

# EVALUATING THE INEQUALITY PERCEPTION OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES IN THE CONTEXT OF MISRECOGNITION

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aims to describe how different social classes in Turkey perceive inequality through their values regarding economic issues. The study evaluates the agreement of members of different social classes with neoliberal values related to income equality, livelihood, competition, and success through the lens of misrecognition. The study, designed as secondary data analysis research, analyzed data obtained via a survey of 1,441 people between the ages of 18 and 65 within the scope of the seventh wave of the World Values Survey. This study concluded that social classes in different parts of the hierarchy show similar tendencies regarding their values. It was determined that within each class, there are those who hold opposite values. It was also found that classes' subjective perceptions of their income affect their attitudes toward inequality.*

**KEYWORDS:** *inequality, social inequality, social class, neoliberal values, misrecognition*

## INTRODUCTION

Inequality is a growing problem in our world today. There are large inequalities in income and wealth between people. According to the *World Inequality Report* (Chancel et al. 2022), these inequalities have increased in almost every country since 1980. Over the past two decades, the average income gap between the top 10% and bottom 50% within countries has nearly doubled. Today, the top 10% within most countries own 60 to 80% of the total wealth. The poorest 50% have

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less than 5% (ibid.). Inequality is found in many areas of daily life. People in the upper and middle classes live longer and healthier lives than people in the lower classes, with better access to adequate nutrition and quality health care (Scott 2018; Ansell 2021). Their children develop important life skills by participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, dance, drama, and music that are difficult for children from lower-class backgrounds to access (Lareau 2011, 2018; Reay 1998). Moreover, they study at the best schools and elite universities. The opportunities they have access to increase their chances of obtaining jobs with high income and status (Stiglitz 2012; Reay 1998). This creates a cycle in which children from wealthy families do better in school, increasing their likelihood of becoming wealthy. The process perpetuates an unequal and economically polarized society (Reardon 2011).

Inequality is a persistent and obvious problem in today's societies, yet people remain silent in the face of such inequity. Even the disadvantaged lower classes consent to an economic system that is clearly contrary to their interests. This attitude of people toward inequality is discussed in Marxist literature using terms such as false consciousness, legitimation, and reproduction (Scott 1990). Marx noted that people's understanding of their situation is ideologically shaped by capitalism. In a class society, the class that owns the material means of production also owns the intellectual means of production and regulates the production of ideas in their own era (Marx–Engels 1998 [1845]). By instilling their own thoughts and ideas in the individuals who make up the lower class, they ensure that lower-class members behave in accordance with the interests of the ruling class (Cuff et al. 2006). Althusser argues that the state creates false consciousness in individuals through its ideological apparatuses. By manipulating thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs, the ideological apparatuses of the state ensure that the masses see reality through the eyes of the bourgeoisie and thus reproduce capitalist exploitation relations (Althusser 2014).

Bourdieu, who distances himself from the conceptualization of false consciousness, states that “the obedience we grant to the injunctions of the state cannot be understood either as mechanical submission to an external force or as conscious consent to an order” (Bourdieu 1998: 54). Using the concept of misrecognition, he points out that we adopt values without external influence. He argues that practical sense and ingrained bodily dispositions are effective in promoting adapting to the social order. According to Bourdieu, the individual's practical sense (*habitus*) is shaped by the objective conditions of existence they are in. Thus, the individual gains adaptation and disposition with the field at both the level of action and perception. On the other hand, in the process of socialization, they also internalize presuppositions (*doxa*) that make the functioning of the field seem natural and legitimate (Koytak 2012).

As a result, they end up with a misrecognition of the world. Misrecognition is the internalization and acceptance of values that naturalize the privileges of the ruling classes (Bourdieu 2001). Social agents adopt the world without questioning it, accept it as it is, and find certain values and beliefs natural because their minds are formed by the cognitive structures of the world. Since people are born into a social world, they accept these values spontaneously and without the need for indoctrination. Thus, they become collaborators in the reproduction of existing relations of domination (Bourdieu–Wacquant 1992).

