

Article

What makes elites more or less egalitarian? Variations in attitudes towards inequality within the economic, political and cultural elites in Chile

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Abstract

This article investigates how the type of elite to which a person belongs and their inter-generational contextual experiences are associated with attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals. We propose that membership of the economic elite and access to private schools, higher education business schools and affluent residential areas may contribute to the development of views that favour inequality. Using unique survey data collected in 2018 from a sample of 416 individuals belonging to Chile's economic, political and cultural elites, we construct an additive score to measure attitudes towards inequality. Results of our regression analyses indicate that individuals belonging to the economic and political elite are more tolerant of inequality than members of the cultural elite. Moreover, intergenerational experiences at both private schools and higher education business schools significantly contribute to the formation of attitudes that favour inequality. These contextual experiences also relate to significant attitudinal variations within all elite groups.

Key words: inequality, private schools, business schools, concentration of affluence, preferences regarding redistribution, Chile

SER Keywords: elites, inequality, preferences, social policy

JEL classification: D63, H10, Z13

1. Introduction

There has been significant growth in elite studies in recent years, especially due to growing evidence of increased economic inequality and concentration of wealth globally (e.g. Carranza *et al.*, 2022; Chancel *et al.*, 2022). One aspect that has received relatively little attention in elite studies is analysis of the political attitudes held by elite individuals regarding inequality. The design and implementation of redistributive policies often display bias towards elite preferences (e.g. McCall, 2013; Page *et al.*, 2013). Hence, understanding these attitudes and their underlying mechanisms is crucial for gaining insights into effective approaches to addressing inequality (Kuusela, 2022).

Previous research has found that elite individuals tend to express limited support for state-provided social goods and redistribution policies. Scholars have highlighted that the perception of negative consequences linked to inequality, such as criminal and political violence, is a crucial factor in understanding variations in the perspectives of elites concerning inequality (e.g. De Swaan, 1988; Rueda and Stegmüller, 2016). Others have demonstrated that elite attitudes are largely influenced by additional factors such as feelings of personal responsibility for addressing inequality, perceptions of fairness in economic inequality and their opinions of the poor (e.g. Reis and Moore, 2005; Berens and von Schiller, 2017; Atria *et al.*, 2020; Feierherd *et al.*, 2020; Suhay *et al.*, 2021; López *et al.*, 2022). While researchers have suggested that the various sources of elite power, particularly in terms of economic, political and cultural resources, may also be a crucial determinant of attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals (López, 2013), the literature still lacks a detailed examination of how diversity within the elite shapes their contrasting attitudes (c.f., Gulbrandsen, 2019). In this work, we therefore focus on assessing the potentially contrasting perspectives on social inequality among people from different elite groups.

The call to examine diversity within the elite is related to the need for a better understanding of the various contextual experiences that contribute to the privileged acquiring specific preferences (e.g. Khan, 2012; Cousin *et al.*, 2018). Scholars have argued that the moral economy and cultural repertoires used to comprehend the attitudes of elites towards inequality are shaped, to a considerable degree, in educational settings, particularly those of elite private schools (e.g. Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011; Courtois, 2018). However, there has been relatively little research on the sociology of elites that quantitatively tests this argument while also considering other significant social settings. We suggest that exposure to multiple social contexts, including not only private schools but also higher education business schools and affluent residential areas, might all contribute to the formation of elite individuals' attitudes towards inequality (e.g. Fotaki and Prasad, 2015; Paugam *et al.*, 2017). Drawing on the insights of cultural class analysts, we propose that these contextual influences may additionally stem from parental experiences (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996), potentially resulting in the consolidation or attenuation of elite attitudes towards inequality. Thus, in this article, we additionally investigate whether intergenerational variations in contextual experiences among elite individuals lead to significant differences in attitudes towards inequality.

Although the various types of elites and their intergenerational contextual experiences may be essential factors in shaping the formation of views on inequality, it also seems reasonable to combine these factors in order to achieve a more profound comprehension of elite attitudes. We contend that differences in attitude among elite groups might, to some

extent, be facilitated by distinct intergenerational contextual experiences. More critically, we assert that intergenerational contextual experiences can potentially lead to attitudinal disparities within elite groups. This aligns with arguments that elite groups may exhibit internal heterogeneity and a lack of integration or congruence in terms of interests and ideological frameworks (e.g. Higley and Lengyel, 2000; Cousin *et al.*, 2018; Lopez and Dubrow, 2020; Moraes-Silva *et al.*, 2022). Elite groups that are cohesive in their composition and preferences may find it easier to coordinate strategies that serve to perpetuate and justify inequalities, while divisions within elite groups engender intra-group conflicts that may open the door to constructive change.

Against this background, the main goal of this article is to examine how elite type and intergenerational contextual experiences are associated with attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals. Specifically, we analyse formal positions of power in the cultural, economic and political fields of society, while considering three different contexts that may affect views on inequality: school, professional and residential environments. In addition, we aspire to a fuller understanding of the diversity of elite individuals by addressing how such contextual influences on attitudes vary according to the source of power within elite groups.

We focus on Chile, a country whose wealth inequality figures are exceedingly high from a comparative perspective (Carranza *et al.*, 2023), where close to 81% of all net personal wealth is possessed by the top 10%, while the top 1% alone hold almost 50% of this wealth. It is argued that economic inequality contributes to the proliferation of non-egalitarian views among elite individuals in Latin America (López *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the Chilean context is particularly interesting for research on attitudes towards inequality. We seek to answer the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent do attitudes of elite individuals vary depending on the type of elite to which they belong—whether economic, political or cultural?
- (2) Are intergenerational contextual experiences associated with attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals?
- (3) Does this association vary within elite groups?

We address these questions using unique survey data collected in 2018 from a sample consisting of 416 economic leaders, senior politicians and members of the cultural elite in Chile. We now present theoretical arguments upon which our hypotheses are based.

2. Theoretical background

A major divide in political attitudes is related socio-economic issues, and attitudes towards inequality in particular. This generally entails contrasting views on welfare state models and the distribution of economic resources, more specifically in terms of the extent of agreement with the introduction of market principles into the provision of basic needs (e.g. healthcare and education), support for redistributive policies, and willingness to pay taxes in order to reduce stark economic differences in the population (e.g. Svallfors, 1993; Langsaether and Evans, 2020).

In general, we contend that elites might have important differences in their views and preferences on inequality. This potential attitudinal divergence likely stems from various

forms of heterogeneity among distinct elite groups, as well as within each group. Detailed elaboration on these arguments is provided in the following subsections.

2.1 Types of elites

The elites may be defined as groups of individuals who, by virtue of their leading positions in the largest or most pivotal institutions and thus their privileged control over or access to resources, hold considerable decisional power to affect the functioning of society (Mills, 1956; Higley and Burton, 2006). Elite status is primarily assigned to persons who hold the top positions in the economic and political sectors of society (e.g. Carroll and Sapinski, 2010; Higley, 2018), but those who enjoy the highest cultural standings have increasingly been recognized as an important elite group (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993; Khan, 2012). This definition of elites implies that power can be obtained through various sources, both material and symbolic, and at least three major elite types can be identified: the economic, the political and the cultural.

