

Courts, Sex, Race, Class, Degree

Exploring the Influence of Sex, Race, Social Class, and Education on Local Court Sentiment

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Summary:

The purpose of this paper was to explore to what extent do an individual's sex, racial background, social class, and level of education vary based on their opinions on how their local courts deal with criminals. My thought process behind this question was influenced by the idea of the Dark Triad traits. Specifically, the traits include Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. From an evolutionary perspective, these traits were selected for based on survival and success. Individuals in the majority relative to their category, would be competing against a greater number of people thereby reinforcing these traits for their success. Therefore, I believe that those individuals would have more harsh opinions towards the judgement of criminals. To further analyze this idea, a multivariate analysis was done using data from the GSS survey. After extracting necessary variables such as sex, race, social class, level of education and finally, opinions on how local courts deal with criminals, stacked bar charts were plotted to show the how frequency and proportion of the opinions on the courts varies between a given category. The result from the analysis did indeed show that the majority group from each variable had harsher opinions on the treatment of criminals by their local courts. Specifically, the majority group for the race variable was 'white', where 79.7% of white individuals believed the courts treated the criminals "not harshly enough", while only 67.6% of black individuals and 69.3% of other race individuals shared the same opinion. The majority group for the Sex variable was 'female', where 79.5% of female individuals believed the courts treated the criminals "not harshly enough", while 75.5% of male individuals shared the opinion. The majority group for the education variable was 'high school' where 80.2% of those individuals opted for the harsher opinion, followed by the 'less than high school' group having 79.8% of the individuals sharing the harsher opinion. Notably, that group was the second highest majority. Finally, the majority group for the social class variable was 'working class' where 78.9% of the individuals leaned towards the harsher opinion, followed by the second majority, individuals from the middle class, where 71.5% leaned toward the harsher opinion. A parallel coordinate plot was also attempted where the dimensions were the various variables, and the lines were the response to the court opinions.

Data:

The data used for this paper came from the General Social Survey (GSS). The variables codes from the data were: SEX which was split into 2 categories: Male and Female, RACE which was split into 3 categories: White, Black, and Other, DEGREE which was split into 6 categories: Less than high school, High school, Associate/Junior college, Bachelor's, Graduate, and Don't know, CLASS which was split into 7 categories: Lower class, Working class, Middle class, Upper class, No class, Don't know, and No answer, and finally the code COURTS which was split into 5 categories: Too harshly, Not harshly enough, About right, and Don't know. Specifically, these answers were a response to the question, "In general, do you think the courts in this area deal too