In sum, shared values that people assume without questioning because they are born into and socialized into them cause them to accept the world as it is and remain unresponsive to inequality. Dorling lists the values that reinforce inequality in today's neoliberal societies as follows: (1) elitism is efficient because of differences in people's abilities; (2) the exclusion of those who have too little is perceived as natural and necessary; (3) prejudice against the lower classes is seen as natural; (4) greed for a better life and success is viewed as good; 5) despair is inevitable (Dorling 2010). In his book *Does the Richness of the Few Benefit Us All?*, Bauman addresses four false beliefs: economic growth is the only way to solve the problems arising from human cohabitation; consumption is the only way to achieve happiness; inequality among people is natural; and rivalry is necessary to ensure social justice (Bauman 2013). The acceptance of these values contributes to the perpetuation of social inequality. This is because people's reactions to inequality are determined by how inequality is perceived rather than the objective dimension of inequality. If people have the wrong perception of inequality, fail to realize the extent of inequality in their country, and think that the existing differences between individuals are fair, then inequalities do not cause anger and do not create pressure for equality (Whyte 2011; Mijs 2019; Bottero 2020).

Turkey is a developing country where neoliberal policies were introduced in 1980 and have been largely entrenched since 2002. In this context, state support for agriculture has been reduced (Buğra–Candaş 2011), the mechanisms that allowed rural-urban migrants to make a new life in the city have been eliminated, and taxation has become even more unfair by increasing the share of indirect taxes on goods and services consumed regardless of income and wealth (Işık 2022). Public institutions have been privatized. With Labor Law No. 4857, workers' rights have been restricted through the legalization of temporary, part-time, flexible, and precarious forms of employment (Işık 2022; Özdemir 2020). The neoliberal policies thus implemented have led to the deepening of poverty and inequalities among people.

Although inequality in income distribution decreased slightly in the early 2000s (from 2002 to 2005, the Gini coefficient decreased from 0.44 to 0.38), it

has increased since 2005. By 2020, it had returned to the situation of the early 2000s (Işık 2022). Today, Turkey has the third highest income inequality among OECD countries (OECD 2019). According to *the World Inequality Report* (Chancel et al. 2022), the top 10% of the country collects 54.5% of all income. On the other hand, the share of the bottom 50% remains at 12%. The average wealth of the country has more than doubled in the last 25 years. However, the distribution of wealth has not improved significantly. The distribution of wealth is more unequal than in countries with similar levels of wealth. The top 10% of the country owns 68% of total national wealth. For the bottom 50%, the share remains at 4% (ibid.).

In addition to the obvious income and wealth inequalities in Turkey, there are significant inequalities in areas such as housing, health, and education. Lower-income groups have much lower-quality housing than higher-income groups. They have to work precariously under harsh conditions, unlike higher-income groups (Işık 2022). Their children are at a disadvantage in accessing the opportunities available to children from higher-income families, such as tutoring, after-school programs, cultural activities, and access to quality schools and universities (Buyruk 2008; Uz 2020; Babahan 2018). According to the poverty statistics of TurkStat (2022), 12 million people, or 14.37% of the population, live below the relative poverty line in the country. Despite this, people, especially the disadvantaged, do not appear to be reacting to these inequalities. In such a situation, it is important to identify the perception of inequality of people in different positions of the social hierarchy, especially the lower classes, who are expected to react to inequality.

People perceive inequality as legitimate if they accept values that work in the interests of the dominant segments of society, whether members of the upper or lower class. In this regard, the study aims to describe how different social classes perceive inequality through their values regarding the economy. To this end, the study examines the agreement of different class members with neoliberal values related to income equality, livelihood, competition, and success through the concept of misrecognition. The focus is particularly on the lower and upper classes. It explains whether there is a significant difference between these classes in terms of their adoption of neoliberal values that produce inequality.

## METHOD

The study involved quantitative secondary data analysis. Secondary data analysis is a type of research that encompasses the statistical analysis of data

previously collected and recorded by others. This type of research has become widespread as the data collected by national or international institutions and organizations have become more accessible over time (Neuman 2014). Working with secondary data is advantageous to the researcher in terms of time and cost. It eliminates the risk of not getting enough answers and permits the analysis of specific periods (Çoşkun et al. 2019).

The study employs the seventh wave of the *World Values Survey Turkey data*<sup>2</sup> (Haerpfer et al. 2022). In the *World Values Survey-7 (2017–2022)*, data are collected through a questionnaire that measures respondents' values and attitudes related to family, religion, gender, education, health, economy, security, poverty, social tolerance, and trust. The target group of the survey consists of all Turkish citizens aged 18 and over living in households. The cluster sampling method is used to design the sample. Twelve of the 100 households in each of the 180 clusters selected by the State Institute of Statistics based on the census were randomly selected and included in the sample. The individuals to be interviewed were selected using the Kish method. This guaranteed that all segments of the population (large cities, towns, rural areas) were represented in proportion to their size. The sample consists of 2,415 people (World Values Study 2018).