The economic elite comprises individuals who occupy the top business positions and, as such, have a strong impact on economic processes (e.g. Atria *et al.*, 2020; Kuusela, 2022). Members of this group generally include the founders, chairpersons and members of the governing boards of the largest enterprises, along with chief executive officers (CEOs), chief financial officers (CFOs) and chief operating officers (COOs). The political elite is often identified as consisting of a small number of individuals who hold top positions in key political institutions and who consequently exercise disproportionate influence on key political decisions (e.g. Hoffmann-Lange, 2018). This elite group includes the top elected and appointed holders of government offices, members of parliament, judicial authorities, leaders of political parties, senior military officers and leaders of large public organizations and movements (see also López *et al.*, 2022). Finally, the cultural elite comprises individuals with formal decision-making authority in the cultural realm, encompassing directors of prominent religious, educational and cultural organizations and the mass media (Bourdieu, 1993). It may also include recognized scientists, intellectuals and journalists who possess the capability to influence both the cultural field and society at large (see also, e.g. Brint *et al.*, 2020).

One might expect the economic elite to have particularly favourable attitudes towards individual responsibility in regard to service provision and inequality (e.g. Kantola and Kuusela, 2019; Suhay *et al.*, 2021). This may be the case because the economic elite are likely to benefit more from resource concentration than other elite groups and thus have an interest in maintaining or even increasing their resources (e.g. Page *et al.*, 2013). The political elite, in contrast, are probably more supportive of social welfare programmes and redistributive policies than the economic elite given that politicians often have a stronger connection to the middle classes and poorer sections of the population through their engagement in political campaigns; as such, they may have more information available to them with which to mitigate erroneous ideas about the causes of inequality (López *et al.*, 2022). Finally, the cultural elite typically embrace an egalitarian moral code, combining expressions of snobbery with a strong imperative to project an image of openness, tolerance and respect towards others (e.g. De Keere, 2020; Jarness and Friedman, 2017). These dispositions are said to form an ethos that balances cultural elite awareness with simultaneous public commitment to the values of equality and sameness (Ljunggren, 2017). Thus, cultural elite individuals probably present the most egalitarian dispositions within the elites.

We consider this line of reasoning to be particularly applicable to the Chilean context. The economic elite played a prominent role in the country's neoliberal revolution during the 1970s and 80s, a period overshadowed by the Pinochet dictatorship (Sánchez-Ancochea, 2017). This strong degree of influence has fostered the concentration of wealth and enabled the economic elite to exert their power to obstruct social change and, in particular, the implementation of redistributive reforms through taxation policies (Atria, 2022). Resistance to paying tax has been justified by anti-statist attitudes, which express scepticism towards the effectiveness of public policies and a general aversion to the state's prominent role in the economy (see also Undurraga, 2014). These arguments lead us to the following hypothesis:

- *Members of the economic elite hold attitudes that more strongly favour inequality compared to members of the political and cultural elites (H1).*

2.2 Intergenerational contextual experiences

Regardless of specific elite group, we propose that the extent to which elite individuals justify, legitimize and ultimately prefer inequality also depends on ideology developed from various contexts and institutions (e.g. Gerth and Mills, 1953). More precisely, we suggest that experiences at private elite schools, at higher education business schools and in affluent residential areas play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards inequality among members of the elite. We view these socialization agencies as ideologically oriented towards transmitting cultural repertoires that reinforce social boundaries. The more these social contexts align coherently with conservative perspectives, the easier it is for the individual to express narratives that favour inequality (e.g. Naudet, 2018).

Sociological studies of elite reproduction have commonly suggested that private schools serve not only to prepare elite students academically to get ahead in competitive environments (e.g. Reeves *et al.*, 2017), but also to endow them with 'appropriate' styles and signs of nobility (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1996). Within this context, individuals additionally learn to use the language of talent, hard work and discipline to explain their achievement (Khan, 2011), meaning that elite schools help the privileged to associate the nobility of birth with appropriate credentials and the rhetoric of meritocracy (see also Khan and Jerolmack, 2013; Courtois, 2018). In legitimating the elite's own worthiness, elite schools send powerful messages to students and influence their ways of thinking about the self in relation to others (Howard, 2007), all of which arguably serve to normalize inequality (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

The link between privilege and attitudes towards inequality can be further explained by the training that takes place in business schools. In these contexts, individuals are socialized into a set of professional norms and exposed to interactions and experiences of authority and control that likely contribute to forging a particular outlook regarding welfare politics and inequality (Gulbrandsen, 2019). The professional-managerial class-in-making is seen to incorporate free-market economic principles, including the virtues of market efficiency, individual responsibility and the discourse of merit (e.g. Vijay and Nair, 2022; Holmqvist, 2023). As such, this subjectivity might serve individuals socialized at business schools to justify current levels of inequality in such a way that collective obligations and government

generosity in the provision of public goods may come to be seen as risks, threats and onerous regulations (e.g. Fotaki and Prasad, 2015).

The production of the geographies of privilege that is taking place in a global context has also been regarded as a key element of elite reproduction. The geographical concentration of wealth provides elite individuals with contextual experiences that generate strong cultural coherence and solidarity (e.g. Méndez and Gayo, 2019). However, within these places, the privileged are isolated inside comfortable social ‘bubbles’ that provide little insight into and experience of the problems faced by the rest of society (e.g. Thal, 2017). This lack of exposure to or contact with people from different backgrounds can also facilitate the development of prejudice and feelings of hostility towards the ‘others’ (Massey, 1996). As such, it can erode feelings of empathy for the general citizenry and thus diminish support among elite individuals for reducing inequality (see also Paugam *et al.*, 2017; Holmqvist and Wiesel, 2023).

Although contextual experiences may be essential to understanding how views on inequality are created, we acknowledge that early childhood socialization within families is also crucial in the formation of dispositional schemes (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). This implies that parental characteristics—especially their own contextual experiences and the contextual differences between parents and offspring—may also affect the categories of perception according to which elite individuals divide up the world. More specifically, we suggest that homogeneity of contextual experiences between parents and offspring may produce a consolidation or cumulative effect on attitudes. For instance, individuals raised by parents who were also educated at business schools arguably have particularly strong pro-market inclinations and the most radical discourses on the subjects of property rights and low taxation (e.g. Kuusela, 2018). In addition, residential biographies that have unfolded since childhood in close proximity to affluent others in locations far removed from the rest of society are likely to produce a significant lack of understanding of the exogenous factors that shape individual agency (e.g. Toft, 2018). As such, it is probable that intergenerational persistence in these specific contexts reinforces dispositions sympathetic to hierarchy and inequality.

In short, our theoretical framework suggests that (intergenerational) experiences at private schools, in business environments and in affluent residential areas may have a substantial influence on the development of attitudes that support inequality. Building upon these arguments, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- Intergenerational experiences at private schools, in business environments and in affluent residential areas strengthen pro-inequality attitudes among elite individuals (H2).

It should be noted that the contexts considered in this study are of particular relevance in Chile. Within the Chilean school landscape, approximately 8% of students attend fully private schools (e.g. Gayo *et al.*, 2019). These institutions charge substantial fees and offer educational programmes that confer advantages to upper-class students in terms of university admissions and subsequent life opportunities (e.g. Zimmerman, 2019). Higher education business schools have played a significant role in strengthening neoliberal ideology in Chile by offering programmes that explicitly promote the values of consumerism and minimal concern for social issues (e.g. Koljatic and Silva, 2015; Gutierrez-Crocco and Cruz, 2022). Finally, we highlight that concentrated affluence is particularly extreme in Chile, especially in the capital, Santiago. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing trend among

elite groups and the upper classes of self-segregation in the north-east of the city, close to the Andes (Méndez and Gayo, 2019).

