levels proposed by Wright (1997: 74–90), the survey data at least distinguishes between those who worked in a supervisory capacity and those who did not.

Taking these into account, we can create six categories of salaried class position based on qualification level and authority: 4. Expert managers, 5. Experts (non-managerial), 6. Skilled managers/supervisors, 7. Unskilled supervisors, 8. Skilled workers, and 9. Unskilled workers. Taken together with the four business owner categories described above, our class schema contains 10 class positions total.

It is important to remember that, as stated above, our approach to class focuses on its 'objective' (structural) aspects. Thus, by 'working class' we mean the class of people located in salaried, non-managerial, and skilled or unskilled class locations (i.e., the categories 8 and 9 in our schema). While not 'working class' in the strict definition of the term, in our class schema the informal self-employed (category 10) are considered as part of the 'popular' (subordinated) classes.

Unionization

Union membership status was measured with a dummy variable, where a value of 1 indicates that the respondent was or is currently a member of a union, and 0 indicates they have never been a union member.

Year

We also analyze whether the hypothesized positive effects of both variables increased over the time series. Our analysis therefore includes the survey years, 2009 and 2019.

Table 2 presents the frequency and proportion of union membership status and each class category, by year.

Table 2: Class location and union membership status by year

Predictor	Responses	2009	2019
Class location (in percentages)	1. Employers	0.8	0.9
	2. Small employers	6.4	2.1
	3. Petty bourgeoisie	2.3	3.7
	4. Expert managers	3.9	4.3
	5. Experts	2.9	5.3
	6. Skilled managers/supervisors	6.3	4.3
	7. Unskilled supervisors	8.5	5.5
	8. Skilled workers	12.6	10.3
	9. Unskilled workers	46	49.2
	10. Informal self-employed workers	10.3	14.4
Union membership status (in percentages)	No	86	85.5
	Yes	14	14.5
Total (n)		1,253	1,012

Controls

Following other recent research, our analysis also includes the following sociodemographic controls: sector of employment (0 = public; 1 = private), gender (0 = male; 1 = female), area of residence (1 = Santiago Metropolitan Region; 0 = other), and age (in years). The descriptive statistics of these controls can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Sociodemographic controls.

Predictor	Responses	2009	2019
Area of residence (in percentages)	Metropolitan Region	41.5	41.1
	Other	58.5	58.9
Gender (in percentages)	Men	52.2	52.7
	Women	47.8	47.3
Sector of employment (in percentages)	Public	9.7	13.7
	Private	90.3	86.3
Age	(in years)	M=46.5 SD=17.1	M = 49.9 SD=17.21
Total (n)		1,253	1,012

Methods

For this study we tested the hypotheses stated above using several logistic regression models. The dependent variable for these models was working-class identity, while the three main independent variables were class position (reference category: unskilled workers), union membership status (1 = yes), and survey year (reference category = 2009). These models also included the sociodemographic controls discussed above.

Using the Stats package (v3.6.2 glm, Fitting Generalized Linear Models) of the statistical software R (R Core Team, 2020), we ran three regression models.[3] In the first

model, we included our three independent variables plus sociodemographic controls. The second included all of the variables from model 1 plus an interaction term between class and year. Finally, the third model shows all the variables from model 1 plus the coefficients resulting from the interaction term between year and unionization. While model 1 is useful for estimating the net effects of class, unionization, and year upon class identity, with models 2 and 3 we can see whether the effects of class (model 2) or unionization (model 3) changed over time.

To assess whether the results obtained through these models were an effect of our operationalization of the dependent variable, we ran the same models with a more restrictive measure of 'working class identity', which only included the 'working class' category such as asked in the survey. The results of these models, available by request, were similar to the results reported here (with the exception of year, no other independent variables had coefficients different from the ones shown below).