In the present study, the data obtained from five questions measuring economic values and one question measuring perception of income level in the survey form were analyzed. Goldthorpe's seven-category class scheme (Goldthorpe 1980) was used to operationalize social class, the independent variable of the analyses in the study. In developing his class scheme, Goldthorpe first distinguishes between those who own the means of production and those who do not. This distinguishes classes that do not own the means of production based on their relationship with their employers. Two criteria come into play here: "asset specificity" and "difficulty of monitoring." Asset specificity refers to jobs requiring special skills, expertise, and knowledge that are hard to find in the labor market. Difficulty of monitoring refers to the difficulty of monitoring whether an employee is acting in the interest of the employer. Employers enter into a "service relationship" with employees who are asset-specific and difficult to monitor and a "labor contract" with employees who are neither asset-specific nor difficult to monitor. There is a contrast between positions regulated by the labor contract and those regulated by the service relationship (Breen 2005).

The first class of Goldthorpe's seven-category class scheme is the "service class," which includes occupations with a service relationship. The service class consists of professionals, administrators, and managers. The second class is

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2 Data retrieved from <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp> [Last access: 06 20 2023].

“routine non-manual workers,” including occupations with complex employee relations. This class includes officers, sales staff, and other service employees. The third class is the “petty bourgeoisie,” referring to small property owners. The class consists of the self-employed and small employers. The fourth class is smallholders and farmers working on their own land. The fifth and sixth classes are “skilled workers” and “semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers,” who have a labor contract with their employer. The seventh class is the “agricultural laborers” working on someone else’s land. Except for the third and fourth classes, which are property owners, the classes are formed according to their employee positions. Three classes, skilled, unskilled, and agricultural workers, are close to each other in terms of employee positions. They are farthest from the service class (Erikson–Goldthorpe, as cited in Bergman–Joye 2005; Breen 2005). In the present study, due to the small number of respondents, farmers (41) were combined with the “petty bourgeoisie” and agricultural workers (13) with “semi-skilled and unskilled workers.” Analysis was undertaken using this five-category scheme.

To adapt the data to the class scheme, the working status and occupation of the respondents were examined first. Since Goldthorpe developed the class scheme based on occupations (Goldthorpe 1980), respondents who answered “housewife,” “student,” or “looking for a job,” and those who answered “no answer” or “no idea” to the occupation question were excluded from the analysis. As the retirement age in Turkey is 65, respondents over the age of 65 were also excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the target group of the study is the working population between the ages of 18–65. The study sample consists of 1,441 people made up of 172 service class, 241 routine non-manual workers, 212 petty bourgeoisie, 618 skilled workers, and 198 semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. Males made up 68.4% of the sample, females 31.6%. Regarding education, 51.6% of the respondents have a ‘low,’ 26% a ‘medium,’ and 22.4% a ‘high’ level.

The data were analyzed via SPSS 22. In the *World Values Survey*, the respondents were shown a scale with two contrasting statements.<sup>3</sup> On the scale, ‘1’ corresponds to complete agreement with the first statement, and ‘10’ corresponds to complete agreement with the second statement. The data were collected by having the respondents rate their views on this scale from ‘1’ to ‘10.’ The options 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on the scale show that there is agreement with the first statement, although the level of agreement decreases as we move towards 5. Options 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 indicate that there is agreement with the second statement. As we move towards 10, the level of agreement with the statement increases. During the data analysis

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<sup>3</sup> The statements are presented in the relevant tables in the findings section.

of the present study, the options 1, 2, 3, and 4 were combined under category ‘1,’ option 5 under category ‘2,’ option 6 under ‘3,’ and options 7, 8, 9, and 10 under category ‘4.’ After combining the options, category ‘1’ means “agree with the first statement,” category ‘2’ means “close to the first statement but neutral,” category ‘3’ means “close to the second statement but neutral,” and ‘4’ means “agree with the second statement.” Cross tabulation and chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests were used for the comparative evaluation of the groups.

## FINDINGS

This section compares social classes’ perceptions of their place in the income distribution and their attitudes toward economic values. As seen in Table 1, there is a significant relationship between the social class and social classes’ perceptions of their place in the income distribution [ $\chi^2_{(8)} = 131.75$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ]. More than one-third (32.3%) of the service class consider themselves to be in the “high-income” group among people in Turkey, while 23.4% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers consider themselves to be in the “low-income” group. On the other hand, most classes, regardless of social class, position themselves somewhere in the middle of the income distribution. This is the case for the service class, routine non-manual workers, and petty bourgeoisie, as well as for manual workers. About 66% of the service class, 82% of routine manual workers, 71% of the petty bourgeoisie, 80% of skilled workers, and 78% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers consider themselves “middle-income” in the income distribution.

