



Preferences for market justice in education: The role of meritocratic beliefs in the Chilean context

Masters thesis

Tomás Urzúa Moreno

Profesor guía:

Santiago de Chile

15 de julio de 2026

Tabla de contenidos

Abstract	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Theoretical and empirical background	7
2.1 Market justice preferences	7
2.2 Meritocratic beliefs	9
2.3 Associated factors	11
2.4 This study	14
3 Data, Variables and Methods	16
3.1 Data	16
3.2 Variables	16
3.3 Analytical strategy	17
3.3.1 Latent class analysis	19
3.3.2 Ordinal logistic regression	19
3.3.3 Robustness analysis	20
4 Results	21
5 Discussion	22
6 Conclusions	23
7 References	24

Abstract

Palabras clave: Market justice preferences; Education; Meritocratic beliefs; Chile; Latent class analysis

The commodification of education has reshaped not only how educational systems are organized but also how people evaluate what counts as fair in this domain. Market justice—the normative principle that access to and quality of education should depend on an individual’s or family’s ability to pay—has been consistently linked to meritocratic beliefs, which legitimize inequalities by attributing outcomes to individual effort and talent rather than to structural conditions. However, most research treats meritocracy as a one-dimensional construct, overlooking that meritocratic and privilege-based beliefs can coexist within the same individuals. Building on a multidimensional framework that distinguishes perceptions from preferences and merit from privilege, this study asks how patterns of meritocratic beliefs are configured in the population and how these configurations relate to preferences for market justice in education. I use representative data from the Chilean survey EDUMERCO ($N = 3,470$), collected in 2025 among adults aged 18 to 75 in the Santiago Metropolitan Region. I first apply latent class analysis to identify configurations groups of meritocratic and privilege-based beliefs, and then estimate ordinal logistic regression models to examine how membership in these belief classes relates to education market justice preferences, net of educational level, political identification, and sociodemographic controls, with a robustness check on a student subsample. By moving beyond a unidimensional view of meritocracy, this study aims to show that meritocratic beliefs do not operate as a single, uniform mechanism of legitimation but as a multidirectional one whose relationship with market justice varies across groups. The findings are expected to inform how normative judgments about educational fairness are shaped

in a highly unequal, market-oriented society such as Chile, offering evidence to support policies aimed at advancing educational justice.

Preferred journal for submitting the article: *Social Justice Reseach*

1 Introduction

Education has historically been a central element in the functioning of welfare states by promoting access to opportunities and upward social mobility (Castles et al., 2010). However, the commodification of education in recent years has profoundly transformed the purpose of educational institutions (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011; OECD, 2025). In this context, the expansion of private education has created a competitive environment with the public sector, leading, in some cases, to the perception that paying for education is synonymous with quality (Busemeyer & Iversen, 2020; Esping-Andersen, 1985; Lindh, 2015). This phenomenon is particularly concerning in countries such as Chile, the United States, and Australia, where educational provision is primarily private (Castles et al., 2010; Lee & Stacey, 2024; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Thus, the commodification of education has led to tangible consequences, such as school segregation, but it has also changed people’s moral schemes about what is considered fair in education (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Koos & Sachweh, 2019; Piketty & Sandel, 2025).

Although one might expect most people to support the public option—especially in countries with greater inequality—various studies have shown that some segments of the population support the private alternative and may even endorse the inequalities it generates (Lindh, 2015). This runs counter to general notions of redistribution and social justice, which are based on the principles of equality and equity (Walzer, 2010). In this sense, the private architecture of education has reshaped people’s sense of justice. The concept of “market justice” proposed by Lane (1986) is highly relevant in this context; it holds that access to education and its quality should be determined by an individual’s or a family’s ability to pay. By treating money as the guiding principle of education provision, this concept alludes to a distributive judgment but one focused on legitimizing inequalities rather than on the equitable distribution of resources, making it an essential

element for understanding the cultural and institutional transformations brought about by the commodification of education.

The literature suggests that meritocracy is among the most significant factors in legitimizing inequalities, and particularly in market justice. Despite being a distributive system based on effort and talent, several studies have shown that meritocratic beliefs are linked to the acceptance of inequality, as they attribute responsibility for successes and failures primarily to individual agency, which functions as a cultural mechanism that justifies social hierarchies and diminishes the perception of the structural factors that shape individual trajectories (Darnon et al., 2018; Heuer et al., 2020; Mau, 2015; Mijs, 2016; Mijs, 2021). Now, in the field of market justice, previous research has shown a positive association between perception of meritocracy and market justice (Castillo et al., 2024; Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025; Castillo et al., 2026). More specifically, meritocratic effort orientation has been found to be a key driver of education market justice preferences among both adults and students (Castillo et al., 2024; Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025). In this way, meritocratic beliefs serve as auxiliary frames of reference for all individuals; however, this raises the questions: Are the frames of reference provided by meritocratic beliefs the same for everyone? Do these frames share the same type of association with market justice in education?

Although many scholars have shown interest in meritocratic beliefs, most adopt a one-dimensional perspective. For example, they often view meritocratic beliefs as mutually exclusive with those that acknowledge privileges in society, such as social and economic capital. This has significant implications for our understanding of social reality, as it prevents us from observing the multidimensional nature of meritocracy. Recognizing this, various authors have developed conceptual frameworks for studying meritocracy (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Mijs, 2018); for example, Castillo et al. (2023) proposes a novel conceptual framework that distinguishes between meritocratic factors—such as effort and talent—and factors of privilege—such as social networks and a wealthy family. Furthermore, this framework distinguishes between perceptions and preferences, allowing us to understand that meritocratic beliefs and beliefs about privilege are neither opposites nor mutually exclusive; they can coexist. However, there are caveats regarding how these meritocratic beliefs take shape and operate differently in people’s minds. Concretely, although we already know that meritocratic beliefs are compatible with structuralist or privilege-

based beliefs, there is a lack of clarity about the different configurations of beliefs in people's minds and how these groups of individuals are characterized by similar belief patterns.

