The Lack of Association Between Actual and Perceived Social Class and Support for Government Wealth Redistribution.

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Introduction

- Americans vary widely in how they think about inequality and what the government should do
- about it.
- Prior research finds that redistribution views aren't driven only by self-interest; people often
- misjudge or disconnect from their own economic position (Fong, 2001; Weisstanner, 2022).
- Studies also show that class has been a key factor in shaping political attitudes and voting behavior over time but may be changing (Evans & Tilley, 2012).
- This project tests whether the perceived class or the actual income class is more strongly related to support for a redistribution policy, if either.

Research Questions

- Do the perceptions of economic class or reality of economic class determined by people's income show to be stronger predictors of Americans' opinions concerning government intervention regarding wealth redistribution?
- Does neither perceived nor actual economic class have a meaningful impact on opinions regarding government wealth redistribution?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n≈5,000) were drawn from the 2024 American National Election Studies (ANES), a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults.

Measures

- Perceived class was measured using the question "What social class do you think you belong to?" (Lower,
- Working, Middle, Upper class).
- The measurement of actual class was done according to reported household income, which was divided into six categories, ranging from <$10,000 to ≥$250,000.
- Before the analysis, variables were purged to remove missing and invalid responses.
- Support of wealth redistribution by the government was assessed with the question: "The government should do more to reduce income differences between rich and poor" (1=Strong favor to 7=Strong oppose).

Results

Bivariate

- The support of redistribution. was similar across all class groups.
- The means were clustered closely around 3.33-3.8 with or without perceived or real class.
- There were very few differences in perceived class. Respondents of the lower, working, middle, and upper classes appeared almost the same.
- The levels of actual income were very small. Patterns were primarily level, meaning that there was a weak association between redistribution attitudes and class.

Multivariate

- Adjusted predictions had minor changes across income groups. All the estimated means were in a very narrow range of 3.4-3.8.
- Overlapping confidence intervals indicated that there were no statistically significant differences that were statistically significant after adjustment.
- The bivariate pattern is supported by multivariate results. Class (objective or subjective) is still a weak predictor of redistribution views.
- When measured, the P value was greater than .05, indicating low significance.
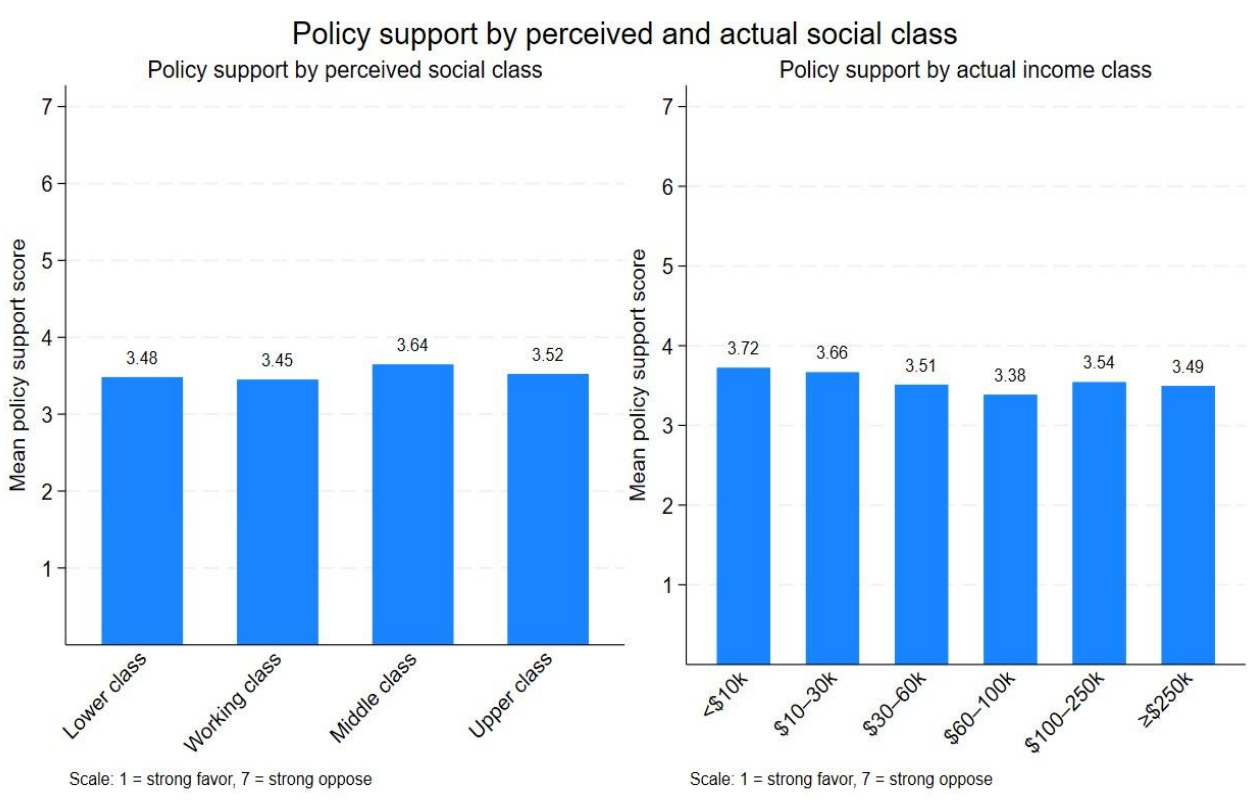