**Table 1.** *Social classes’ perceptions of their place in the income distribution*

$[\chi^2_{(8)} = 131.75,$ $p < 0.05]$	Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
Low income	3 1.8%	13 5.5%	23 11.2%	81 13.4%	43 23.4%	163 11.7%
Middle income	110 65.9%	193 81.8%	146 71.2%	480 79.6%	132 71.7%	1061 76.1%
High income	54 32.3%	30 12.7%	36 17.6%	42 7.0%	9 4.9%	171 12.3%
Total	167 100.0%	236 100.0%	205 100.0%	603 100.0%	184 100.0%	1395 100.0%

Source: *World Values Survey (2018)*.

According to the TurkStat data, of the total income in the country, the quintile (20%) with the lowest income has a share of 5.9%, the second quintile, 9.8%, the third 14%, the fourth, 20.5%, and group with the highest income, 49.8% of all income (TurkStat, Income distribution statistics 2023). As can be seen, the distribution of income among people is quite unequal in reality. Nevertheless, in the research, both the upper and lower classes identify themselves as being in a “middle-income” position. All classes perceive themselves to be in a “middling” position among people in Turkey. Therefore, the subjective perception of income inequality of social classes differs from the objective data about income inequality.

**Table 2.** Social classes' levels of agreement with the statements related to success

[ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 28.01$ ; $p < 0.05$ ]		Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life.	Agree	75 43.9%	76 31.7%	109 51.7%	232 37.7%	79 40.5%	571 39.8%
	Neutral	18 10.5%	36 15.0%	21 10.0%	106 17.2%	28 14.4%	209 14.6%
Hard work doesn't generally bring success – it's more a matter of luck and connections.	Neutral	24 14.0%	32 13.3%	21 10.0%	81 13.1%	27 13.8%	185 12.9%
	Agree	54 31.6%	96 40.0%	60 28.4%	197 32.0%	61 31.3%	468 32.7%
Total		171 100.0%	240 100.0%	211 100.0%	616 100.0%	195 100.0%	1433

Source: World Values Survey (2018).

As seen in Table 2, there is a significant relationship between social class and agreement with the statements [ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 28.01$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ]. The two variables are weakly related (Cramer's  $V = 0.08$ ). Slightly more than half (51.7%) of the petty bourgeoisie and 43.9% of the service class believe that hard work leads to a good life. In these classes, the proportion of those who believe that luck and connections play a role in success is lower. Among the working classes, the share of those who believe that a good life is achieved through hard work is smaller than among the two mentioned classes. However, the proportion of both skilled workers (37.7%) and semi-skilled and unskilled workers (40.5%) who believe in the importance of hard work is larger than that of those who agree that luck and connections are the main determinants of a good life (32% and 31%



respectively). Most of the lower-class members, like those higher up, accept that working hard leads to a better life and success.

It is understandable that those in the service class and petty bourgeoisie support the meritocratic understanding that achieving a good life is the result of hard work and effort (i.e., that hard work is rewarded). This is because this understanding justifies the fact that these classes have more opportunities and privileges than those in lower positions. The surprising thing is that this idea, which seeks to legitimize the privileges of the upper classes and naturalize inequalities between people, is also shared by the working classes. At the same time, many studies that were conducted in Turkey reveal that social background characteristics significantly impact the social position that is attained (Candaş et al. 2010; Torun 2016; Uz–Akca 2021). Furthermore, a look at the paternal occupations of the respondents indicates that their class position replicates that of their fathers.

**Table 3.** *Social classes in relation to occupations of fathers when the respondents were 14*

Father's occupation	Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
Professional, higher administrative	52 31.3%	30 12.7%	42 21.0%	23 3.8%	8 4.3%	155 11.2%
Clerical	38 22.9%	66 28.0%	8 4.0%	62 10.4%	14 7.6%	188 13.6%
Skilled worker	50 30.1%	74 31.4%	59 29.5%	346 57.8%	40 21.7%	569 41.1%
Semi-skilled/ unskilled worker, farm worker	15 9.0%	41 17.4%	32 16.0%	115 19.2%	96 52.2%	299 21.6%
Farm owner, farm manager	11 6.6%	25 10.6%	59 29.5%	53 8.8%	26 14.1%	174 12.6%
Total	166 100.0%	236 100.0%	200 100.0%	599 100.0%	184 100.0%	1385 100.0%

Source: *World Values Survey (2018)*.