Some studies have sought to understand the diversity of meritocratic beliefs in person-centered approaches (Van Hootegeem, 2022; Zhu, 2025), but their operationalizations of meritocracy do not distinguish between perceptions and preferences, limiting the scope of interpretations based on these measurements. We see there is also research that has already examined the link between meritocracy and market-oriented preferences in education, but without outlining a typology of beliefs that would allow for an appreciation of variations across groups in the relationship between these two variables (Castillo et al., 2024; Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025; Lindh, 2015). In light of the above, I aim to contribute to this line of research based on two developments: (1) To identify different patterns of meritocratic beliefs using the conceptual framework proposed by Castillo et al. (2023). (2) To analyze how these patterns of meritocratic beliefs relate to the preference for market justice in education.

The study of the relationship between meritocratic beliefs and market justice in education is particularly relevant in Chile, a country that has internalized market-based structures into its social services since the military dictatorship, during which education was one of the sectors that underwent extensive privatization—the foundations of which remain in place to this day (Bellei, 2025; Corvalán et al., 2016; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Furthermore, the country's high levels of inequality are striking given its strong adherence to meritocracy, especially regarding the value placed on effort (Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025). Thus, this study aims to respond to two questions: (1) How do patterns of meritocratic beliefs manifest in terms of the number of identifiable groups and their sizes? (2) To what extent do meritocratic belief patterns influence preferences for market-based justice in education?.

To address these issues, I use representative data from the Chilean survey EDUMERCO (N = 3470), a 2025 study that examined attitudes, emotions, and behaviors among adults aged 18 to 75 regarding inequalities and meritocracy. First, I applied latent class analysis to identify configurations of meritocratic beliefs, and then conducted ordinal logistic regression to examine the relationship between these profiles and preferences for

market justice in education, while incorporating sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors. Thus, this research expands our understanding of how people's normative judgments vary and, above all, attempts to clarify that meritocracy does not function as a one-way mechanism for legitimizing educational inequalities. This can provide an assessment of how people normatively perceive the functioning of education, which may serve as a basis for developing policies to promote educational justice.

2 Theoretical and empirical background

2.1. Market justice preferences

Welfare states have undergone several institutional transformations in recent years, with private expansion strongly penetrating social services alongside public provision (Busemeyer & Iversen, 2020). Such processes have led to changes in the architecture of the institutions responsible for social welfare. On the one hand, private companies operate as service administrators of benefits based on the user's ability to pay, whereas on the other hand, public providers have reorganized to compete as quasi-markets (Lindh, 2017). Besides changes at the formal level, the commodification of social services shapes cultural norms and beliefs, where markets operate as moral projects (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Koos & Sachweh, 2019).

The field of distributive justice has gradually incorporated market preferences into attitudinal research on redistribution. Since Kluegel's seminal work (1981) on the normative foundations of beliefs about social stratification, the concept of market justice preferences has been developed, understood as the normative principle that legitimizes access to goods and services according to an individual's or family's ability to pay (Lane, 1986). This principle is closely linked to the justification of inequalities: by conceiving the market as a space of equal opportunities, economic success is interpreted as an individual achievement (J. R. Kluegel et al., 1999), disregarding the structural conditions that produce such disparities. In this way, market justice operates simultaneously as an economic and moral principle that legitimizes socioeconomic inequalities.

Most research in this field relies on survey data, in which questions about market justice directly probe support for the provision of social services—education, pensions, and health care—based on individual ability to pay (e.g., “Is it fair that high-income

individuals receive better education than low-income individuals?”) (Busemeyer, 2013; Lindh, 2015). Within this framework, ISSP has been the primary source for advancing this agenda. Also, recent research has employed both indices constructed from relevant items (Castillo, Laffert, et al., 2025) and a separate analysis of each item.

Education is one of the key dimensions in the study of market justice, given the commodification processes educational systems have undergone in recent decades. The growing prominence of the private sector in education, coupled with the implementation of market-driven logic, has transformed the structure of educational systems where students and their families are viewed as consumers of a service (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011; Lindh, 2015). These changes have ethical consequences, as education loses its intrinsic value and becomes a means of generating monetary value, and its quality is often determined by the type of funding, thereby reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities (Abowitz & Stitzlein, 2018; Ball, 2004; Piketty & Sandel, 2025; Satz, 2010). In this sense, market justice in education conflicts with educational justice by denying equity in quality and universal access to education.

Recent literature on market preferences has identified significant associations at both the individual and contextual levels. At the individual level, socioeconomic status emerges as a consistent predictor; those in more advantaged positions tend to exhibit greater preferences for market justice (Koos & Sachweh, 2019; Lindh, 2015), a pattern reflecting a moral economy that justifies status for those who benefit from the market order. In this regard, political ideology shows a clear association, with right-leaning individuals tending to favor market-oriented distributional principles (Castillo et al., 2024; Lee & Stacey, 2024). At the contextual level, the relative weight of private and public service provision emerges as a structuring factor in preferences; in countries where private investment predominates, individuals tend to internalize the market order as a criterion of justice and, consequently, to reduce their redistributive preferences; whereas the opposite trend is observed where public provision prevails (Busemeyer, 2013; Immergut & Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015).