2.3 Elite integration and attitudinal differences within elite groups

While we have proposed that elite type and intergenerational differences in contextual experiences may independently contribute to significant variations in attitudes towards inequality and welfare state policies, it is also plausible to combine these factors to achieve a more profound understanding of elite attitudes. Specifically, we assert that, beyond influencing attitudes irrespective of elite type, intergenerational contextual experiences are likely to give rise to attitudinal distinctions within elite groups. To some extent, this assertion alludes to certain arguments put forward in the broader literature on elites that suggest not only the non-existence of a single unified cohesive elite, but especially that elite groups are internally heterogeneous and characterized by a lack of congruence in terms of interests and ideological frames (e.g. Cousin *et al.*, 2018).

The extent to which members of the economic elite are integrated into one or more cohesive blocs according to their views is especially relevant, because this sector arguably has stronger decision-making power within the political economy of capitalist welfare states than other elite groups (e.g. Piketty, 2014). It is expected that most members of the economic elite have been involved in strongly business-oriented professional settings, while remaining relatively diverse in terms of intergenerational contextual experiences in schools and residential environments. Thus, it is possible that school and residential contexts in particular foster attitudinal divisions within this elite group.

Scholars have put particular emphasis on internal divisions within the political elite and suggest that the lack of attitudinal consensus is likely to be considerable within this sector, influenced primarily by party ideologies (Hoffmann-Lange, 2018; Gulbrandsen, 2019). In this case, we therefore suggest that intergenerational contextual experiences may generate additional diversity in preferences and reinforce multiform attitudes within the political elite. Studies examining the political elite in Chile have shown that the group varies substantially in terms of educational, professional and residential experiences (e.g. Atria and Rovira, 2021). For these reasons, we expect that attitudes towards reducing economic differences are likely to be more polarized within the political elite than other elite sectors and, as such, members of the group arguably constitute what Higley and Lengyel (2000) refer to as a fragmented elite with low degrees of attitudinal congruence and internal cohesion.

The cultural elite is also often described as showing a notable level of heterogeneity, largely attributed to their diverse contextual experiences in higher education (Brint *et al.*, 2020). For instance, it is often acknowledged that some segments of the cultural elite—especially those associated with the media—are predominantly formed in business schools and thus appear to be more oriented towards large-scale commercial production aimed at wider audiences and generating economic profit (Bourdieu, 1996). The presence of a wide array of professional backgrounds within the cultural elite also leads to struggles among members involved in knowledge production—a division particularly noticeable among intellectuals in Chile (Undurraga *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, it can be inferred that the apparently substantial heterogeneity, particularly in terms of professional backgrounds, may contribute to significant variations in individualistic and egalitarian values within the cultural elite (see also Ljunggren, 2017).

Combined, our arguments underscore the presence of different contextual experiences that could contribute to internal attitudinal incongruence within the economic, political and cultural elites. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, the improbability that all contexts carry equal significance for all elite groups. The Chilean economic elite has been characterized by its remarkably high ideological homogeneity and cohesion in defending the profound neoliberal transformations implemented during the dictatorship (e.g. [Sánchez-Ancochea, 2017](#); [Atria, 2022](#)). Consequently, we anticipate that this elite group will be less influenced by potentially diverse intergenerational contextual experiences and display greater attitudinal congruence compared to the political and cultural elites. These arguments form the basis of our final hypothesis:

- *Different intergenerational contextual experiences result in attitudinal variations within elite groups, particularly in the political and cultural elites, and to a lesser extent in the economic elite (H3).*

In the following section, we provide a description of the data and methods employed to test our hypotheses.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data

We use survey data from the ‘Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile’. The study was designed by the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES) and implemented by consultancy firms Feedback and DESUC between August 2019 and December 2020 (see [Atria and Rovira, 2021](#)). The survey was initially applied using face-to-face interviews but switched to virtual interviews during the pandemic. Following the positional method, the study’s sample design involved selection of individuals who occupy formal positions of power in the economic, political and cultural sectors of Chilean society, including chairpersons and CEOs of large firms, party leaders and members of parliament, directors of leading cultural organizations and recognized journalists. These positional samples were supplemented by snowball samples based on suggestions from previous interviewees, which was helpful to capturing senior members, particularly of the economic and political elites. Although this latter purposive sampling may hinder the external validity of our findings with respect to the larger ‘universe’ of members of the elite, such a method has been shown to result in estimates that converge with those achieved using probabilistic samples ([López, 2023](#)). The final sample consisted of 416 individuals representing the economic, political and cultural elites in Chile, with 137, 139 and 140 individuals, respectively.

As expected with quantitative elite studies, response rates were relatively low. Moreover, we see large heterogeneity between elite groups. Response rates are 10% for the economic elite and 30% for the cultural elite. The political elite presents a response rate of 26%—slightly below the 36% of previous exercises focusing solely on the Chilean political elites ([Vis and Stolwijk, 2021](#)). Given the very similar number of observations across the three elite groups, these differences are explained by the highly contrasting sample frame populations, with the economic elite universe stemming from a list of board members and managers of a large number of companies and being more than twice the size of the universe of the other two groups. Despite the relatively low response rates, we find our sample sizes

to be fairly consistent with previous studies, in which the average size by elite group is 105 respondents (López, 2023). We provide further details of the survey and collection process by elite group in the [Supplementary Materials](#) ([Supplementary Appendix Table A1](#)).

It is important to note that this is not the first survey to enquire about the elites in Chile. The UNDP office in Chile has conducted several waves of such surveys, which have been a key instrument in their Human Development Reports (see, inter alia, UNDP, 2004, 2007, 2018) as part as a broader project on parliamentary elites in Latin America (*Élites Parlamentarias en América Latina—PELA*).

3.2 Dependent variable

To measure attitudes towards inequality, we build a summative index comprising nine items, each ranging from 1 to 5 in response categories or attributes. These items capture different preferences and attitudes towards inequality, including general preferences concerning inequality, the role of the state in reducing inequalities and in providing services such as healthcare and education, and willingness to pay more in tax (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B1](#) in for a full description of these variables). To better interpret our findings, we add each individual score and then standardize the aggregate score to achieve a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. The result is a continuous variable where lower values represent more egalitarian views. This index will be used as the dependent variable in the subsequent regression analyses.

We understand that such an index is open to discussion. On one hand, we implicitly assume arbitrary (and equal) weighting across variables, despite the possibility that certain items may better capture attitudes towards inequality than others. On the other, there is a possibility that these items capture different aspects of the preferences they address, or, more critically, that they do not follow the same direction in their distributions. To address these potential issues, we have introduced an additional dependent variable based on the first component of a principal components analysis (PCA) derived from the nine individual variables. This component captures almost 40% of all variances and the analysis shows that all measures have positive associations with the first principal component. This indicates that, while attitudes may speak to some distinctions or specific dimensions within the construct, they are generally aligned with the main construct. To take advantage of all the available information, we also provide two additional dependent variables that rely on the entire sample, replacing missing values in each of the nine variables with the average of those that were reported.

3.3 Independent variables and sample composition

The main independent variables to be used in the subsequent regression analyses are organized according to the two main dimensions highlighted in our theoretical frame: type of elites and contextual experiences.