As can be seen in Table 3, the fathers of about 31% of the service class respondents were working in professional occupations (such as being doctors, engineers, or teachers) or in higher administrative positions (such as bankers and high government officials) when the respondent was 14 years old. At the same time, the fathers of 23% worked in clerical jobs such as civil servants, office managers, and accountants. The fathers of the majority of skilled workers

(77%) and semi-skilled and unskilled workers (74%) were either skilled/unskilled workers or agricultural workers. Therefore, having a family that offers advantageous socioeconomic and cultural opportunities facilitates access to social positions higher in the hierarchy. Conversely, the misfortune of being born into a lower-class family is an obstacle to achieving a good life. Despite this reality, most workers in manual labor jobs embrace the idea that hard work is the key to social mobility and success.

**Table 4.** *Social classes' levels of agreement with statements related to income equality*

		[ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 21.99;$ $p < 0.05$ ]		Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
Incomes should be made more equal.	Agree	56	88	32.9%	36.5%	75	239	86	544
	Neutral	25	24	14.7%	10.0%	16	76	23	164
There should be greater incentives for individual effort.	Neutral	18	40	10.6%	16.6%	28	99	19	204
	Agree	71	89	41.8%	36.9%	85	195	64	504
Total		170	241	100.0%	100.0%	204	609	192	1416
				100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: World Values Survey (2018).

As seen in Table 4, there is no significant relationship between social class and agreement with the statements [ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 21.99; p < 0.05$ ]. The two variables are weakly related (Cramer's  $V = 0.07$ ). Just over forty percent (41.7%) of the petty bourgeoisie and 41.8% of the service class agree with the statement, "There should be greater incentives for individual effort." These classes have fewer members who believe that incomes should be made more equal. Agreement with the idea that income distribution should be more egalitarian is stronger among skilled workers and semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Around 45% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers and 39% of skilled workers agree that incomes should be made more equal. In these classes, the rate of those who adopt the idea that income distribution should be even more unequal is lower. However, it may also be seen that a significant portion of these classes (around 33%) agree with the statement, "There should be greater incentives for individual effort."

**Table 5.** *Social classes' levels of agreement with statements related to income equality according to perceived income level*

		Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
Low income							
Incomes should be made more equal.	Agree	1 33.3%	9 69.2%	14 60.9%	39 51.3%	28 65.1%	91 57.6%
	Neutral	1 33.3%	1 7.7%	1 4.3%	11 14.5%	5 11.6%	19 12.0%
There should be greater incentives for individual effort.	Neutral	0 0.0%	2 15.4%	1 4.3%	9 11.8%	2 4.7%	14 8.9%
	Agree	1 33.3%	1 7.7%	7 30.4%	17 22.4%	8 18.6%	34 21.5%
Total		3 100.0%	13 100.0%	23 100.0%	76 100.0%	43 100.0%	158 100.0%
Middle income							
Incomes should be made more equal.	Agree	38 34.9%	72 37.3%	59 41.5%	192 40.2%	51 39.8%	412 39.2%
	Neutral	15 13.8%	23 11.9%	13 9.2%	58 12.1%	17 13.3%	126 12.0%
There should be greater incentives for individual effort.	Neutral	15 13.8%	32 16.6%	21 14.8%	84 17.6%	17 13.3%	169 16.1%
	Agree	41 37.6%	66 34.2%	49 34.5%	144 30.1%	43 33.6%	343 32.7%
Total		109 100.0%	193 100.0%	142 100.0%	478 100.0%	128 100.0%	1050 100.0%
High income							
Incomes should be made more equal.	Agree	16 29.6%	6 20.0%	2 5.9%	5 11.9%	2 22.2%	31 18.3%
	Neutral	8 14.8%	0 0.0%	2 5.9%	3 7.1%	0 0.0%	13 7.7%
There should be greater incentives for individual effort.	Neutral	3 5.6%	6 20.0%	3 8.8%	2 4.8%	0 0.0%	14 8.3%
	Agree	27 50.0%	18 60.0%	27 79.4%	32 76.2%	7 77.8%	111 65.7%
Total		54 100.0%	30 100.0%	34 100.0%	42 100.0%	9 100.0%	169 100.0%

Source: World Values Survey (2018).

A look at the service class shows that approximately 33% support the idea that incomes should be made more equal. According to contemporary liberal understanding, some occupations in society require the possession of specific skills developed through a long and costly education. Incentives and rewards such as high salaries, prestige, and ample free time should be associated with these positions in order to ensure that the most suitable people within society make the necessary effort (Davis–Moore 1945). Given this explanation, it is expected that the service class respondents, who have acquired their professions through education, would agree that incomes should be even more differentiated. However, a significant proportion of them, one-third, are in favor of more equal incomes. One-third of manual workers, who are expected to be in favor of income equality, believe that the gap should be widened further to encourage personal effort. Social classes' perceptions of their place in the income distribution provide an explanation for this situation.