Results

Figure 3 shows the percentage of people who identify with the "working class" (i.e., with the lower or the working class properly speaking) by class and union membership status. The figure suggests that the subordinated classes—e.g., unskilled workers and the informal

self-employed—identify more with the working class, whereas union members tend to identify less with it. Although the data indicate some change over time (e.g., the percentage of expert and expert managers who identify themselves with the working class increased substantially in 2019), the differences by class and union membership status seem to remain stable over time. Furthermore, in the two time points the pattern is similar regarding the categories that comprise our definition of working-class identity: in the two years the identification with the working class (in its restrictive sense) is higher than with the lower class.

Figure 3. Identification with the working class by class location and union membership status, 1999 – 2019

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

To test whether the differences identified in Figure 3 are statically significant, Table 4 shows the results of the three logistic regression models in which the dependent variable is our dichotomous measure of working-class identity. Model 1 shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between class location and class identity. As we proposed in H_1, those who are located in the unskilled working class (reference category),

or similar disadvantaged classes, are more likely to self-identify as working class, in comparison to those who occupy a privileged class positions (employers or expert managers) or "middle class" positions (e.g., experts, supervisors, or petty bourgeoisie). For example, the log odds that an expert manager would self-identify with the working class are 2.3 times less than those of an unskilled worker. Something similar happens in the "employers" class category: belonging to this class reduces by 1.35 points the log odds of identifying with the working class, compared to belonging to the unskilled working class. On the other hand, the coefficient for informal self-employed workers suggests that belonging to this class positively affects working-class identification (log odds = 0.31, $p < .01$) (model 1). This same general pattern is repeated in models 2 and 3, therefore we should accept H_1 as true. In all models, objective class location is a significant determinant of class identity.

This conclusion is further supported if we calculate the predicted probabilities that a person from different social classes would self-identify with the working class. These probabilities are shown, along with the probabilities for union membership status, in Figure 4. The probabilities were calculated using the coefficients from model 1, holding constant all other variables included in the model at their average (for age) or their reference category (for all others). With regard to social class, Figure 4 shows that the probability of

someone from the working or the informal self-employed class self-identifying with the working class varies between 60–70 percent. On the other hand, the probabilities that an employer or expert would do so vary between 20-30 percent, whereas the probability for an expert manager is only 14 percent.

Further results of model 1, seen in Table 4, show that there is no statistically significant relationship between unionization and class identity. Contrary to what we hypothesized in H_2, union membership does not significantly increase the log odds of identifying with the working class. The coefficient for this variable indicates, in fact, that the effect of unionization upon the log odds of identifying with the working class is actually negative, though very weak. If we look at the probabilities presented in Figure 4, we can see that, while union members are less likely to identify with the working class than are non-members, the difference is very small (around 2 percent less) and not statistically significant. All in all, our analysis of the data suggests that, contrary to H_2, union participation does not significantly contribute to working-class identity.

Table 4: Determinants of working-class identity in Chile, 2009–2019

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	0.27	0.30	0.26
	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Class location (ref: 9. Unskilled workers)			
1. Employers	-1.35**	-1.05	-1.35**
	(0.51)	(0.66)	(0.51)
2. Small employers	-0.59**	-0.35	-0.59**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.22)
3. Petty bourgeoisie	-1.27***	-0.83*	-1.27***
	(0.28)	(0.39)	(0.28)
4. Expert managers	-2.34***	-3.03***	-2.35***
	(0.32)	(0.54)	(0.32)
5. Experts	-1.81***	-2.59***	-1.80***
	(0.28)	(0.54)	(0.28)
6. Skilled managers/supervisors	-1.25***	-1.25***	-1.26***
	(0.21)	(0.26)	(0.21)
7. Unskilled supervisors	-0.67***	-0.83***	-0.67***
	(0.17)	(0.22)	(0.17)
8. Skilled workers	-0.39**	-0.41*	-0.39**
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.14)
10. Informal self-employed workers	0.31*	0.44	0.31*
	(0.15)	(0.23)	(0.15)
Union membership status (ref: Non-member)			
Union member	-0.14	-0.14	-0.08
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.18)
Year (ref: 2009)			
2019	-0.07	-0.07	-0.05
	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.10)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sociodemographic controls			
Employee in private sector (ref: public)	0.17	0.17	0.18
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Women (ref: Men)	-0.21*	-0.22*	-0.21*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Age (in years)	0.01	0.00	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Other residence (ref: Metropolitan area)	0.12	0.10	0.12
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Interactions			
1. Employers- 2019		-0.74	
		(1.07)	
2. Small employers-2019		-1.30*	
		(0.58)	
3. Petty bourgeoisie-2019		-0.89	
		(0.57)	
4. Expert managers-2019		1.25	
		(0.68)	
5. Experts-2019		1.21	
		(0.63)	
6. Skilled managers/supervisors-2019		0.01	
		(0.44)	
7. Unskilled supervisors-2019		0.47	
		(0.37)	
8. Skilled workers-2019		0.03	
		(0.29)	
10. Informal self-employed workers-2019		-0.23	
		(0.31)	
Union member-2019			-0.15
			(0.27)
Pseudo R^2	0.946	0.1066	0.953
Log Likelihood	-1411.63	-1402.83	-1411.49