Elite type: We anticipate that members of the economic elite will exhibit more favourable attitudes towards inequality compared to members of the political and cultural elites. Therefore, we introduce a variable that categorizes the elite into three primary groups: economic, political and cultural elites. Members of the economic elite encompass CEOs, chairpersons and CFOs of the 500 largest companies in Chile. The political elite comprises individuals in positions of power within the Chilean government, leadership roles in political parties with parliamentary representation, and executives of the country's major professional associations and unions. Members of the

cultural elite include influential directors and decision-makers from cultural institutions, educational establishments, research centres, the media and churches.

Contextual experiences: We expect that exposure to private schools, higher education business schools and affluent residential areas will increase attitudes that favour inequality. In order to test this assumption, we created three binary variables. The first is school type, namely having gone to private school compared to either a public school or a private-subsidized school (i.e. a voucher school). Private schools account for 7% of all students in Chile, but their pupils are predominantly from the elites. Second, the professional context is split between attending business schools versus careers in other professional settings. This includes the preeminent business degree in Chile (*Ingeniería Comercial*), along with other degrees composed predominantly of business modules, such as industrial engineering or accounting. Third, the residential context captures whether the individual currently resides in one of the three high-income districts of the Chilean capital, Santiago (Las Condes, Lo Barnechea and Vitacura), relative to all other districts. These are the three most affluent districts, with average incomes more than double that of Santiago. As such, these three districts exhibit substantial differences to the rest of the country in terms of socio-economic indicators and residential conditions (see, *inter alia*, Otero *et al.*, 2023, for a discussion on the relevance of urban segregation within Santiago).

We also considered that parental contextual experiences may affect the development of distinctive attitudes towards inequality. To capture these influences, we built the same binary variables used to measure individuals' contextual experiences and followed the same codification. These variables are all retrospectively reported by respondents. Regarding residential context, we assessed whether the individual resided in one of the three high-income districts of Santiago at the age of 14, relative to all other districts in the country. Furthermore, as we are specifically interested in the differences in contextual experiences between elite individuals and their parents, we include the interaction between the two, thus creating a categorical value that takes four values. The results are three sets of independent variables, each included in a separate specification: individual characteristics, parental characteristics and interaction between them.

Finally, we include three control variables: gender, age and whether respondents hold a postgraduate degree or not. Table 1 shows the average for all variables, both in total and by type of elite.

Table 1 shows that the elite sample is mostly composed of older men with a postgraduate degree. Average age is 53 years, with a slightly higher average age observed among the cultural elite (55.4 years), and a slightly lower average age for the political and economic elites (51.2 and 51.8 years, respectively). Women account for 18.5% of the sample and are more prevalent within the cultural elite (27%) and the political elite (20%). Only 8% of the economic elite is accounted for by women. Our sample of elites also illustrates a high incidence of postgraduate degrees (71%). Furthermore, it reveals that approximately 61% of individuals within the elite sample attended private schools, although this is more common among the economic elite, with two-thirds of respondents having attended this type of school. The economic elite also has the highest share of individuals who attended higher education business schools (two-thirds), while the cultural elite shows the lowest (17%), followed by the political elite (31%). Lastly, the economic elite also has a higher share of residents of affluent areas (56%), while the cultural elite has the lowest (24%). Overall, this indicates that, despite a generally high incidence of private school attendance, business degrees and residence in high-income neighbourhoods, the three elite groups differ substantially in socio-demographic and contextual terms.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables by type of elite

Variable	Respondents				Parents			
	Cultural	Economic	Political	Total	Cultural	Economic	Political	Total
Private school	58.6%	65.7%	57.6%	60.6%	37.1%	42.3%	36.7%	38.7%
Business background	17.1%	68.6%	30.9%	38.7%	60.0%	76.6%	75.5%	70.7%
High-SES neighbourhood	23.6%	56.2%	37.4%	38.9%	18.6%	29.9%	30.9%	26.4%
Women	27.1%	8.0%	20.1%	18.5%	–	–	–	–
Age	55.4	51.8	51.2	52.8	–	–	–	–
Postgraduate degree	78.6%	70.1%	65.5%	71.4%	–	–	–	–
Sum of scores	–0.65	0.46	0.15	0				
Observations	118	127	125	370	118	127	125	370

Notes: COES Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile (2018). The sum of scores includes the answer to nine questions on preferences on inequality and redistribution and it is our main dependent variable, with lower values representing more egalitarian views. It is standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing it by the standard deviation. See [Supplementary Table B1](#) for a description of this variable and the questions that it comprises.

Regarding the parental generation, almost 40% of respondents’ parents attended private schools and over 70% had business-oriented professional backgrounds, while 26% resided in high-SES neighbourhoods. The differences across elite types give us some insights into the relative importance of the remaining factors. Privately educated parents are most common within the economic elite, while residence in high-SES neighbourhoods is much more common among the political and economic elites.

Table 2 presents the educational and contextual differences between individual and parental characteristics, i.e. intergenerational contextual experiences. School type shows strong persistence across generations, with a third of the sample attending and having parents who attended private school, and another third neither attending nor having parents who attended private schools. The remaining third is mostly comprised of respondents who attended private schools but whose parents did not. The convergence between respondents and parents with business-oriented professional backgrounds is 29.3%, while 41.3% of respondents did not attend business schools despite their parents having business-oriented professional backgrounds. Lastly, regarding neighbourhoods, we see that both parents and respondents living outside the high-SES districts account for half of the sample, followed by respondents who moved into the high-SES area, accounting for 23% of the sample. Overall, we see that these three characteristics represent quite different intergenerational contextual patterns.

Results from **Table 2** are mostly consistent if we split the sample by type of elite. Perhaps the most notable differences are found in participation in higher education business schools and experiences in affluent residential areas. Among the economic elite, 55% of the sample have parents with a business-oriented professional background and attended a business school themselves. This was the case for a very small share of the cultural elite (10% of the sample) and a slightly larger share of the political elite (24%). Most respondents in these two groups had parents with a business background but did not themselves attend a business school (around 50%). In terms of neighbourhoods, moving into a high-SES area is

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the intergenerational transition variables by type of elite

	Cultural (%)	Economic (%)	Political (%)	Total (%)
School type				
Non-private (P) × Non-private (O)	35.0	27.7	36.7	33.2
Non-private (P) × Private (O)	27.9	29.9	26.6	28.1
Private (P) × Non-private (O)	6.4	6.6	5.8	6.3
Private (P) × Private (O)	30.7	35.8	30.9	32.5
Professional context				
Other (P) × Other (O)	32.9	9.5	17.3	20.0
Other (P) × Business background (O)	7.1	13.9	7.2	9.4
Business background (P) × Other (O)	50.0	21.9	51.8	41.3
Business background (P) × Business background (O)	10.0	54.7	23.7	29.3
Neighbourhood context				
Other (P) × Other (O)	66.4	35.0	49.6	50.5
Other (P) × High-SES (O)	15.0	35.0	19.4	23.1
High-SES (P) × Other (O)	10.0	8.8	12.9	10.6
High-SES (P) × High-SES (O)	8.6	21.2	18.0	15.9

Notes: This table reports the share of respondents with each specific set of parental and individual characteristics. For each of the three dimensions, school type, occupation and neighbourhood, we report the four combinations of characteristics and the corresponding share of the population for each category. This is shown both separately by elite type and in total. COES Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile (2018). Reports all individuals that respond these questions ($N = 416$).

more common among the economic elite (35%). The economic elite is also the group with the largest share of respondents who remained in the high-SES area, at 21% versus 18% for the political elite and almost 9% for the cultural elite.