As seen in Table 5, the perceptions of the classes about their income level affect their agreement with the statements. While the rate of agreement with the first statement is high among those who perceive themselves as low-income in all classes, the rate of agreement with the second statement remains at a low level. The opposite situation is observed among those who consider themselves high-income. Approximately 69% of routine non-manual workers, 61% of petty bourgeoisie, 51% of skilled workers, and 65% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who consider themselves low-income agree with the statement that income should be distributed more equally. On the other hand, about 60% of routine non-manual workers, 79% of petty bourgeoisie, 76% of skilled workers, and 77% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who consider themselves high-income believe that the income gap should widen further. There is a similar trend in the service class, although the difference is not as great as in other classes. Moving from service-class participants who consider themselves middle-income to those who consider themselves high-income, support for income equality decreases (from 35% to 30%), while support for widening income gaps increases (from 38% to 50%). The rates of class members who position themselves in the middle are similar to those in Table 4. Within each of these groups, it can be observed that there are significant numbers of supporters of both statements. Thus, participants' subjective perceptions of their position affect their attitudes toward income inequality. The lower classes are more likely to support inequality if they see themselves in the middle- or upper-income groups. The upper classes, on the other hand, reduce their support for increasing inequality when they perceive themselves as being in a lower-income group.

**Table 6.** *Social classes' levels of agreement with statements related to livelihood*

[ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 16.92;$ $p > 0.05$ ]		Service	Routine	Petty	Skilled	Semi-	Total
		class	non-manual	bourgeoisie	workers	skilled and	
			workers			unskilled	
						workers	
The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.	Agree	61 35.9%	93 38.6%	85 41.3%	249 40.7%	94 49.0%	582 41.0%
	Neutral	17 10.0%	30 12.4%	21 10.2%	84 13.7%	15 7.8%	167 11.8%
People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves.	Neutral	29 17.1%	42 17.4%	25 12.1%	97 15.8%	25 13.0%	218 15.3%
	Agree	63 37.1%	76 31.5%	75 36.4%	182 29.7%	58 30.2%	454 31.9%
Total		170 100.0%	241 100.0%	206 100.0%	612 100.0%	192 100.0%	1421 100.0%

Source: *World Values Survey (2018)*.

As seen in Table 6, there is no significant relationship between social class and agreement with the statements [ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 16.92; p > 0.05$ ]. In all classes except the service class, the rate of agreement with the idea that the state should take more responsibility for citizens' livelihoods is higher than the rate of agreement with the second statement. Approximately 41% of skilled workers and 49% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers agree with the statement, "The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for." The class with the highest level of agreement that people should be more responsible for their livelihood is the service class. More than one-third (37.1%) of this class agree with the statement. The service class is followed by the petty bourgeoisie in this regard (36.4%). On the other hand, there is also considerable acceptance among the service class (35.9%) and the petty bourgeoisie (41.3%) that the government should be more responsible for the livelihoods of individuals. Similarly, among manual workers, there is a notable tendency to hold individuals more responsible for the provision of their livelihood. Approximately 30% of both skilled and semi-skilled and unskilled workers agree with the statement, "People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves." Therefore, it can be said that almost a third of the sample of working-class members have internalized the "free man's belief in his own responsibility for his own destiny," as proposed by proponents of liberalism (Friedman 2002: 1). Social classes' perceptions of their place in the income distribution provide an explanation for this situation.

**Table 7.** Social classes' levels of agreement with statements related to livelihood according to perceived income level

		Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
Low income							
The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.	Agree	1 33.3%	7 53.8%	13 56.5%	40 50.0%	26 60.5%	87 53.7%
	Neutral	1 33.3%	1 7.7%	3 13.0%	7 8.8%	3 7.0%	15 9.3%
People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves.	Neutral	0 0.0%	2 15.4%	2 8.7%	7 8.8%	6 14.0%	17 10.5%
	Agree	1 33.3%	3 23.1%	5 21.7%	26 32.5%	8 18.6%	43 26.5%
Total		3 100.0%	13 100.0%	23 100.0%	80 100.0%	43 100.0%	162 100.0%
Middle income							
The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.	Agree	47 42.7%	77 39.9%	69 47.9%	197 41.2%	64 49.6%	454 43.1%
	Neutral	10 9.1%	26 13.5%	14 9.7%	68 14.2%	10 7.8%	128 12.1%
People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves.	Neutral	19 17.3%	35 18.1%	18 12.5%	80 16.7%	17 13.2%	169 16.0%
	Agree	34 30.9%	55 28.5%	43 29.9%	133 27.8%	38 29.5%	303 28.7%
Total		110 100.0%	193 100.0%	144 100.0%	478 100.0%	129 100.0%	1054 100.0%
High income							
The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.	Agree	13 24.1%	7 23.3%	2 6.1%	10 23.8%	1 11.1%	33 19.6%
	Neutral	4 7.4%	3 10.0%	3 9.1%	5 11.9%	0 0.0%	15 8.9%
People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves.	Neutral	9 16.7%	4 13.3%	3 9.1%	7 16.7%	0 0.0%	23 13.7%
	Agree	28 51.9%	16 53.3%	25 75.8%	20 47.6%	8 88.9%	97 57.7%
Total		54 100.0%	30 100.0%	33 100.0%	42 100.0%	9 100.0%	168 100.0%