2.2. Meritocratic beliefs

When discussing education, it is difficult not to encounter the concept of meritocracy. Based on Michael Young's work *The Rise of Meritocracy* (1962) (2017), this concept is understood as the distribution of rewards based on effort and talent. For their part, schools award credentials that reflect students' performance in various subjects. In this sense, meritocracy is a fundamental element of every educational institution, as it is one of the principles governing the awarding of credentials. Thus, beliefs about the educational system are often closely tied to meritocracy (Clycq et al., 2014; Darnon et al., 2018).

In the field of education, meritocracy has been used as a distributive principle, but within this framework, it has also been linked to the justification of inequalities. Starting from Adams' theory of equity (1963), meritocracy operates as a universal equality principle, where rewards should be commensurate with effort. Several studies have shown that meritocratic beliefs are associated with individualistic beliefs, such as an aversion to redistribution and a preference for market justice (Bartram, 2023; Castillo et al., 2024; Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025; Mijs, 2021; Sin et al., 2026), and are characteristic of those in more privileged social positions (Heuer et al., 2020). In these cases, meritocracy is used to legitimize positions, with those who benefit from the system often justifying their success on the basis of their own merit, overlooking the structural conditions that shape reality. Thus, the merit narrative is used to support the idea that money should determine the quality and access to education. This normative judgment runs counter to educational justice, as it hinders equal opportunities and, ultimately, determines students' educational trajectories (Moyano, 2020; Walzer, 2010).

In the meritocracy research framework, most studies have used survey items, with the International Social Survey Program as the main instrument for measuring and analyzing meritocratic beliefs in both national and international contexts. These items show the relevance of meritocratic and privilege factors for getting ahead in life, like effort and contacts, respectively. Following this conceptual model, there is a tradition of studying meritocratic beliefs from a unidimensional perspective (García-Sánchez et al., 2019; Mijs, 2021). The fundamental assumption of this perspective is that the factors are negatively correlated; for example, if one expresses a higher degree of meritocratic beliefs, then, consequently, beliefs that account for structural factors decrease. The problem with this

approach is that it has serious implications for understanding social reality, since people's beliefs cannot be assumed to follow a rational logic where, if one goes up, the other must go down. To address this, in recent years, some authors have proposed a multidimensional perspective on meritocracy, constructing frameworks that allow for distinguishing the dimension of merit from that of privilege, on the one hand, and differentiating perceptions from preferences on the other (Castillo et al., 2023; Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Zhu, 2025). These advances have led to two key contributions: (1) to capture the coexistence of beliefs that may be considered contradictory and, consequently, (2) to demonstrate that people can hold different sets of meritocratic beliefs.

While the multidimensional perspective on meritocracy allows for a more detailed examination of people's beliefs, a caveat remains about the individuals who hold them. So far, we do not know how different combinations of these dimensions operate in people's minds or how prevalent they are in populations. Several methods have addressed these issues by estimating how variables can group into persons, with Latent Class Analysis (LCA) among the most promising approaches. LCA is a person-centered approach that allows us to identify the heterogeneity of individuals' beliefs by clustering them, going beyond the scope of variable-centered methods, which assume that the association between two or more variables in the population behaves uniformly (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010). In our context, one advantage of this approach is that it accommodates the possibility that individuals may hold both meritocratic and structuralist beliefs, allowing for a theoretical and methodological examination of multidimensional meritocracy (Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018; Zhu, 2025).

Although LCA allows us to identify different configurations of meritocratic beliefs, it is not possible to define in advance the types of patterns that will be found. In this regard, the evidence suggests that one of the most common patterns is pure meritocratic beliefs, in which individuals consider merit important and structural factors unimportant (Heuer et al., 2020; Xian & Reynolds, 2017; Zhu, 2025). On the other hand, a pattern has also been identified in which success is attributed to family and background conditions rather than effort (C. Palomino & Sebastian, 2026). Finally, a pattern of dual consciousness has been identified, in which individuals consider merit, family connections, and wealth to be important (Zhu, 2025). Therefore, based on previous studies, this research hypothesizes three types of groups based on meritocratic beliefs:

H_1 : (1) purely meritocratic beliefs, viewing merits as important while deeming privilege factors as irrelevant; (2) aware of privilege beliefs, viewing privilege factors as important while deeming merits as unimportant; (3) dual consciousness, viewing merits and privilege factors as important simultaneously.

Each pattern of meritocratic beliefs can be situated within a framework of meaning related to a preference for market justice in education. As the literature suggests, the perception of meritocracy is widely associated with the legitimization of inequalities—and specifically with market justice—so it is to be expected that the first group would adhere to this pattern (Castillo, Laffert, et al., 2025; Castillo, Iturra, et al., 2025). With regard to the second group, the prevalence of privilege could be directly associated with disagreement over education-market justice preferences, since observing that society distributes rewards based on factors unrelated to merit might seem unfair (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005). Finally, the pattern of dual consciousness may demonstrate that the recognition of merit and privilege in the functioning of society could imply an understanding that structural conditions play an important role in individual outcomes, leading to opposition to the idea that access to and the quality of a service such as education should be based on economic conditions (Xian & Reynolds, 2017; Zhu, 2025). Based on the above, the following hypotheses emerge:

H_2 : Purely meritocratic beliefs class shows a positive association with education market justice preferences

H_3 : Aware of privilege beliefs class shows a negative association with education market justice preferences

H_4 : Dual consciousness beliefs class shows a negative association with education market justice preferences

2.3. Associated factors

There are various theories regarding how educational attainment affects people's redistributive preferences. On the one hand, there are theories that view education as a resource that enhances the development of technical skills and/or critical thinking, lead-

ing individuals to become aware of structural problems and, as a result, to support the reduction of inequality (Becker, 1993; Freire, 2015; Schultz, 1961). On the other hand, in cultural reproduction theories, education has been understood as a source of social inequalities, as it reproduces individuals' living conditions, preventing opportunities for intergenerational social mobility and, consequently, perpetuating the stratified social order (Bourdieu, 2019; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Within the framework of redistributive preferences, reproductionist notions are grounded in self-interest theory, whereby those with higher levels of education tend to exhibit attitudes that reflect a desire to protect their privileged social positions, which could be understood as an aversion to redistribution or support for market-based justice. Thus, education can be understood not only as an enlightening force in social life but also as a cog in the reproduction of inequalities.