3.4 Empirical strategy

Our intention is to examine how elite type and intergenerational contextual experiences are associated with attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals. To do so, we propose a straightforward empirical strategy based on linear regressions. We provide four models to estimate the role of elite types, parental and individual contextual experiences (separately), and intergenerational contextual differences between individuals and their parents (i.e. their interaction). To provide a benchmark for the differences across elite groups, we begin with a specification that excludes our independent variables that represent contextual experiences. Thus, for a standardized score S_i our specification can be presented as in [Equation \(1\)](#):

$$S_i = \alpha + \gamma C_i + \mu_{econ} + \mu_{pol} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

The vector C_i includes our control variables for gender (taking the value 1 for women), an age polynomial (age and age squared) centred at age 50, and a proxy for an advanced educational degree. The parameters μ_{econ} and μ_{pol} are fixed effects for the economic and political elites. They represent the average difference between elite groups with respect to the cultural elite, conditional on control for gender and age. These parameters give us an idea

of the extent to which average differences in these groups matter in explaining the variation in preferences regarding inequality and redistribution.

We then move on to include the three contextual experiences of the respondent, expanding on Equation (1) to describe each of these variables. Our main specification is presented in Equation (2):

$$S_i = \alpha^1 + \beta_1^1 School_i^r + \beta_2^1 Occup_i^r + \beta_3^1 Neigh_i^r + \gamma_1^1 Gender_i + \gamma_2^1 (Age_i - 50) + \gamma_3^1 (Age_i - 50)^2 + \gamma_4^1 Postgrad_i^r + \mu_{econ} + \mu_{pol} + \varepsilon_i^1 \quad (2)$$

where $School_i^r$, $Occup_i^r$ and $Neigh_i^r$ are the three categorical variables representing each respondent factor. Age is centred at age 50 in order to interpret all β coefficients at that specific age (very close to the mean and median of our sample of respondents), while $Postgrad_i^r$ is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for respondents with a postgraduate degree. Our interest lies in the Beta coefficients β_1^k to β_3^k , which are to be interpreted in terms of standard deviations, as the dependent variable has been standardized. Moreover, due to the nature of our approach, each coefficient should be interpreted in the context of the remaining variables—in our case, relative to the lower-status option. For example, when interpreting the coefficient for business school attendance, we need to be aware that it considers someone without private education, without a postgraduate degree, etc.

Similarly, and following the same structure, we can present our specification looking at parental characteristics:

$$S_i = \alpha^2 + \beta_1^2 School_i^p + \beta_2^2 Occup_i^p + \beta_3^2 Neigh_i^p + \gamma_1^2 Gender_i + \gamma_2^2 (Age_i - 50) + \gamma_3^2 (Age_i - 50)^2 + \gamma_4^2 Postgrad_i^r + \mu_{econ} + \mu_{pol} + \varepsilon_i^2 \quad (3)$$

Lastly, we present our third specification, focused on the interaction between individual and parental characteristics:

$$S_i = \alpha^3 + \beta_1^3 (School_i^r \times School_i^p) + \beta_2^3 (Occup_i^r \times Occup_i^p) + \beta_3^3 (Neigh_i^r \times Neigh_i^p) + \gamma_1^3 Gender_i + \gamma_2^3 (Age_i - 50) + \gamma_3^3 (Age_i - 50)^2 + \gamma_4^3 Postgrad_i^r + \mu_{econ} + \mu_{pol} + \varepsilon_i^3 \quad (4)$$

Where the interaction between respondent's and parental characteristics is a categorical variable taking four values that represent all possible paths from one generation to the next.

The next section presents the main descriptive statistics for our independent and dependent variables, both in total and for each type of elite. The second subsection focuses on the estimation of Equations (1)–(4).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive analyses

To begin, we analyse descriptive statistics of attitudes towards inequality. As mentioned, our main index measuring attitudes towards inequality is expressed in standard deviations, with positive values indicating more non-egalitarian views. In Table 1, we see a clear-cut differentiation across elite types: the cultural elite has the lowest average score at -0.65 , followed by the political elite at 0.15 and the economic elite at 0.46 . Figure 1 details this issue by illustrating differences in the distribution of our additive dependent variable by type of

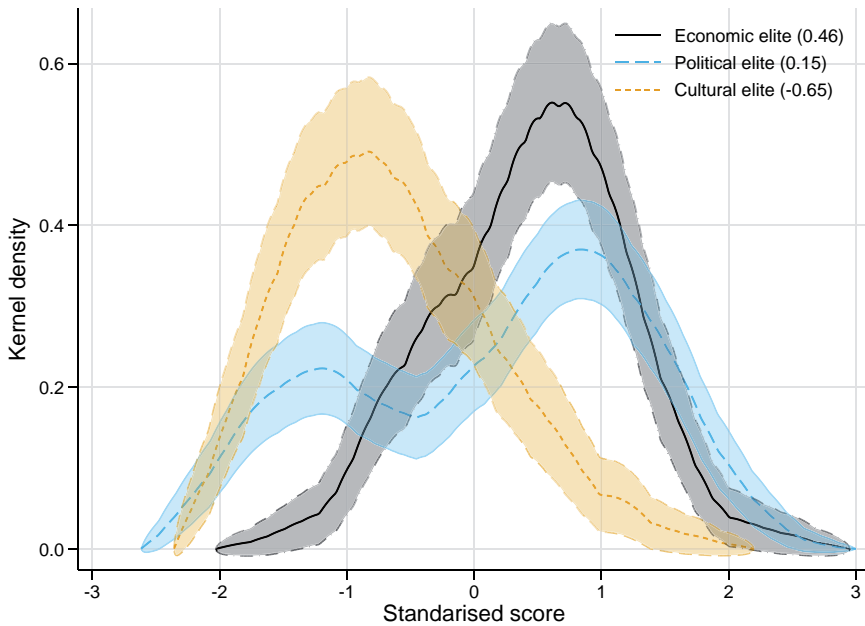


Figure 1. Kernel density distribution of preferences for inequality by type of elite.

elite. We find that the distribution of attitudes towards inequality is skewed to the left for the cultural elite, meaning more pro-equality views, while the converse is true for the economic elite. We also see that, unlike the other two elite types, the political elite shows a clear bimodal distribution representing internal polarization regarding attitudes towards inequality. The first segment within this elite type is more egalitarian, with scores just below -1 . The second segment is considerably larger—almost double the former—with scores just below 1 , thus showing more non-egalitarian views. This split probably captures the expected differences within the political elite in terms of party ideologies or the left-right ideological continuum. Together, [Figure 1](#) shows that the three elites have very distinct average scores, as well as distinct distributions altogether, reinforcing the importance of studying each group on its own.