Source: World Values Survey (2018).

As seen in Table 7, the perceptions of the classes about their income level affect their agreement with the statements. While the rate of agreement with the first statement is high among those who perceive themselves as low-income in all classes, the rate of agreement with the second statement remains at a low level. The opposite situation is observed among those who consider themselves high-income. Approximately 54% of the routine non-manual workers, 57% of petty bourgeoisie, 50% of skilled workers, and 61% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who consider themselves low-income agree with the statement that the government should take more responsibility for providing a livelihood. On the other hand, about 52% of the service class, 53% of routine non-manual workers, 76% of petty bourgeoisie, 48% of skilled workers, and 89% of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who consider themselves high-income support the view that individuals should take more responsibility for their livelihood. In these groups, the rate of agreement with the opposite statement decreases significantly.

The order of agreement with the statements of the service class who consider themselves middle-income differs from that in Table 6. Among members of the service class in this group, the percentage who agree that the government should take more responsibility (42.7%) exceeds that of those who believe that individuals should take more responsibility (30.9%). When the upper classes see themselves as a lower-income group, they more strongly support the claim that the government is responsible for individual livelihoods. The working classes, on the other hand, tend to place the responsibility for livelihoods on the individual rather than the state when they consider themselves well-off in terms of income.

**Table 8.** Social classes' levels of agreement with statements related to competition

[ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 26.82;$ $p < 0.05$ ]		Service class	Routine non-manual workers	Petty bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	Total
		Competition is good.	Agree	89 52.4%	88 36.8%	117 55.7%	297 48.2%
Neutral	23 13.5%		34 14.2%	22 10.5%	101 16.4%	23 11.8%	203 14.2%
Competition is harmful.	Neutral	19 11.2%	39 16.3%	23 11.0%	82 13.3%	31 15.9%	194 13.6%
	Agree	39 22.9%	78 32.6%	48 22.9%	136 22.1%	47 24.1%	348 24.3%
Total		170 100.0%	239 100.0%	210 100.0%	616 100.0%	195 100.0%	1430 100.0%

Source: World Values Survey (2018).

As may be seen in Table 8, there is a significant relationship between social class and agreement with the statements [ $\chi^2_{(12)} = 26.82$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ]. The two variables are weakly related (Cramer's  $V = 0.08$ ). More than half (55.7%) of the petty bourgeoisie and 52.4% of the service class agree with the statement that competition is a good thing. Among routine non-manual workers (36.8%), the proportion drops significantly. This class is different from these two classes in that members agree with the statement. The rate of low-grade routine non-manual workers is lower. On the other hand, the rate of agreement of the working classes with the statement that competition is a good thing approaches that of the petty bourgeoisie and the service class. About 48% of both skilled and semi-skilled and unskilled workers agree with the statement that "Competition is good." Therefore, almost half of the lower-class members tend to view competition positively. Social classes seem to embrace the idea of competition, which in the neoliberal system is defined as a particular mode of behavior of the subject who seeks to surpass and leave others behind through identifying new opportunities for gain (Dardot–Laval 2013).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The existence of large income and wealth inequalities in a society may not be enough for people to feel discontent about them. For inequality to create anger, people must be able to perceive it accurately and without error (Bottero 2020). However, people may internalize the dominant viewpoint in society as a result of socialization and thus begin to see reality through the eyes of the ruling class. They may have a partial and distorted understanding and misrecognition of the world and their place in it (Calhoun 2013). In this case, the legitimacy of the established order does not become a problem for people (Bourdieu 1998). People's inaccurate perception of their position within the income distribution or the internalization of values that legitimize inequality may suppress discontent with inequality.