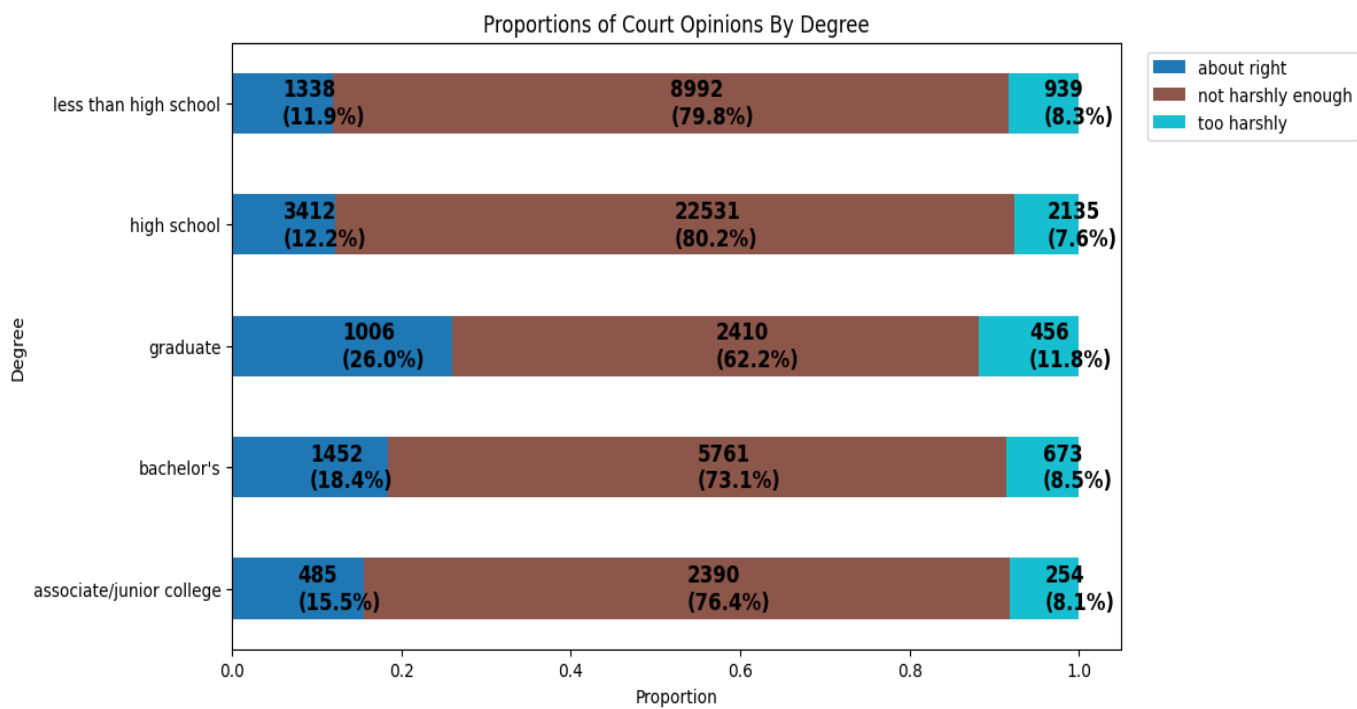
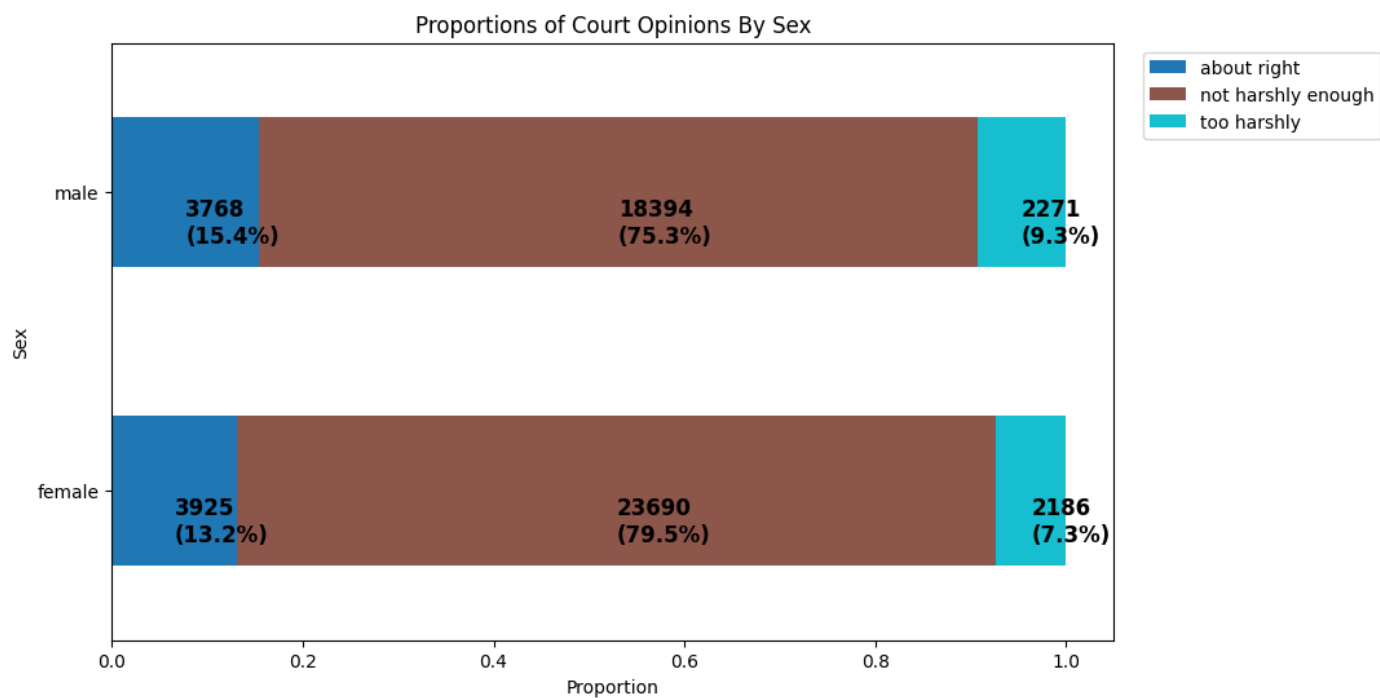
harshly or not harshly enough with criminals?” (*GSS Data Explorer | NORC at the University of Chicago*, 2018). Notably, the CLASS variable was based on the question, “If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?” (*GSS Data Explorer | NORC at the University of Chicago*, 2018). Therefore, it is best to keep in mind that these responses were not based off of a quantitative analysis, but survey responses.