Figure 1: Policy support by perceived and actual social class• Support for redistribution was similar
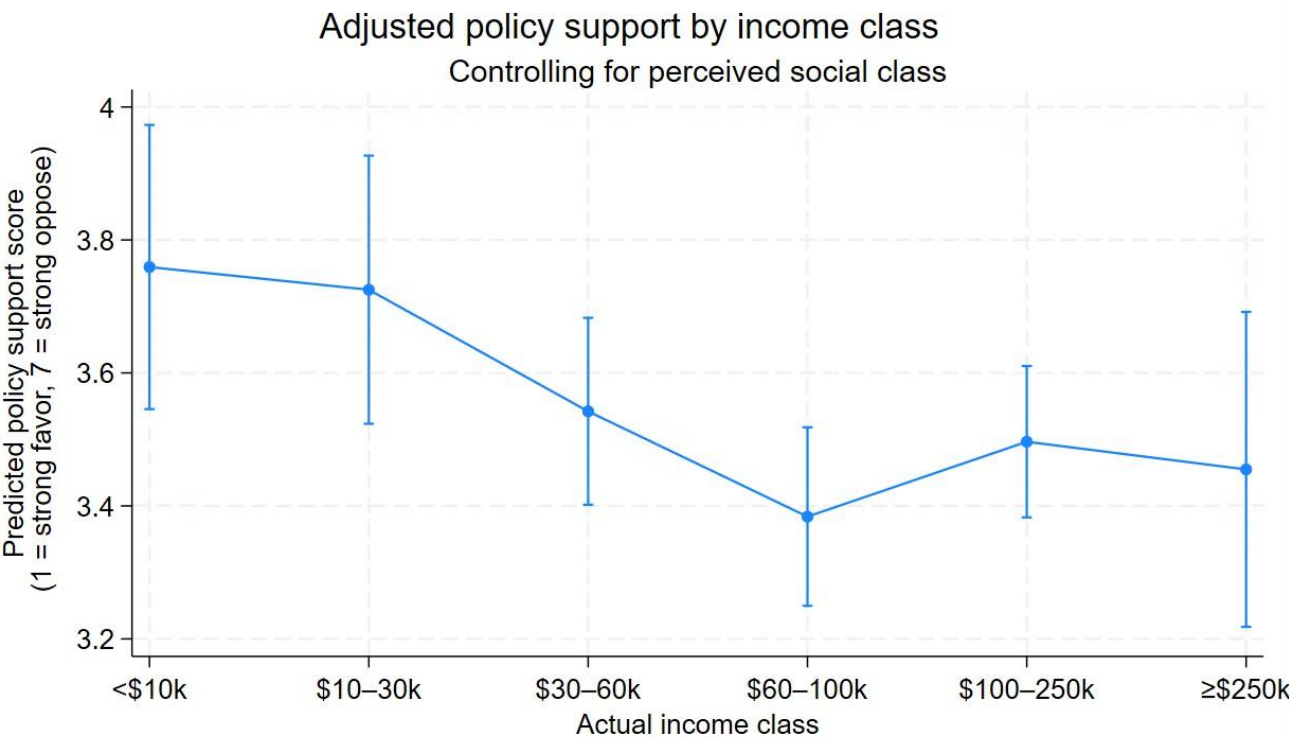

Figure 2: Adjusted policy support by income class (controlling for perceived class)

Discussion

- There was no strong association between perceived and actual class and attitude towards wealth redistribution. Intergroup differences were quite negligible, implying that class position now holds a minor role in the development of policy views (at least those regarding wealth redistribution).
- The weak associations were supported by multivariate results. This was not significant in terms of controlling the effect of perceived class, implying that neither of the measures of class accounts for substantial variations.
- Results are the opposite of what had been anticipated by most prior research. Most studies indicate that lower-class or low-income people favor redistribution more, but this was not evident in the 2024 ANES sample. (Fong, 2001)
- Due to increased polarization in recent years policy opinions may have shifted to be decided more on factors other than class.

References

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