The study concludes that classes higher and lower in the hierarchy have a poor perception of their position within the income distribution. Although there is great inequality in income distribution in the country, the majority of social classes consider themselves middle-income. Both service-class and working-class members consider themselves in a "middling" position relative to others in the country. This suggests that the classes perceive the distribution of income in society as more equal than it actually is and have a low awareness of income inequality.



All social classes included in the study generally embrace the achievement ideology that hard work leads to success and a good life. Half of the petty bourgeoisie and two-fifths of the service class and skilled and unskilled workers, agree that hard work leads to a good life. The belief that hard work and effort are rewarded fosters the perception that the system is fair, though unequal. Making individuals responsible for their own success or failure makes them think that their current situation is deserved (Torun 2009). It leads to the masking of the structural factors that influence the social position that is achieved. Even though they generally occupy positions similar to their fathers, social classes accept this belief, which legitimizes inequality. In this context, both lower and upper classes misrecognize values. They seem to exaggerate the impact of hard work on achieving a good life while overlooking the influence of luck and connections.

Across all social classes in the study, there are adherents of the two opposing values: achieving income equality or widening the gaps. With the service class and petty bourgeoisie, most think incomes should be further differentiated to encourage personal effort. However, a third of these classes support income equality. Similarly, while two-fifths of skilled and unskilled workers support income equality, a third think that income gaps should be widened. Thus, in both the upper and lower classes, some individuals support increasing inequalities. They seem to embrace the value that incentive rewards should be attached to top positions to ensure that talented people put in the necessary effort. In other words, they accept a belief that legitimizes inequality and naturalizes the privileges of the ruling ones.

The social classes in the study do not differ in their preferences regarding whether the state or the individual should take more responsibility for a livelihood. The majority of all classes, except the service class, support the idea that the government should take more responsibility for supporting the livelihoods of all its citizens. However, one-third of the service class agrees with this position. The service class and the petty bourgeoisie are the two classes that most strongly agree that individuals should take more responsibility for their livelihoods. However, nearly a third of the working classes also see the provision of livelihoods as primarily the responsibility of the individual. Therefore, a significant proportion of both the upper and lower classes embrace the liberal understanding (Kalaycıoğlu 2020) that individuals should be able to achieve an income level that they can live on by making wise use of the opportunities that are equally available to them. Such an understanding shifts the responsibility of providing education, employment, and income from the state to the individual. It leads to differences in livelihoods and welfare in society being seen as the result of individual characteristics. In this context, there is a segment within social classes that adopts an individualized understanding of inequality, whether upper class or lower class.

Social classes in different parts of the hierarchy show similar tendencies in terms of the values they accept. Within each class, some hold opposing values. Differences in class members' perceptions of their place in the income distribution explain this situation. In almost every class in the study, as we move from those who perceive themselves as lower-income to those who perceive themselves as higher-income, agreement with ensuring income equality and the government's responsibility for livelihoods decreases, while agreement with the opposite values increases. The individuals in lower classes are more supportive of widening income gaps and individual responsibility for livelihood if they perceive themselves as middle or high-income. Similarly, the individuals in the upper classes are more supportive of income equality and the state's responsibility for livelihood if they perceive themselves as middle-income. This suggests that the subjective perceptions of income and social position of the classes, rather than their objective positions, determine attitudes towards inequality.

Social classes in the study embrace the neoliberal value of competition as a good thing. More than half of the service class, the petty bourgeoisie, and almost half of the working class view competition positively. Meanwhile, the neoliberal understanding of competition transforms individuals into competitors in the race to access beneficial information, generate new ideas, and make profits. It turns the plight of others into gains to be enjoyed individually rather than as concerns. It makes inequality less of a problem to worry about. It also undermines trust, cooperation, and solidarity between individuals, making people suspicious of each other (Bauman 2013). Making people preoccupied with their individual lives prevents them from coming together to react to inequality and struggle for change.

To conclude, a considerable segment within social classes accepts values that naturalize the privileges and inequality of the ruling individuals in society, indicating a misunderstanding of values. This is also the case for the lower classes, who might be expected to be disturbed by inequality. The classes have a low awareness of income inequality in society, and their subjective perceptions of their income status impact their attitudes toward inequality. Even those in the lower classes become supportive of inequalities when they positively perceive their position in the income level. All social classes, including the lower classes, embrace the individualism and competitiveness of neoliberal society. This prevents the lower classes from coming together to take a common stand against problems. It fosters indifference towards inequalities. It means that the lower classes are, as Bourdieu puts it, "agents who, ... contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them" (Bourdieu–Wacquant 1992: 167–168).

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