Recent literature provides empirical support for these two theoretical approaches to education. For example, research by Nye et al. (2026) found, in an analysis of 282 country-year combinations from various international surveys, that in 95 % of cases, education was positively associated with market-oriented attitudes. Likewise, Van Noord et al. (2019) used data from 31 countries to show that education is widely understood as the basis for social stratification. Other studies have found that higher levels of education are associated with a greater preference for public investment (Busemeyer, 2012). However, the results from Liu & Wang (2026) suggest that education does not fulfill a generalized function; rather, both the enlightening and the reproductionist roles exist but depend on the level of education, where in countries with low inequality, basic education is associated with reproductionist positions, while in secondary and tertiary education, the enlightening role stands out.

Given the important role that education plays in shaping individuals' attitudes toward inequality, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_5 : Individuals with higher levels of education show higher education market justice preferences

In addition to educational level, the literature has shown that income is also an important factor in the study of attitudes toward inequality (Heuer et al., 2020; Lindh, 2015). The evidence shows that higher-income individuals tend to support market-based distributive principles (Immergut & Schneider, 2020; Lindh, 2015; Nye et al., 2026). In this

context, among higher-status social groups, there is congruence between their attitudes and their individual outcomes—that is, a legitimization of the market as a distributor of rewards, serving as a justification for social status. Although the link between income and market justice can be tied to self-interest theories, Langsæther & Evans (2020) argues that social status does not always provide a rational explanation for attitudes toward inequality, making it necessary to test this relationship. Based on the literature, the corresponding hypothesis is:

H_6 : Individuals with higher incomes show higher education market justice preferences

Political ideology also influences people’s attitudes toward inequality. In this regard, the scientific literature has shown that people with right-wing political ideologies tend to support a market-based distribution of welfare (Lee & Stacey, 2024). Meanwhile, (Van Hootegeem, 2022) found that right-wing individuals are less likely to adopt positions that support equity and equality. This finding is consistent with the study by Castillo, Iturra, et al. (2025), which found that only individuals identifying with right-wing ideologies showed a positive correlation with a preference for market justice in education. In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_7 : Right-wing individuals show higher education market justice preferences than those belonging to the left-wing

Finally, I examine the moderating role of education in the relationship between meritocratic belief patterns and preferences for education market justice. Given that education can play either an enlightenment or a reproductionist role, it would be interesting to observe how educational level can amplify or attenuate the relationship between each latent class and education market justice preferences. Since I do not have sufficient evidence to support this hypothesis, this analysis is exploratory. Thus, the following hypothesis emerges:

H_8 : Classes that are positively associated with education market justice preferences show an amplified effect when moderated by educational level