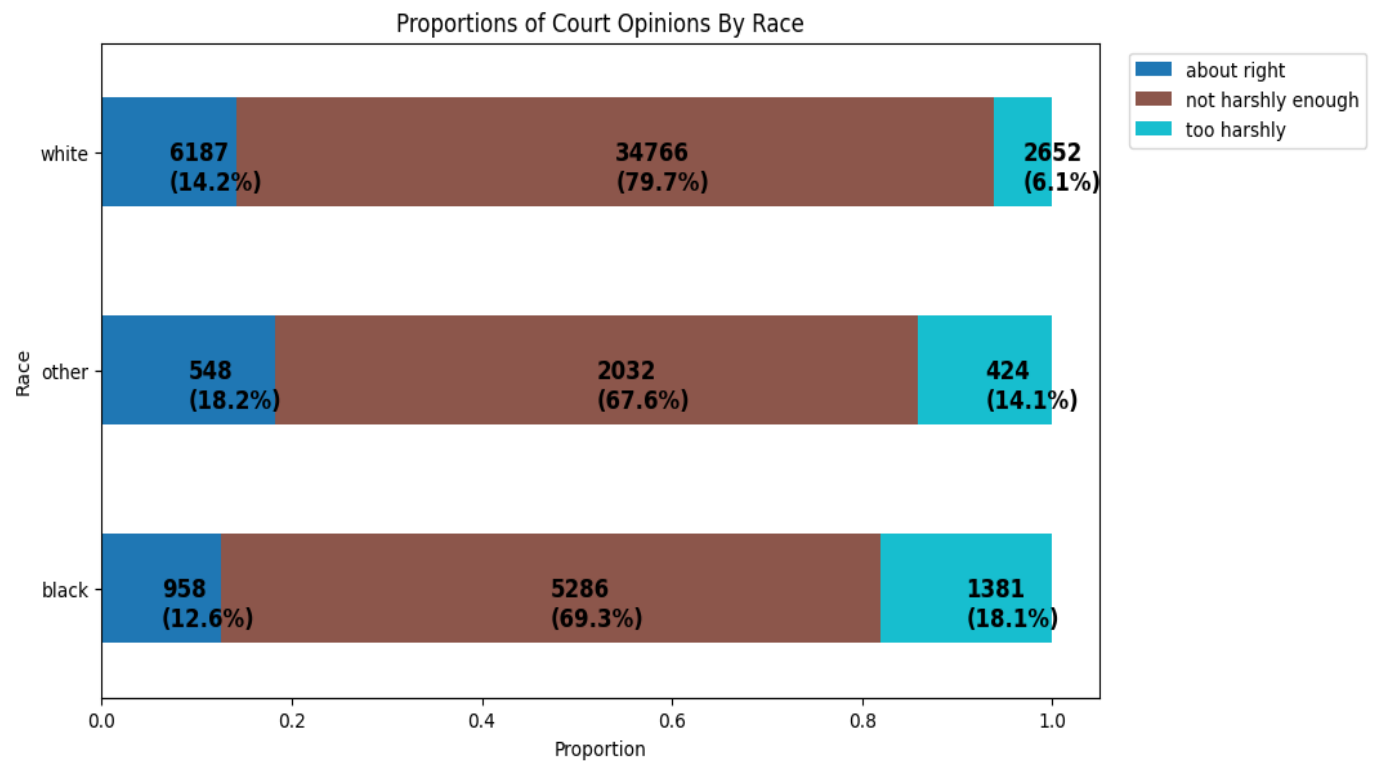
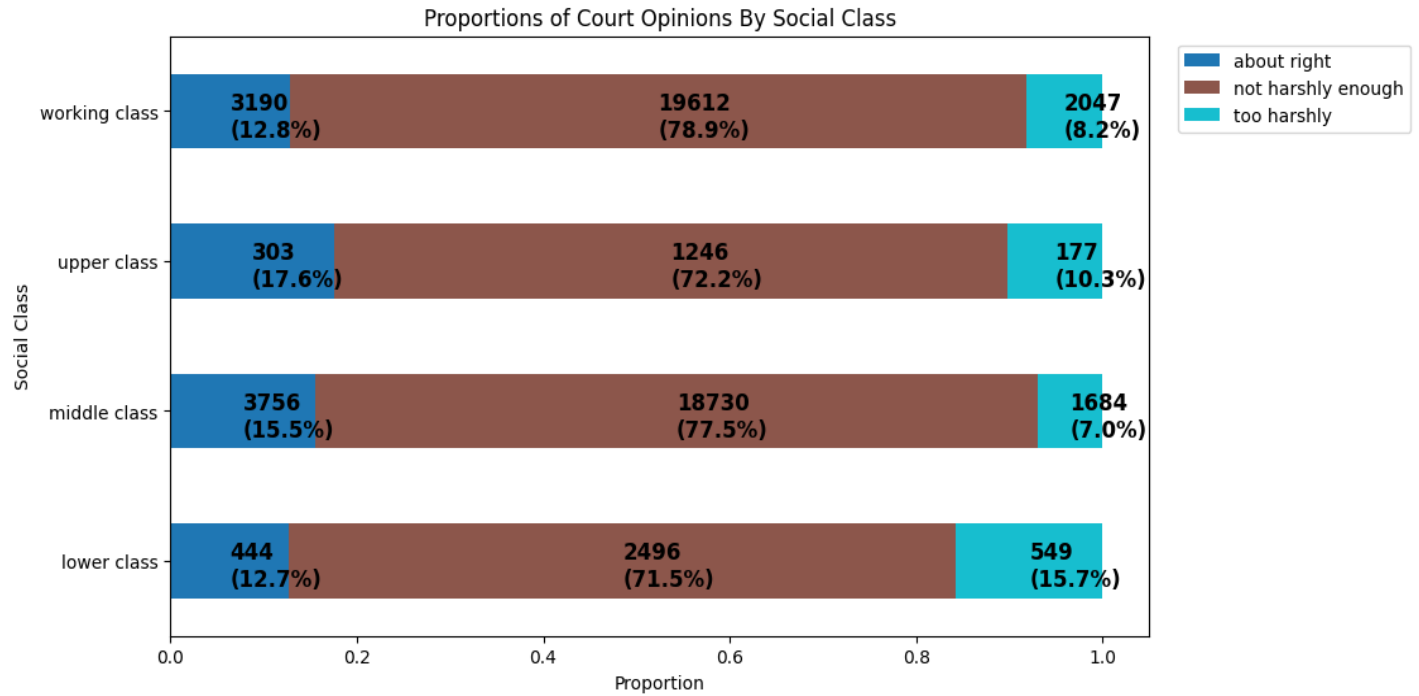
Data Cleaning:

The data was read in using a provided format by Professor Terrance. After reading in the data, the variable codes were renamed to a more readable name. For example, “courts” was renamed to “Courts Deal With Criminals” from which the values could be read as a sentence: “Courts Deal With Criminals more harshly, not harshly enough, or about right.” Each of the variables were then cleaned. The Sex variable originally had 2 extra responses: ‘sex’ and nan which totaled to 148 invalid responses out of a total 72,426 responses. The rows with the invalid responses were dropped leaving 72,278 valid responses. The Race variable had 101 null responses out of the remaining 72,278 responses. The rows with the invalid responses were dropped leaving 72,177 valid responses. The Social Class variable had 1 response for ‘no class’ and 3528 null responses. The rows containing either were dropped leaving 68,648 valid responses. The Degree variable had 159 null responses which were dropped leaving 68,509 valid responses. Finally, the Courts Deal With Criminals variable had 14,255 null responses, which were dropped leaving a total of 54,234 valid responses. Originally, the CAPPUN variable, which asked if an individual was in favor of or opposed to the death penalty for a convicted murderer, was going to be used instead of COURTS, however, that variable had an excessive number of null variables, therefore, the use of COURTS was decided upon. After the variables were cleaned a tidy data set was left, with each variable being a column and each observation a row, with no null values.