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Deviance	2760.88	2741.12	2760.56
Num. obs.	2,152	2,152	2,152

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Standard Errors in parenthesis. **Note:** Dependent variables is a binary response indicating whether the respondents identify as working class (1 = yes). The "working class" category comprises those who define themselves as "working class" and "lower class" (see main text).

Finally, we included interaction effects in models 2 and 3 in order to evaluate whether the impacts of belonging to the working class (or another subordinated class) and of being a union member increased over the decade. Contrary to hypothesis 3.1, model 2 reveals that there is no statistically significant interaction effect between class and year. This can be seen in Figure 5. Using the interaction coefficients from model 2, this figure shows the change in probability, for each class, of identifying with the working class each year, holding all other variables constant at their average value (age) or reference category (all others). As we can see, the probabilities for each class of identifying with the working class do not change across years. The only exception is in the case of small employers, who (according to model 2) were less likely to identify with the working class in 2019 than in 2009. However, the size of this effect is low and likely not statistically significant (its confidence intervals overlap). Overall, these results suggest that the positive impact of being in the working or subordinated classes upon working-class identity stayed the same across both timepoints. In other words, it was not reinforced over the course of the decade.

We see something similar with the interaction effect between unionization and year from model 3. Contrary to hypothesis 3.2, we do not see a significant change over time in the impact of union affiliation. This is evident in the predicted probabilities in Figure 6, which were calculated using the model 3 coefficients, controlling all other variables as done for Figure 5. In this case, Figure 6 suggests that the effect of unionization on class identity did not increase over the decade.

Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of identifying with the working class by class location and union membership status

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of identifying with the working class for the interaction between class location and year

[FIGURE 5 HERE]

Figure 6. Predicted probabilities of identifying with the working class for the interaction between union membership status and year

[FIGURE 6 HERE]

Discussion

Based on the results presented here, we can conclude that social class is a significant predictor of how people perceive their position within the social structure. This leads us to question the "death of class" hypothesis put forth several decades ago by Pakulski and Waters (1996). Rather, our findings support earlier research that proposed that, despite the weakness of class organizations like unions, social class is still a determining factor in identity (Andersen and Curtis, 2012; Hout, 2008; Oddsson, 2018).

The importance of class position contrasts somewhat with what we see for union membership. Our regression models show that unionization does not significantly reinforce working-class identity. This finding could indicate that the union revitalization experienced in Chile in recent years is not yet strong enough to change the general pattern of unionization there in order to generate significant subjective effects. As stated above, the Chilean labor legislation contains several anti-union provisions that have impeded the emergence of a strong labor movement (Rojas, 2017). Due to these provisions, union membership is infrequent and relatively restricted to certain economic sectors and working conditions. Most people employed in precarious work modalities—with flexible, short-term contracts or in small production units—are, in practice, unable to unionize. In fact, a CASEN survey from 2017 determined that union members tend to work in large

companies: 57 percent of them work for a large business (with over 200 employees), 32 percent for a medium-sized business (with between 10–199 employees), and only 6 percent for small businesses (with between 2–9 employees). Large companies, in general, tend to offer better work conditions and compensation than medium-sized or small businesses. This, in part, is why union members tend to have much greater job stability than non-members: while 90 percent of union members work under an indefinite (permanent) contract, only 70 percent of non-unionized workers do (CASEN, 2017). This may also explain why unionized workers have higher incomes than non-members do. Landerretche, Lillo, and Puentes (2013) report that, in Chile, unionized workers receive wages between 18–24 percent higher than those of workers who are not part of a union. As a result, beyond the revitalization of Chilean unions, a large portion of unionized workers have a comparatively advantageous position in the labor market, which may influence their lower probability of identifying as working-class.