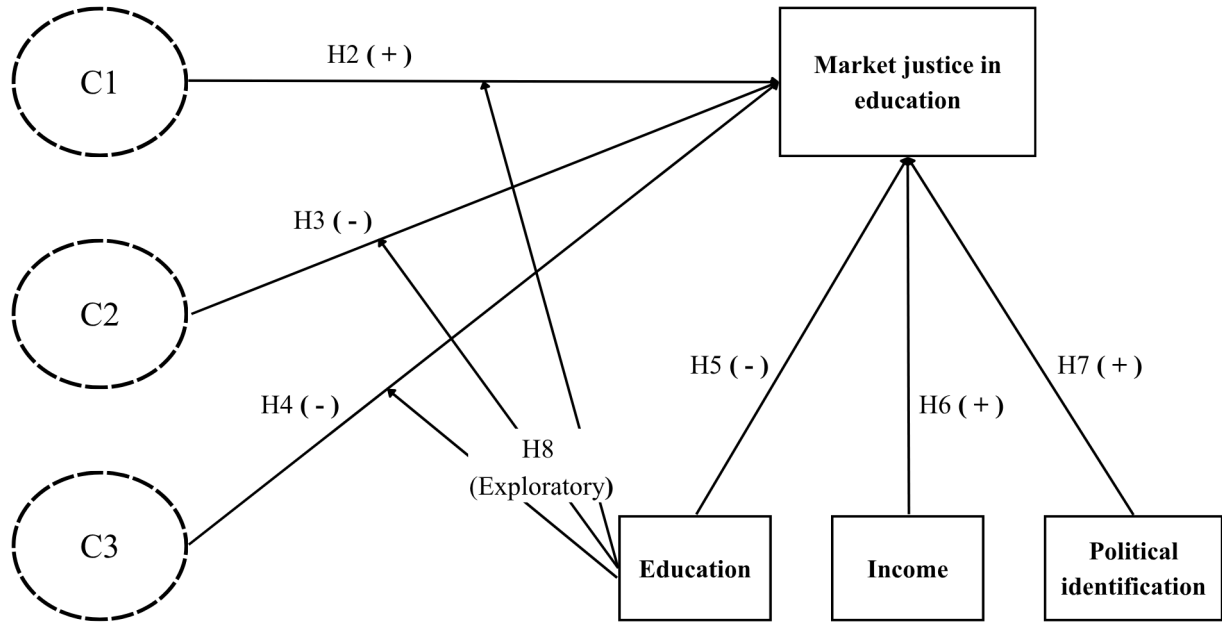


Figura 2.1: *Conceptual map for hypotheses.*

2.4. This study

Considering the hypotheses, this study argues that implementing a private social services architecture has consequences for the population's normative judgments, with meritocracy emerging as a driving force shaping people's conceptions of justice in the educational sphere. Specifically, this research posits that meritocracy is a multidimensional concept, and based on this premise, it advances two main arguments: (1) Meritocratic beliefs are not subject to a rational or continuous logic; their multidimensional nature explains why such beliefs are organized into diverse patterns in people's minds. (2) Based on these different configurations of beliefs, meritocracy can be understood as a multidirectional mechanism for legitimizing inequalities based on ability to pay, thereby expanding the current framework of understanding regarding this issue. The aim is to highlight the importance of studying the link between education and meritocracy in a global context of commodification, where this relationship addresses the convergence of familial, cultural, and academic elements in shaping a sense of justice. In a broader sense, this research could inform policymakers' prioritization of public policies that promote educational justice.

In light of the foregoing, it is worth analyzing this phenomenon in Chile, a country that offers an interesting case for examining how public attitudes toward the distribution

of social services. Chile is one of the most unequal countries in the OECD, with a high concentration of income and wealth in the top decile ([Chancel et al., 2026](#); [Flores et al., 2020](#)). This inequality is largely attributable to the neoliberal reforms of the civil-military dictatorship (1973–1989), subsequently expanded by democratic governments, which privatized and commodified key spheres of social reproduction through concessions and regulatory frameworks favorable to private provision ([Madariaga, 2020](#); [PNUD, 2017](#)). This model has produced structurally segmented systems in health care, education, and pensions, where access and quality depend on the ability to pay, benefiting higher-income sectors and relegating the poorest to limited, underfunded public alternatives ([Boccardo, 2020](#); [Castillo, Laffert, et al., 2025](#)). The education system is characterized as one of the most privatized in the world, where the quality of private education surpasses that of public education due to the limited regulation of the education market, and where high levels of private-sector investment coexist with a lack of public funding, which is reflected in high levels of school segregation and a low regard for public education ([Bellei, 2025](#); [Ramos, 2022](#); [Valenzuela et al., 2014](#)). Thus, in a context marked by high and durable inequalities, deep marketization of education, and the entrenchment of meritocratic beliefs, it becomes relevant to examine the link between meritocratic beliefs and preferences for education market justice ([Castillo, Laffert, et al., 2025](#)).

3 Data, Variables and Methods

3.1. Data

The data come from the EDUMERCO dataset, a survey conducted as part of the EDUMER-funded project that focused on beliefs and attitudes toward meritocracy and inequality. The survey was conducted in 2025 via Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) among adults aged 18 to 75 in the Santiago Metropolitan Region of Chile. The sampling design was a quota-based non-probability sample, with quotas for age, sex, educational level, and socioeconomic status that approximated the population parameters. The total sample consisted of 3,470 respondents.

3.2. Variables

The dependent variable of this study is the preference for market justice in education. This construct is measured using the following statement: “It is just that high-income people have a better education for their children than people with lower incomes” (“Es justo que las personas de altos ingresos tengan una mejor educación para sus hijos que las personas con ingresos más bajos” in Spanish). The responses categories are based on a Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”.

The main independent variable in this study is meritocratic beliefs. To this end, two dimensions are distinguished: (1) meritocratic perceptions and preferences, and (2) perceptions and acceptance of privilege. Meritocratic and privilege-based perceptions and preferences were measured using the same items proposed in the original scale ([Castillo et al., 2023](#)). The items are as follows:

- Meritocratic perceptions: the extent to which effort and ability are rewarded in Chile,
- Meritocratic preferences: agreement with that those who work harder or are more talented should be better rewarded,
- Privilege perceptions: the extent to which success is perceived as linked to connections and family wealth,
- Privilege acceptance: agreement that it is acceptable for individuals with better connections or wealthy parents to achieve greater success.

Each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (4), higher scores indicate stronger endorsement of the corresponding perception or preference.

In addition, other independent variables considered are educational level and political identification. Educational level is measured using the question: “What is the most recent course or level of study you completed?” (“¿Cuál es el último curso o nivel de estudios que completó?” in Spanish). The response categories range from 1 to 9, where higher values indicate a higher level of education among respondents. Political identification, meanwhile, is measured along a left-right axis using a 6-category scale, where 1 indicates right, 5 indicates left, and 6 indicates independent.

Based on previous research ([Castillo, Laffert, et al., 2025](#)), the statistical models include sociodemographic controls to account for potential compositional effects in the population. The control variables are age (en años) and sex (0 = male; 1 = women).

3.3. Analytical strategy

First, a latent class analysis (LCA) is conducted to identify the latent classes (C) that represent meritocratic belief patterns. Second, once the optimal model has been determined, each individual is assigned the latent class to which they are most likely to belong. Third, a multinomial logistic regression is performed to examine the relationship between membership in latent classes and a preference for market justice in education, while also considering the effects of education and political identification on the dependent variable.