[Table 3](#) reports, the average additive score at each difference between individuals and their parents, separately for each elite group. First, in most cases we see the highest score among those who themselves and whose parents were in the privileged positions. This means that those who show persistence ‘at the top’ have less egalitarian views. Perhaps the most salient exception to this point is those within the economic elite who reside in high-SES areas. This exception follows on from the composition of the economic elite and the distinction between urban and rural businesses—something we further discuss in the regression analysis in [Section 4.3](#). Second, the steepest gradients, on the other hand, appear in the case of business-oriented professional backgrounds, particularly among the cultural and political elites. Lastly, we see that, across the three elite groups, it is the economic elite that

Table 3. Average additive score by transition and type of elite

	Cultural	Economic	Political	Total
School type				
Non-private (P) × Non-private (O)	-0.78	0.22	-0.05	-0.23
Non-private (P) × Private (O)	-0.73	0.49	0.25	0.02
Private (P) × Non-private (O)	-0.43	0.66	-0.97	-0.21
Private (P) × Private (O)	-0.44	0.57	0.53	0.27
Professional context				
Other (P) × Other (O)	-0.83	0.20	-0.42	-0.53
Other (P) × Business background (O)	-0.72	0.15	0.47	0.00
Business background (P) × Other (O)	-0.68	0.51	0.06	-0.15
Business background (P) × Business background (O)	0.20	0.55	0.67	0.55
Neighbourhood context				
Other (P) × Other (O)	-0.81	0.64	-0.09	-0.22
Other (P) × High-SES (O)	-0.13	0.30	0.46	0.26
High-SES (P) × Other (O)	-0.87	0.56	-0.06	-0.10
High-SES (P) × High-SES (O)	0.02	0.34	0.62	0.39

Notes: The present table reports the average of the dependent variable across each group for each of the three dimensions—school type, occupation and neighbourhood—and both separately by elite type and in total. COES Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile (2018). Final sample ($N = 370$). The dependent variable is the standardized sum of scores, with mean zero.

shows the smallest gradients, suggesting that this is the most homogeneous group of the three and the one with the least egalitarian views.

4.2 Explaining elite attitudes towards inequality

Table 4 reports the results of our regression analyses that estimate attitudes towards inequality based on the type of elite and the intergenerational contextual experiences. Column 1 focuses on elite groups, excluding contextual experiences, while Columns 2 and 3 present the contextual experiences of individuals and their parents, respectively. Finally, Column 4 highlights the intergenerational contextual experiences, i.e. differences between parents and respondents. As mentioned previously, each of these coefficients is to be interpreted as standard deviations from the mean with respect to the lower-status alternative for the remaining independent variables.

Column 1 indicates that individuals belonging to the economic and political elite are more lenient towards inequality than those in the cultural elite. Consistent with Figure 1, the largest difference is observed between the economic and cultural elite. Column 2 incorporates individuals' contextual experiences, and we find that all three show statistically significant associations with attitudes towards inequality. Having attended a private school, having a business-oriented professional background and residing in a high-SES neighbourhood are all associated with higher standardized scores. In other words, all three contextual experiences are positively correlated with stronger support for inequality. The size of these associations is quite substantial and shows some heterogeneity depending on the specific experience. Having a business degree shows the higher coefficient, 0.4 standard deviations—higher than the average difference between the political and economic elites. Private school

Table 4. Linear regression on preferences for inequality (OLS estimation)

	Type of elite 1	Respondent characteristics 2	Parental characteristics 3	Transitions 4
Offspring: School = 1, Private school		0.34*** (0.09)		
Parents: School = 1, Private school			0.24** (0.10)	
Both: School = 2, Non-private (P) × Private (O)				0.20* (0.12)
Both: School = 3, Private (P) × Non- private (O)				0.03 (0.19)
Both: School = 4, Private (P) × Private (O)				0.38*** (0.12)
Offspring: Occupation = 1, Business background		0.41*** (0.10)		
Parents: Occupation = 1, Business background			0.32*** (0.10)	
Both: Occupation = 2, Other (P) × Business background (O)				0.33* (0.18)
Both: Occupation = 3, Business background (P) × Other (O)				0.22* (0.12)
Both: Occupation = 4, Business (P) × Business (O)				0.63*** (0.14)
Current neighbourhood = 1, High-SES district		0.20** (0.10)		
Neighbourhood at age 14 = 1, High-SES district			0.05 (0.11)	
Both: Neighbourhood = 2, Other (P) × High-SES (O)				0.14 (0.12)
Both: Neighbourhood = 3, High-SES (P) × Other (O)				-0.14 (0.16)
Both: Neighbourhood = 4, High-SES (P) × High-SES (O)				0.18 (0.14)
Gender (Women) = 1, Women	-0.16 (0.12)	-0.14 (0.12)	-0.15 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.12)
Age (centred at 50)	0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)
Age squared (centred at 50)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Postgraduate degree	0.10 (0.10)	0.10 (0.10)	0.14 (0.10)	0.11 (0.10)
Economic elite	1.08*** (0.12)	0.79*** (0.13)	1.01*** (0.12)	0.77*** (0.13)
Political elite	0.81*** (0.12)	0.73*** (0.11)	0.77*** (0.12)	0.70*** (0.11)

continued

Table 4. *Continued*

	Type of elite	Respondent characteristics	Parental characteristics	Transitions
	1	2	3	4
Constant	-0.66*** (0.13)	-0.99*** (0.14)	-0.98*** (0.15)	-1.08*** (0.16)
Observations	370	370	370	370
R-squared	0.23	0.30	0.27	0.32

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, * $P < 0.1$.

COES Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile (2018). Dependent variable is the sum of scores of 9 different questions, where lower scores represent more egalitarian views. The reference category for the elite binary variables is the Cultural elite. See [Supplementary Table B1](#) for a description of this variable and the questions that it comprises.

attendance has a coefficient of 0.34, and residence in a high-SES neighbourhood has one of 0.2. We also see that elite type fixed effects remain positive and significant for the political and economic elite, representing an average increase of 0.7 and 0.8 standard deviations, respectively. This suggests that average differences between the elites persist even when individuals' contextual experiences are included.

Column 3 focuses on parental characteristics, where we see a similar picture to that of individuals' contextual experiences. However, residence in high-SES neighbourhoods shows no statistically significant association. Having parents who attended private schools or have business backgrounds is positively associated with our standardized score, thus reinforcing pro-inequality views. However, the coefficient for private schools is smaller than that of business schools, and both are smaller than their respondent counterpart from column 2. In other words, having a parent with a business-oriented professional background is the most important predictor among our three parental contextual experiences, but it still has a lower association than the respondent's own business background.

The last model in Column 4 deals with the differences between individuals and parents, and thus focuses on intergenerational contextual experiences. As with the previous two models, attending a private school and having a business-oriented professional background are the key factors in predicting differences in attitudes towards inequality. However, they differ in the ways they do this. In the case of private schooling, movement into private education and having parents who attended private education themselves further reinforces this association. On the other hand, a business background is always relevant, whether on the part of the parent, the respondent or both. In all three cases we see a positive and statistically significant association, with the size of the association going in the direction one would expect: the largest increment is among those whose parents and who themselves have business-oriented professional backgrounds (0.6); the second largest is among elite individuals who attended business schools but whose parents did not (0.3); and the lowest is among those who did not attend business schools but whose parents did (0.2). The difference in size is substantial, with the former being three times that of the latter, again

reinforcing the importance of business-oriented professional training in explaining these differences.

4.3 Within-elite analysis

We now extend the analysis presented in Table 4 by replicating it separately for each elite group. This approach will allow us to look into elite-specific associations between individual and parental contextual experiences and attitudes towards inequality. Results are reported in Table 5. They are also graphically reported in Supplementary Appendix Figures D1 and D2. It is important to note that the dependent variable has not been re-adjusted, therefore coefficients still reflect differences with respect to the overall mean, and not to the elite-specific mean.

