
Political social capital and status attainment in Chile

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Résumé

Long-standing literature argues that social capital is closely associated with status attainment (Bourdieu, 1986; Flap and Volker, 2004; Lin, 2001; Lin and Erickson, 2008). However, this hypothesis has not yet systematically studied in Chile, one of the most unequal countries in the world. This study examines the relationship between social capital and two measures of status attainment: job prestige and employment income. We use data from the first wave of the Longitudinal Social Study of Chile (ELSOC), a representative survey of the Chilean urban population aged 18–75 years. We analyse a subsample of 1,351 individuals who are currently employed. We consider traditional dimensions of individual social capital, or general social capital, such as job status, i.e., having personal connections to people holding higher position; and network extensity, i.e., knowing people with occupations across a wide range of socioeconomic prestige (see Tubergen and Volker, 2015). More interestingly, we present a novel dimension in the study of social resources and labour market outcomes, which is the political social capital, i.e., contacts with members of different political parties. We hypothesise that political contacts, which often do not hold the highest positions in the occupational structure, could be equally or even more useful for status attainment than contacts with more prestigious positions (e.g. Lin, 2001; Chapter 7). There are good reasons to pay attention to this type of social capital in Chile. For instance, the upper and middle classes emerged and developed in close assembly with the public sector. Despite declining benefits for the middle class from the 1960s onwards, as a result of a lack social stability and the subsequent implementation of free market policies during the 1970s and the 1980s, it has been suggested that this group managed to preserve some identity traits and reinforced its social capital through strong class sociability (Barozet, 2006). Theoretically, we discuss the relationship between political social capital and status attainment, via mechanisms such as favouritism, clientelism and corruption. OLS and Poisson regressions show that political social capital is strongly related to job status and employment income, after controlling for general social capital and socio-demographic variables. We also report that political social capital flows through stratified networks which tend to benefit individuals from high-SES family backgrounds. We therefore discuss the idea that, in times when debate on inequality and social class has regained traction, it is essential to re-calibrate traditional stratification measures.

Mots-Clés: social networks, social capital, political contacts, status attainment, inequality

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