Tabla 3.1: *Descriptive statistics of variables*

Variable	Category	V
Dependent variable		
Education market justice preferences	Agree	
Education market justice preferences	Desagree	
Education market justice preferences	Strongly agree	
Education market justice preferences	Strongly disagree	
Independent variables		
Effort perception	Agree	
Effort perception	Desagree	
Effort perception	Strongly agree	
Effort perception	Strongly disagree	
Talent perception	Agree	
Talent perception	Desagree	
Talent perception	Strongly agree	
Talent perception	Strongly disagree	
Rich parents perception	Agree	
Rich parents perception	Desagree	
Rich parents perception	Strongly agree	
Rich parents perception	Strongly disagree	
Contact perception	Agree	
Contact perception	Desagree	
Contact perception	Strongly agree	
Contact perception	Strongly disagree	
Effort preference	Agree	
Effort preference	Desagree	
Effort preference	Strongly agree	
Effort preference	Strongly disagree	
Talent preference	Agree	
Talent preference	Desagree	
Talent preference	Strongly agree	
Talent preference	Strongly disagree	
Rich parents preference	Agree	
Rich parents preference	Desagree	
Rich parents preference	Strongly agree	
Rich parents preference	Strongly disagree	
Contact preference	Agree	
Contact preference	Desagree	

3.3.1. Latent class analysis

LCA is conducted using the poLCA package in R (Linzer & Lewis, 2011), with meritocratic and privilege-based indicators as dichotomized variables. The model is estimated using the Expectation-Maximization (EM) and Newton-Raphson algorithms, which iteratively estimate the model's parameters until convergence. The optimal number of latent classes is determined based on a combination of statistical criteria, including the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and entropy. Lower AIC and BIC values indicate better model fit, while higher entropy values indicate better classification accuracy.

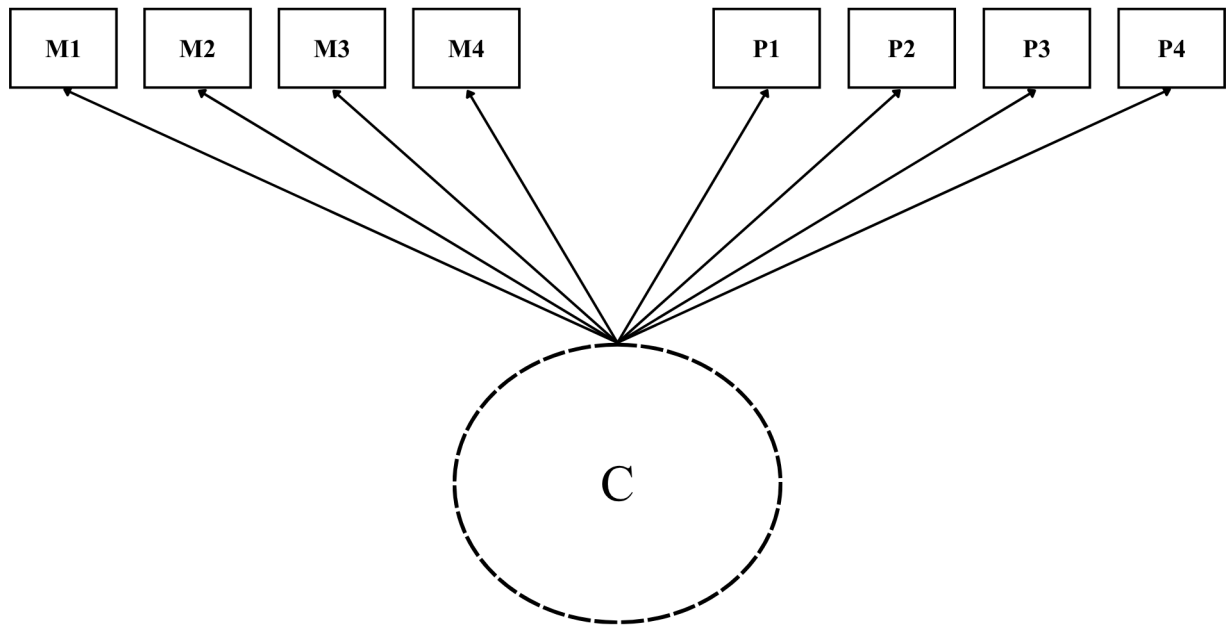


Figura 3.1: *Conceptual map for latent class analysis (LCA). “C” represents latent class memberships. “M1-M4” represents four meritocratic items used as LCA indicators, and “P1-P4” represents four privileged items used as LCA indicators.*

3.3.2. Ordinal logistic regression

After determining the optimal number of latent classes, individuals are assigned to their most likely latent class memberships based on their posterior probabilities. An ordinal logistic regression is then conducted to examine the relationship between latent class memberships and the preference for market justice in education. The ordinal logistic re-

gression model is also estimated in R, with the preference for market justice in education as the dependent variable and latent class memberships, educational level, and political identification as independent variables.

3.3.3. Robustness analysis

To ensure the robustness of the research findings, I decided to replicate the procedure with a student population from the same country. This was possible because I had access to a dataset generated by the same project from the main database. As a result, the same variables were available to conduct a complete replication of the study. The analyses in this section will be performed using the same software and the same code libraries.