For private education, we see that parental attendance matters for the cultural elite, while respondents' attendance is relevant for the political and economic elite. The association among the political elite is almost twice as strong as for the economic elite, while the estimate for parental education among the cultural elite lies somewhere in the middle. Moreover, persistence in private education—where both parent and offspring attend private school—only matters for the latter two elite groups, and particularly for the political elite where the estimate also doubles that of the economic elite. There are no statistically significant associations between attitudes and intergenerational contextual experiences among the cultural elite. Together, these findings show that attending a private school is a particularly strong predictor of higher tolerance towards inequality among the political elites.

The association with contextual experiences at business schools shows a more mixed picture. It is the offspring that matters for the cultural elite, the parent that matters for the economic elite and either of them for the political elite. Overall, the significant coefficients for the cultural and economic elite are quite similar in size, while they are considerably higher for the political elite. The only exception is the interaction coefficient for the cultural elite, which is as high as it is for the political elite. In other words, having a managerial occupation as well as a parent who was in the same position is associated with significantly stronger tolerance of inequality—this is not the case among the economic elite. As shown in Table 2, this is partly because the group is an exception, representing only 10% of cases among the cultural elites and 24% among the political elites, in contrast with 55% of cases among the economic elite.

These distinctions tell a very interesting story. Among the cultural elite, attendance of business schools is strongly correlated with less egalitarian views. On the other hand, among the economic elite, it is the business-oriented professional background of the parent that matters the most, partly due to the high prevalence of business backgrounds among respondents. The political elite, which combines people with different perceptions of inequality, shows a more varied picture. Intergenerational experiences at business schools are particularly relevant for predicting differences in attitudes towards inequality by being positively associated with stronger support for inequality.

Residence in a high-SES neighbourhood is associated with stark differences among the economic elite and particularly the cultural elite, although with opposing signs. Among the cultural elite, residing in a high-SES neighbourhood is associated with less egalitarian views, while the opposite is true for the economic elite. In absolute terms, the coefficient for residing in a high-SES neighbourhood among the cultural elite is twice that of the economic elite. This contrast is particularly useful to highlighting the importance of accounting for

Table 5. Separate regressions by type of elite

	Cultural elite			Economic elite			Political elite		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Offspring: School = 1, Private school	0.17 (0.14)			0.23* (0.13)			0.45*** (0.20)		
Parents: School = 1, Private school		0.33** (0.16)			0.18 (0.14)			0.14 (0.22)	
Both: School = 2, Non-private (P) × Private (O)			0.02 (0.17)			0.20 (0.18)			0.31 (0.27)
Both: School = 3, Private (P) × Non-private (O)			0.35 (0.29)			0.40 (0.28)			-0.65 (0.41)
Both: School = 4, Private (P) × Private (O)			0.22 (0.19)			0.32* (0.17)			0.58** (0.28)
Offspring: Occupation = 1, Business background	0.39** (0.18)			0.12 (0.14)			0.57*** (0.20)		
Parents: Occupation = 1, Business background		0.23 (0.14)			0.31* (0.16)			0.41* (0.23)	
Both: Occupation = 2, Other (P) × Business (O)			0.02 (0.26)			-0.13 (0.28)			0.73* (0.42)
Both: Occupation = 3, Business (P) × Other (O)			0.14 (0.15)			0.04 (0.27)			0.31 (0.27)
Both: Occupation = 4, Business (P) × Business (O)			0.79*** (0.25)			0.18 (0.23)			0.74** (0.31)
Current neighbourhood = 1, High-SES district	0.65*** (0.16)			-0.33** (0.13)			0.35 (0.21)		
Neighbourhood at age 14 = 1, High-SES district		0.17 (0.20)			-0.10 (0.14)			0.21 (0.24)	

continued

Table 5. *Continued*

	Cultural elite			Economic elite			Political elite		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Both: Neighbourhood = 2, Other (P) × High-SES (O)			0.50** (0.19)			-0.41** (0.16)			0.21 (0.29)
Both: Neighbourhood = 3, High-SES (P) × Other (O)			-0.04 (0.24)			-0.17 (0.24)			-0.33 (0.33)
Both: Neighbourhood = 4, High-SES (P) × High-SES (O)			0.69** (0.26)			-0.34* (0.17)			0.16 (0.31)
Gender (Women) = 1, Women	-0.24 (0.15)	-0.25 (0.16)	-0.24 (0.15)	0.32 (0.23)	0.29 (0.23)	0.35 (0.23)	-0.28 (0.24)	-0.32 (0.25)	-0.31 (0.24)
Age (centred at 50)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Age squared (centred at 50)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Postgraduate degree	0.14 (0.16)	0.16 (0.17)	0.14 (0.16)	-0.12 (0.14)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.15)	0.17 (0.21)	0.21 (0.22)	0.15 (0.21)
Constant	-1.05*** (0.19)	-1.02*** (0.19)	-1.08*** (0.20)	0.39* (0.20)	0.14 (0.19)	0.33 (0.28)	-0.36 (0.25)	-0.20 (0.29)	-0.42 (0.34)
Observations	118	118	118	127	127	127	125	125	125
R-squared	0.23	0.11	0.29	0.11	0.08	0.16	0.22	0.12	0.26

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, * $P < 0.1$.

Results reported for the main outcome only: the sum of scores excluding missing values ($N = 370$). The outcome has been standardized using the full sample mean and standard deviation. COES Study of the Cultural, Economic and Political Elite in Chile (2018).

heterogeneity among the elites. For the cultural elite, moving into this area is strongly associated with more conservative views, as members of this group with more egalitarian views reside in other neighbourhoods, typically recently gentrified areas closer to the centre of Santiago. Indeed, over three quarters of the cultural elites do not reside in high-SES neighbourhoods. On the other hand, residence in these neighbourhoods is the norm among the economic elite, with more than half of them doing so. Those who reside outside are typically large landowners living in rural areas and representing a more conservative group within the economic elite. These findings suggest a relevant urban-rural divide within an otherwise cohesive elite.

4.4 Additional analyses and robustness checks

In addition to our main analyses, we conducted several robustness checks to validate our findings and/or provide a more detailed look at specific findings. On one hand, to assess the robustness of our findings, we complement our analysis with three additional dependent variables. The first interpolates our score to include all missing values. The latter two are the first component of a PCA analysis, one excluding missing values and another including those observations. Overall, we see very little difference between our main dependent variable and the three alternative dependent variables (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B3](#)). In addition, we have incorporated separate regression analyses for each item included in our aggregate index as a dependent variable. While results vary across variables, with some of them explaining our composite findings more than others, they are overall consistent with what we present here (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B4](#)). All these analyses are presented in [Supplementary Appendix Section B](#).

On the other hand, we calculated separate regressions by type of elite, controlling for political position. This variable is measured from 0 to 10, with 0 representing left-leaning views and 10 representing right-leaning views. By doing so, we can assess the mediating role of political ideology in the relationship between our independent variables and the respondent's attitudes towards inequality. These findings are reported in [Supplementary Appendix Section C](#). As shown in [Supplementary Appendix Figure C1](#), this variable is strongly correlated with our dependent variable and with the different types of elites. From the outset, we see that several statistically significant associations disappear once we control for ideology. This is particularly true among the political elite, where no single characteristic remains statistically significant, suggesting that within this polarized group our findings are indeed driven by differences in political ideology. Among the cultural and economic elites, the association with high-SES residence remains, as does having parents with a business background, suggesting that the role of private schools and respondent's business backgrounds are mediated by political ideology.