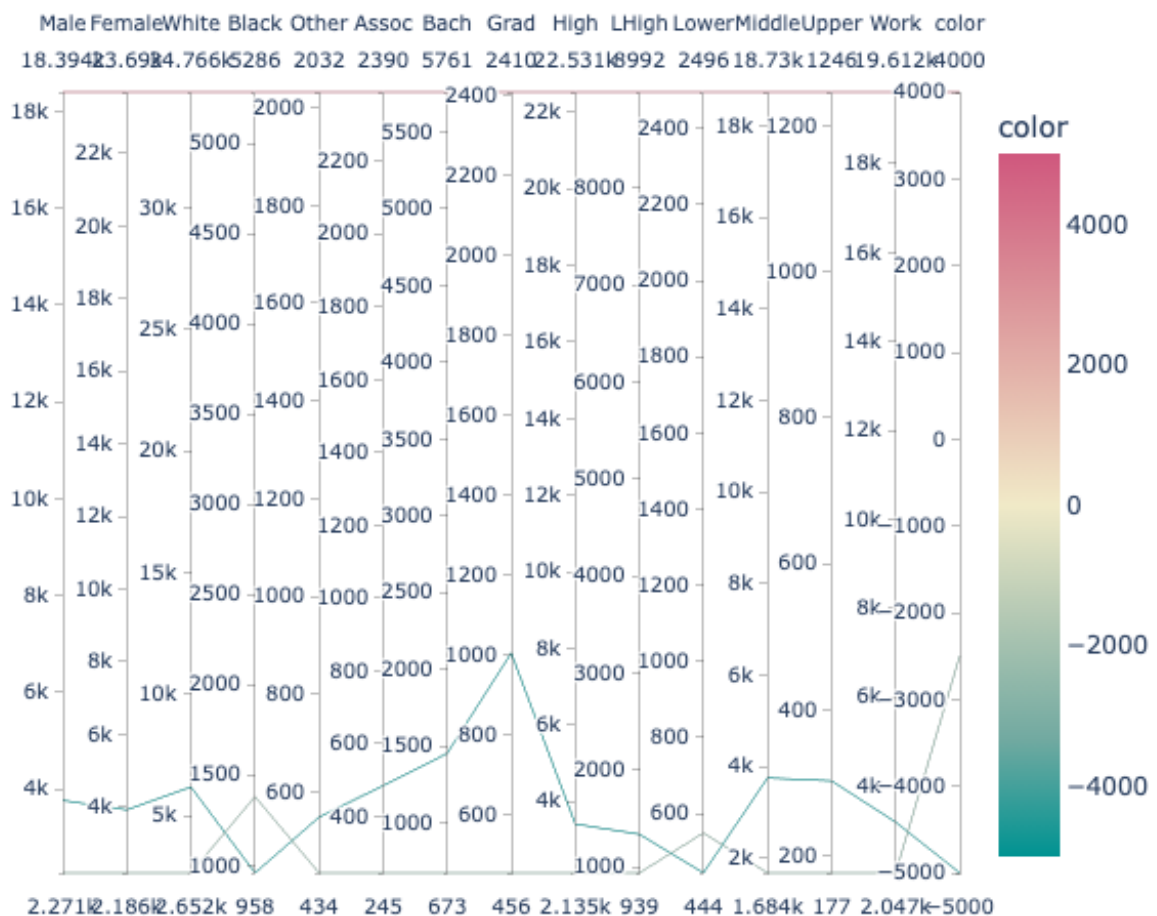
Results:

There were several interesting findings based on the analysis of the data and plots. Notably, the stacked bar charts showed a significant domination for the “Courts Deal With Criminals not harshly enough.” Specifically, the average percent for that response across all variables and their categories was 74.5%. $\frac{3}{4}$ of total sample thought that the courts were not harsh enough to criminals. The highest percentage for that response was 80.2% for people with high school degrees. The lowest percentage for the response was 62.2% for the people with graduate degrees. Further research is necessary to provide a reasoning for this, however, I hypothesize that there is much less competition once an individual has obtained a graduate level degree, therefore, the Dark Triad Traits are less prevalent. The “too harshly” responses had the lowest proportion of votes averaging 10% across all the variables and categories. The “about right” response averaged 15.4%. However, for 2 responses, specifically black and lower class, the “too harshly” response was proportionately higher than the “about right” response. There could be several factors that caused this. One of them may be the fact that individuals from minority groups or those who have experienced marginalization may have more critical views due to perceived injustices or biases. Most importantly, across all the variables, the majority group had the ‘harshest’ opinion.