4 Results

5 Discussion

6 Conclusions

7 References

- Abowitz, K. K., & Stitzlein, S. M. (2018). Public Schools, Public Goods, and Public Work. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(3), 33-37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718808262>
- Adams, J. S. (1963). Towards an Understanding of Inequity. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(5), 422-436. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040968>
- Alesina, A., & La Ferrara, E. (2005). Preferences for Redistribution in the Land of Opportunities. *Journal of Public Economics*, 89(5-6), 897-931. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2004.05.009>
- Ball, S. (2004). *Education for Sale! The Commodification of Everything?* <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/education-sale-the-commodification-everything>
- Bartram, D. (2023). Does Belief in Meritocracy Increase with Inequality? A Reconsideration for European Countries. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 74(5), 763-780. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13042>
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (3rd ed). The University of Chicago Press.
- Bellei, C. (2025). *El problema de la educación en Chile*. Debate. <https://aldebaranlibros.cl/tienda/el-problema-de-la-educacion-en-chile/>
- Boccardo, G. (2020). *30 Años de Privatizaciones En Chile: Lo Que La Pandemia Reveló*. Nodo XXI.
- Bourdieu, P. (2019). *La Reproducción: Elementos para una Teoría Del Sistema Educativo*. Siglo XXI Editores.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2011). *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. Haymarket Books.
- Brancaleone, D., & O'Brien, S. (2011). Educational Commodification and the (Economic) Sign Value of Learning Outcomes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(4), 501-519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2011.578435>

- Busemeyer, M. R. (2012). Inequality and the Political Economy of Education: An Analysis of Individual Preferences in OECD Countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22(3), 219-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928712440200>
- Busemeyer, M. R. (2013). Education Funding and Individual Preferences for Redistribution. *European Sociological Review*, 29(6), 1122-1133. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcs085>
- Busemeyer, M. R., & Iversen, T. (2020). The Welfare State with Private Alternatives: The Transformation of Popular Support for Social Insurance. *The Journal of Politics*, 82(2), 671-686. <https://doi.org/10.1086/706980>
- C. Palomino, J., & Sebastian, R. (2026). Wealth Inequality and Preferences in the Design of a Wealth Tax: An Information-Provision Experiment in the UK and Spain. *INET Oxford Working Papers*, 2026-16. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/amz/wpaper/2026-16.html>
- Castillo, J. C., Canales-Sellés, R., Laffert, A., & Urzúa, T. (2026). Justification Trajectories for Pension Inequality in Chile (2016–2023): The Role of Social Class and Beliefs in Meritocracy. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 11, 1771856. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2026.1771856>
- Castillo, J. C., Iturra, J., & Carrasco, K. (2025). Changes in the Justification of Educational Inequalities: The Role of Perceptions of Inequality and Meritocracy During the COVID Pandemic. *Social Justice Research*, 38(3), 240-263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-025-00458-0>
- Castillo, J. C., Iturra, J., Maldonado, L., Atria, J., & Meneses, F. (2023). *A Multidimensional Approach for Measuring Meritocratic Beliefs: Advantages, Limitations and Alternatives to the ISSP Social Inequality Survey*. 53(6). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00207659.2023.2274712>
- Castillo, J. C., Laffert, A., Carrasco, K., & Iturra-Sanhueza, J. (2025). Perceptions of Inequality and Meritocracy: Their Interplay in Shaping Preferences for Market Justice in Chile (2016–2023). *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1634219>
- Castillo, J. C., Salgado, M., Carrasco, K., & Laffert, A. (2024). The Socialization of Meritocracy and Market Justice Preferences at School. *Societies*, 14(11), 214. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14110214>

- Castles, F. G., Leibfried, S., Lewis, J., Obinger, H., & Pierson, C. (Eds.). (2010). *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State* (1.^a ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199579396.001.0001>
- Cech, E. A., & Blair-Loy, M. (2010). Perceiving Glass Ceilings? Meritocratic versus Structural Explanations of Gender Inequality among Women in Science and Technology. *Social Problems*, 57(3), 371-397. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.3.371>
- Chancel, L., Gómez-Carrera, R., Moshrif, R., & Piketty, T. (Eds.). (2026). *World Inequality Report 2026*. World Inequality Lab. <https://wir2026.wid.world/>
- Clycq, N., Ward Nouwen, M. A., & Vandenbroucke, A. (2014). Meritocracy, Deficit Thinking and the Invisibility of the System: Discourses on Educational Success and Failure. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(5), 796-819. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3109>
- Corvalán, J., Carrasco, A., & García-Huidobro, J. E. (2016). *Mercado escolar: Libertad, diversidad y desigualdad*. Ediciones UC.
- Darnon, C., Smeding, A., & Redersdorff, S. (2018). Belief in School Meritocracy as an Ideological Barrier to the Promotion of Equality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(4), 523-534. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2347>
- Duru-Bellat, M., & Tenret, E. (2012). Who's for Meritocracy? Individual and Contextual Variations in the Faith. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(2), 223-247. <https://doi.org/10.1086/661290>
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1985). *Politics against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power*. Princeton University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1m322zp>
- Flores, I., Sanhueza, C., Atria, J., & Mayer, R. (2020). Top Incomes in Chile: A Historical Perspective on Income Inequality, 1964-2017. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 66(4), 850-874. <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12441>
- Fourcade, M., & Healy, K. (2007). Moral Views of Market Society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33(Volume 33, 2007), 285-311. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131642>
- Freire, P. (2015). *Pedagogía Del Oprimido* (J. Mellado, Trad.; 4a edición argentina, corregida y revisada). Siglo Veintiuno Editores.
- García-Sánchez, E., Van der Toorn, J., Rodríguez-Bailón, R., & Willis, G. B. (2019). The Vicious Cycle of Economic Inequality: The Role of Ideology in Shaping the Relationship