We are now in the position to summarize our results while answering our research questions. First, do attitudes towards inequality vary among individuals in the economic, political and cultural elite? Our research demonstrates that this is indeed the case. The economic elite tend to exhibit the greatest support for inequality, while the cultural elite demonstrate the least support. The political elite occupies a middle ground. This provides support for Hypothesis 1. Second, are intergenerational contextual experiences associated with attitudes towards inequality among elite individuals? Our results show that all contextual experiences are related to attitudes towards inequality. However, intergenerational experiences in private schools and higher education business schools are the ones that most

strongly foster favourable views towards inequality. As such, this provides general support for Hypothesis 2. Finally, does the association between intergenerational contextual experiences and attitudes towards inequality vary within elite groups? We found that intergenerational contextual experiences lead to significant attitudinal variations within all elite groups. This generally supports Hypothesis 3, as contextual influences generate attitudinal incongruity not only within the political and cultural elite, but also within the economic elite. Overall, these findings offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of elite attitudes towards inequality, which will be further discussed in the concluding section of the article.

5. Conclusions and discussion

In this article, we have contributed to the existing research on elite attitudes towards inequality by addressing three specific issues. First, we have assessed how the diversity of elite power sources, particularly in terms of economic, political and cultural resources, shapes distinctive attitudes towards inequality, bearing in mind that works to date have focused primarily on studying the economic and political elites. Second, we further enquired into diversity within the elite and their associated preferences by assessing the experiences of elite individuals and their parents in three contextual settings: private elite schools (e.g. Khan, 2011), higher education business schools and affluent residential environments. Third, we examined whether contrasting intergenerational contextual experiences also produce internal attitudinal variation within the political, economic and cultural elites. Our study focused on Chile, a country known for its historically high levels of wealth concentration. Drawing on quantitative survey data, we estimated multivariate regression models to determine which factors are associated with variations in attitudes towards inequality. Based on our results, we are able to highlight and discuss several issues.

A first important result is that individuals belonging to the cultural elite consistently exhibit more egalitarian attitudes compared to their counterparts in the economic and political elites. Members of the economic elite display the most supportive or favourable attitudes towards inequality. Overall, our findings are consistent with the scant prior research focused on assessing the political attitudes of the economic, political and cultural elites (e.g. Gulbrandsen, 2019). They also correspond well with studies that have examined such attitudes among individuals from the economic and political elites (e.g. López *et al.*, 2022; Moraes-Silva *et al.*, 2022). One possible explanation is that the economic elite stands to gain the most from resource concentration and therefore have a greater interest in minimizing any perceived adverse economic consequences related to potential government redistribution policies (e.g. Page *et al.*, 2013). Given that the influence of the economic elite in decision-making regarding social policies appears to prevail over that of other elite groups in contemporary societies (e.g. Piketty, 2014), our findings suggest that prospects for change are limited, particularly in contexts such as Chile, where the economic elite has historically opposed social transformation (e.g. Atria, 2022).

Second, we found that contextual experiences play a crucial role in understanding individuals' attitudinal variations, regardless of elite groups. Specifically, our findings reveal that both attending a private school and attending a higher education business school substantially contribute to the development of non-egalitarian preferences among elite individuals. Living in affluent areas yields similar results, although with less statistical significance.

These results are aligned with certain pieces of qualitative research demonstrating that such social settings are relevant in terms of transmitting the language of intelligence and talent and disconnecting the elite from the other's needs, while producing negative stereotyping that ultimately leads elite individuals to normalize inequality and justify their privilege (e.g. Khan, 2011; Courtois, 2018; Vijay and Nair, 2022; Holmqvist, 2023; Holmqvist and Wiesel, 2023).

More critically, we found that intergenerational persistence in these specific contexts further reinforces favourable dispositions towards inequality. In particular, elite individuals who were socialized in families whose parents attended business schools, and who themselves later engaged in similar contexts, exhibit the strongest preferences for inequality. These findings suggest that homogeneity of contextual experiences between parents and offspring produces a consolidation or cumulative effect on attitudes towards inequality. They also indicate that principles of social justice that align with the perpetuation of an established social hierarchy are more effectively incorporated by elite individuals when these narratives are transmitted intergenerationally, which correspond to a degree with the ideas put forth by cultural class analysts such as Bourdieu (1984). Overall, our results indicate that a preference for inequality held by a portion of the elite may prove them to be particularly resistant to change due to their foundation in early processes of socialization.

Third, a particularly noteworthy result is that different intergenerational contextual experiences generate attitudinal variation within all elite groups. We found that intergenerational contextual experiences at private elite schools improve attitudes towards inequality, especially within the political and economic elites, while contextual experiences at higher education business schools contribute to favourable attitudes towards inequality particularly within the political and cultural elites, but not as much within the economic elite. In addition, our results indicated that living in affluent areas generates attitudinal differences, especially within the cultural elite. In other words, a portion of this group develops relatively less egalitarian preferences simply by residing in the most affluent urban areas of the country. Interestingly, living in affluent areas also leads to attitudinal variations within the economic elite, although in this case it reduces tendencies towards inequality. This seemingly counterintuitive result can be explained by the fact that the more conservative faction within the economic elite tends to reside in areas outside the capital city, where the most affluent districts are located. Thus, the division between the metropolitan and regional economic elite may shape an important attitudinal incongruence within this group. Taken together, our findings highlight that the Chilean economic elite is not completely homogeneous and cohesive in terms of ideological frames (e.g. Sánchez-Ancochea, 2017), but, more importantly, that attitudinal struggles exist within all elites when referring to inequality.

Despite its merits, our study has some weaknesses that must be acknowledged. While our sample is fairly consistent with the majority of those used in the field of elite studies, its size imposes certain restrictions in terms of model specification. The limited number of observations requires that we simplify our analysis, mainly through a binary categorization of our variables of interest. For example, given sufficient degrees of freedom, we could have studied the interaction between these factors. The small sample size also results in issues of privacy, which forces the survey to exclude specific questions that could potentially facilitate identification of interviewees, e.g. by looking into elite schools within the private system, which are a notable driver of persisting inequality. However, and given that they

account for only a small portion of the population, the number of observations made through any survey of the elite will inevitably be small relative to the general population.

All in all, we have expanded our understanding of elite attitudes towards inequality by examining differences based on different types of elites and their intergenerational contextual experiences. Members of the economic elite hold much more favourable attitudes towards inequality than those expressed by the political and cultural elite. Additionally, intergenerational experiences at private schools and higher education business schools contribute to the development of non-egalitarian attitudes. Within the different elite groups, however, intergenerational contextual experiences produce variations in attitudes among individual members. We posit that the lack of consensus in terms of key political attitudes both between and within different elite groups reflects a fragmentation of the elite (e.g. Higley and Lengyel, 2000). We hope that scholars will draw insights from our study and conduct further research on such attitudinal conflicts among members of the elite.

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Supplementary material

[Supplementary material](#) is available at *Socio-Economic Review Journal* online.

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Conflict of interest

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