

The Association Between Social Class and Perception of Treatment of Criminals

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Introduction

- Criminologists and social scientists alike have investigated public sentiment surrounding crime and punishment for quite some time
- Public support of more punitive measures in response to crime has risen (Côté-Lussier, 2016).
- Overwhelming state of the research on this topic addresses how one's financial circumstance or racial and or ethnic background contribute to their subsequent criminal activity
- Literature has not thoroughly investigated the potential relationship between social class and perceived punitive response to crime

Methods

Sample

- 2021 General Social Survey (GSS) is a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the U.S. aged 18 or older
- Final sample size included 4,032 participants

Measures

- Social Class was evaluated through responses to "If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class or the upper class?"
- Participants' perception of the treatment of criminals was measured through the question "Do you think the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals?"

Research Questions

- Is there an association between social class and perception of treatment of criminals?
- How does the association differ from class level to class level?

Results

Univariate Analysis

- 31% of respondents believed the courts treated criminals "too harshly"
- 68% believed courts were "not harsh enough" with their treatment of criminals

Bivariate Analysis

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **there is a significant association between social class and perception of treatment of criminals** ($\chi^2=28.258$; $p=0.000$)



Figure 1: Displays the average support of harsher treatment of criminals by social class classification

Multivariate Analysis

- When controlling for race, the relationship between social class and perception of treatment of criminals did not shift in direction or strength

Discussion

- Overall statistically significant association between social class and perception of treatment of criminals
- Significance varies from individual class level to individual class level
- Relationship between social class and perception of treatment of criminals does not vary in either strength or direction for different racial demographics

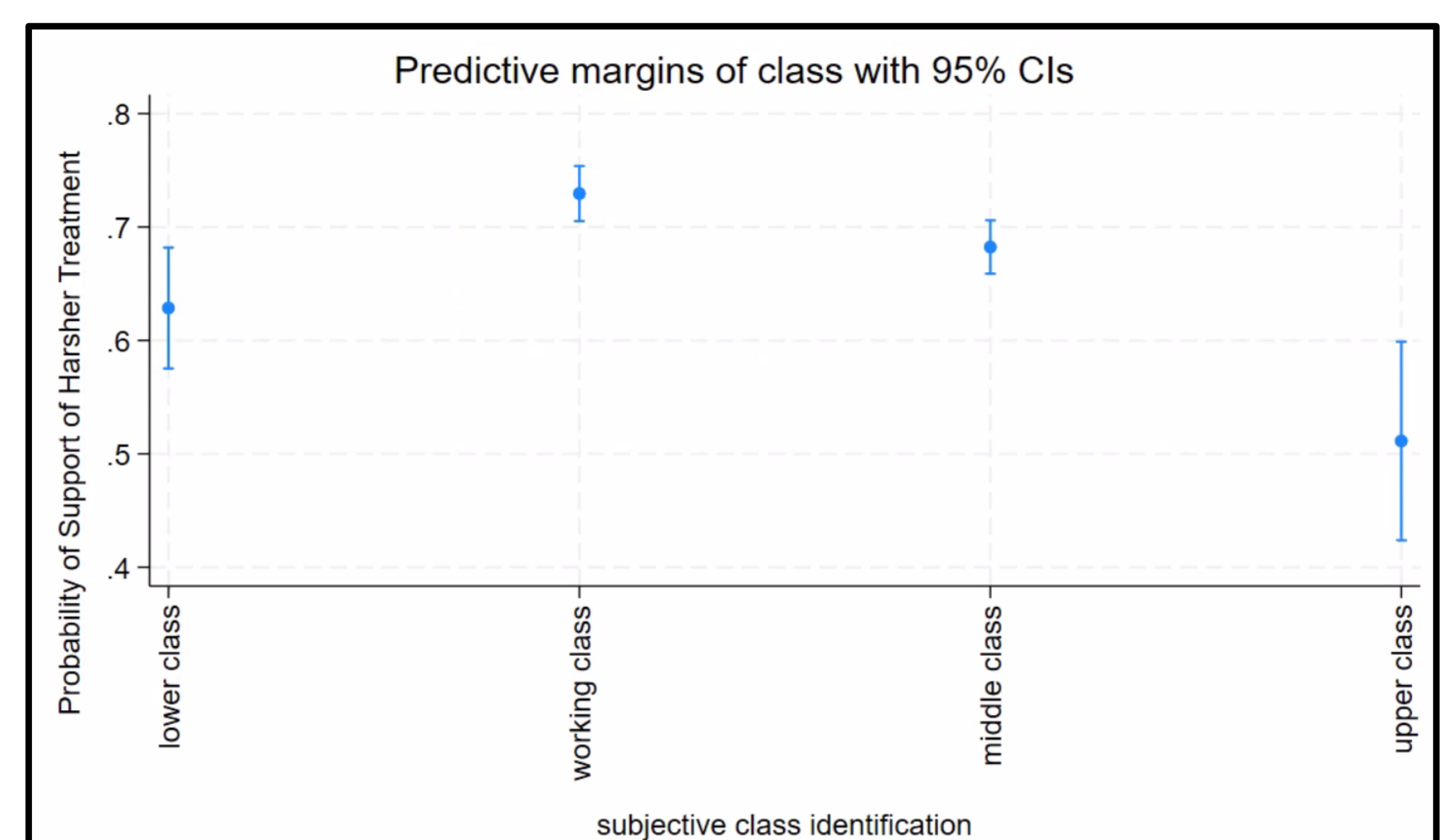


Figure 2: Displays the predicted support of harsher treatment of criminals by social class classification

- Limitations: Underrepresentation of certain demographics in sampling & question wording
- Further research is needed to determine whether race and or income when coupled with social class might be predictors of one's perception of treatment towards criminals

References

- Côté-Lussier, C. (2016). The functional relation between social inequality, criminal stereotypes, and public attitudes toward punishment of crime. *Psychology, Public Policy and Law*, 22(1), 46-57. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000073>
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