- Between «What Is» and «What Ought to Be» in 41 Countries. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(8), 991-1001. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618811500>
- Heuer, J.-O., Lux, T., Mau, S., & Zimmermann, K. (2020). Legitimizing Inequality: The Moral Repertoires of Meritocracy in Four Countries. *Comparative Sociology*, 19(4-5), 542-584. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-BJA10017>
- Immergut, E. M., & Schneider, S. M. (2020). Is It Unfair for the Affluent to Be Able to Purchase «Better» Healthcare? Existential Standards and Institutional Norms in Healthcare Attitudes across 28 Countries. *Social Science & Medicine*, 267, 113146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113146>
- Kluegel, J. R., Mason, D. S., & Wegener, B. (1999). The Legitimation of Capitalism in the Postcommunist Transition Public Opinion about Market Justice, 1991—1996. *European Sociological Review*, 15(3), 251-283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a018263>
- Kluegel, J., & Smith, E. (1981). Beliefs about Stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 7(Volume 7, 1981), 29-56. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.07.080181.000333>
- Koos, S., & Sachweh, P. (2019). The Moral Economies of Market Societies: Popular Attitudes towards Market Competition, Redistribution and Reciprocity in Comparative Perspective. *Socio-Economic Review*, 17(4), 793-821. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwx045>
- Lane, R. E. (1986). Market Justice, Political Justice. *American Political Science Review*, 80(2), 383-402. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958264>
- Langsæther, P. E., & Evans, G. (2020). More than Self-interest: Why Different Classes Have Different Attitudes to Income Inequality. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 71(4), 594-607. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12747>
- Lee, J.-S., & Stacey, M. (2024). Fairness Perceptions of Educational Inequality: The Effects of Self-Interest and Neoliberal Orientations. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 51(4), 1215-1237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00636-6>
- Lindh, A. (2015). Public Opinion against Markets? Attitudes towards Market Distribution of Social Services – A Comparison of 17 Countries. *Social Policy & Administration*, 49(7), 887-910. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12105>
- Lindh, A. (2017). Is It Just That People with Higher Incomes Can Buy Better Education and Health Care? *57225*, 17, 69-80.

- Linzer, D. A., & Lewis, J. B. (2011). poLCA: An R Package for Polytomous Variable Latent Class Analysis. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 42, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v042.i10>
- Liu, C., & Wang, J. (2026). Does Education Legitimise Inequality? Comparative Analysis of Income Inequality, Education, and Meritocratic Beliefs. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 77(1), 5-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.70029>
- Madariaga, A. (2020). The Three Pillars of Neoliberalism: Chile's Economic Policy Trajectory in Comparative Perspective. *Contemporary Politics*, 26(3), 308-329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1735021>
- Mau, S. (2015). *Inequality, Marketization and the Majority Class: Why Did the European Middle Classes Accept Neo-Liberalism?* Springer.
- Mijs, J. J. B. (2016). The Unfulfillable Promise of Meritocracy: Three Lessons and Their Implications for Justice in Education. *Social Justice Research*, 29(1), 14-34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-014-0228-0>
- Mijs, J. J. B. (2018). Inequality Is a Problem of Inference: How People Solve the Social Puzzle of Unequal Outcomes. *Societies*, 8(3), 64. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030064>
- Mijs, J. J. B. (2021). The Paradox of Inequality: Income Inequality and Belief in Meritocracy Go Hand in Hand. *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(1), 7-35. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy051>
- Moyano, C. (2020). *Justicia educacional : desafíos para las ideas, las instituciones y las prácticas en la educación chilena*. <https://www.torrossa.com/it/resources/an/5498882>
- Nye, J. V., Bryukhanov, M., Litman, C., & Polyachenko, S. (2026). Education and Market Liberal Preferences. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 241, 107387. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2025.107387>
- Nylund-Gibson, K., & Choi, A. Y. (2018). Ten Frequently Asked Questions about Latent Class Analysis. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 4(4), 440-461. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000176>
- OECD. (2025). *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>
- Piketty, T., & Sandel, M. J. (2025). *Equality: What It Means and Why It Matters*. Polity Press.
- PNUD. (2017). *Desiguales: Orígenes, Cambios y Desafíos de La Brecha Social En Chile*.

- Ramos, M. (Ed.). (2022). *Educación: La Promesa Incumplida*. Catalonia.
- Satz, D. (2010). *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets*. Oxford University Press.
- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in Human Capital. *The American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1-17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1818907>
- Sin, P., Son Hing, L. S., Pereira, S., & Gill, H. (2026). They Work Hard for Their Money...or Do They? The Role of Meritocracy Beliefs on Evaluations of Pay Dispersion. *Social Justice Research*, 39(1), 1-41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-025-00469-x>
- Valenzuela, J. P., Bellei, C., & Ríos, D. de los. (2014). Socioeconomic School Segregation in a Market-Oriented Educational System. The Case of Chile. *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(2), 217-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.806995>
- Van Hootegeem, A. (2022). Worlds of Distributive Justice Preferences: Individual- and Country-Level Profiles of Support for Equality, Equity and Need. *Social Science Research*, 106, 102721. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2022.102721>
- Van Noord, J., Spruyt, B., Kuppens, T., & Spears, R. (2019). Education-Based Status in Comparative Perspective: The Legitimization of Education as a Basis for Social Stratification. *Social Forces*, 98(2), 649-676. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz012>
- Walzer, M. (2010). *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Nachdr.). Basic Books.
- Xian, H., & Reynolds, J. (2017). Bootstraps, Buddies, and Bribes: Perceived Meritocracy in the United States and China. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 58(4), 622-647. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2017.1331719>
- Young, M. (2017). *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (2.^a ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134642>
- Zhu, L. (2025). Meritocratic Beliefs in the United States, Finland, and China: A Multi-dimensional Approach Using Latent Class Analysis. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 76(1), 153-172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13152>