A parallel coordinate plot was also attempted. The dimensions were all responses to the variables and the lines were the responses to the opinion on criminal handling. Therefore, there were three lines, one showing the frequency of “too harsh” and a specific response, one showing the frequency of “about right” and a specific response, and the last one showing the frequency of “not harsh enough” and a specific response. The plot did not turn out to be as robust as imagined. The line that represents the frequency of “not harshly enough” is a horizontal line at the very top across all the dimensions. This is due to the fact that that response dominated every single category across all the variables and a parallel coordinate plot puts the maximum frequency value relative to each dimension at the top of the y axes. A similar situation occurred for the line representing the frequency of “too harsh”. This response was the lowest in almost all the categories across all the variables and the parallel coordinate plot puts the minimum frequency value relative to each dimension at the bottom of the y axes. However, there are 2 cases where that line spiked over the “about right” line which indicated there was a higher frequency for “too harsh” for black and lower class as also indicated by the stacked bar charts.



The red horizontal line on top represents the frequency of “not harshly enough”.
The green line represents the frequency of “about right”.
The faded-out line at the bottom represents the frequency of “too harshly”.

Conclusion:

In conclusion this paper aimed to investigate how an individual’s sex, racial background, social class, and level of education varies based on their opinion regarding how local courts deal with criminals. The analysis was based on data from the General Social Survey (GSS), and several key findings emerged. Firstly, there was a significant majority of individuals, across all variables and categories, that believed their local courts did not deal with the criminals harshly enough. This was most pronounced among individuals with high school degrees, where 80.2% of those individuals chose the ‘harsher’ response. In contrast, 62.2% of individuals with a graduate degree held the same opinion. This could indicate that there is a more lenient perspective for people with higher education. However, the majority group relative to each variable had the “not harsh enough” opinion indicating a less straight forward theory. One theory could deal with the Dark Triad Traits, however, to be more certain, one could see if the GSS data includes responses related to these traits. Secondly, there was a low proportion of respondents, specifically 10%, who believed the courts dealt with the criminals “too harshly”. This may indicate a general bias towards the criminal justice system. There were 2 demographics, black and lower class, that had a higher proportion of individuals choosing “too harshly” rather than “about right” which also could indicate a concern about the justice system.

The most prominent finding in this study was the consistent trend that the majority group in each variable expressed the harshest opinions. This finding aligns with the hypothesis that individuals in the majority relative to their category might be more inclined towards harsher opinions, potentially influenced by the competitive nature of their environment resulting in selection of the Dark Triad traits.

The attempt to create a parallel coordinate plot to visualize the data did not yield robust results. The dominance of the “not harshly enough: response in all the categories paired with the functionality of the plot led to a horizontal line at the top of the plot. A similar issue occurred for the “too harsh” response at the bottom of the plot. Nevertheless, the plot did indicate specific cases such as black and lower class individuals choosing “too harsh” over “about right”

Essentially, this paper sheds light on the complex relationship between various demographics and their opinion on how local courts handle criminals. Further research could be done to see if the individuals in the majority possess some variation of the Dark Triad traits. More comprehensive variables such as therapy responses and indicators of the traits could be used. Furthermore, one could examine the potential consequences of the opinions such as their influence on voting behavior and public policy. This paper lays a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of relationships between various demographic factors and attitudes towards the criminal justice system while concluding that there may be more factors in play in shaping individual opinions such as the rigor of their environment and selection of the Dark Triad traits.

Appendix:

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Race			
black	958	5286	1381
other	548	2032	424
white	6187	34766	2652

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Race			
black	0.125639	0.693246	0.181115
other	0.182423	0.676431	0.141145
white	0.141887	0.797294	0.060819

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Sex			
female	3925	23690	2186
male	3768	18394	2271

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Sex			
female	0.131707	0.794940	0.073353
male	0.154218	0.752834	0.092948

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Degree			
associate/junior college	485	2390	254
bachelor's	1452	5761	673
graduate	1006	2410	456
high school	3412	22531	2135
less than high school	1338	8992	939

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Degree			
associate/junior college	0.155002	0.763822	0.081176
bachelor's	0.184124	0.730535	0.085341
graduate	0.259814	0.622417	0.117769
high school	0.121519	0.802443	0.076038
less than high school	0.118733	0.797941	0.083326

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Social Class			
lower class	444	2496	549
middle class	3756	18730	1684
upper class	303	1246	177
working class	3190	19612	2047

Courts Deal With Criminals	about right	not harshly enough	too harshly
Social Class			
lower class	0.127257	0.715391	0.157352
middle class	0.155399	0.774928	0.069673
upper class	0.175550	0.721900	0.102549

working class

0.128375

0.789247

0.082378

Work Cited

“GSS Data Explorer | NORC at the University of Chicago.” *Norc.org*, 2018,
[gssdataexplorer.norc.org/](https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/).