Lastly, the absence of interaction effects tells us that the effects of class and unionization have remained constant despite the surge in social mobilization over the past decade. As we stated previously, the 2019 survey data was collected prior to the social upheaval and therefore do not capture any potential effects of the protest cycles that began on October 18th of that year. It is likely that, given their magnitude, these events have had a

substantial impact on the ways Chileans perceive their positions within the class structure. This is somehow what some scholars have recently suggested. Stecher and Sisto (2020: 60–62) posit that the events initiated in October 2019 were the expression of emerging social identities that pushed workers to create new forms of cooperation and solidarity. If this is true, we expect that the interaction effects we hypothesized here will become visible after 2019.

Conclusion

In this article we have studied the relationship between class position and working-class identity in Chile. We also tested whether the impact of class and union membership grew over the past decade. Based on our findings, we can conclude that class position does affect class identity, much as we predicted, but the same cannot be said for union membership. We also did not find any significant interaction effects that would allow us to confirm that the influence of class position upon class identity grew stronger over the ten-year period in question.

We believe that these results offer a glimpse onto certain aspects of class inequality in Chile. The absence of interaction effects could suggest that it is impossible to find a significant temporal change in the impact of class and unionization for identity, at least

over the time period we examined. This interpretation, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. For one thing, as we have explained, we suspect that the effect in question could have taken place after the social mobilizations that began in October 2019. What's more, we have presented clear evidence that the majority of Chileans—55 percent, to be precise—identified with the working class (understood as the umbrella category including both "lower class" and "working class" itself) in 2009 just as in 2019 (see Table 1). The presence of a strong working-class identity *before* 2019 could help explain why the impact of social class in that year was measured so similarly to levels a decade prior, despite the rise of social movements across the country.

To conclude, it is worth reflecting on the theoretical and methodological implications of this work. In contrast to some previous research, our findings challenge the idea that Chile is a "middle-class" country (see also Barozet, 2017; Elbert and Pérez, 2018; Gayo et al., 2016). Methodologically speaking, our findings further suggest that the way a dependent variable is measured can significantly alter the results obtained. Earlier research measured class identity based on gradational frameworks—in particular, using scales from 1 to 10, in which 1 indicates "low" subjective social status and 10, "high" (Castillo et al., 2013). Using this measurement, Castillo, Miranda, and Madero (2013) suggest that a middle-class identity—understood as respondents selecting intermediate values on the

scale—is most common in Chile. Unlike this type of study focused on the analysis of subjective social status, we focused our investigation on class identity as a categorical variable. This involves not only a conceptual difference, but a methodological one; it requires measuring class identity with a dummy variable that explicitly includes the category of "working class." The discrepancy between our research findings and those of earlier work suggests that the quantitative study of class identity is sensitive to how the dependent variable is measured, whether by category or scale. It is essential that future studies take up these kinds of challenges. Further research could, for example, systematically compare the results obtained from measuring class identity in different ways. Chile is a highly relevant case study for such purposes. As a country with high levels of inequality and social movements that continue to evolve and expand, Chile remains fertile ground for studying social class, in both its objective realities and its subjective expressions.

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Notes

1. The ISCO-08 coding was done manually by the authors and validated by the training set from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (National Statistics Institute) of Chile, and the weighting was verified with ENE (2020) data for the survey period.
2. When trying out the broader dependent variable used by Elbert and Pérez (2018), there were no substantial differences in the analyses presented.
3. The R code used to process and analyze the data and then write this article is available in the Open-Source Framework repository (DOI available upon request).