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Simposio: Suffering and challenging inequality: consequences of relative deprivation for personal wellbeing and political mobilization



Associazione
Italiana
di Psicologia

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL ACTION

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ECONOMIC INEQUALITY QUALIFIES AS A STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTIC LEADING TO POLITICAL ACTION



Objective inequality (e.g., Gini index)

Some studies claim that economic inequality increases political participation (Brady, 2004; Oliver, 2001), while others claim the contrary (Goodin and Dryzek, 1980; Lukes, 2004; Solt, 2008).

Subjective inequality

Subjective perception of economic inequality predicts political participation, and it does better than objective indicators of inequality – e.g., the Gini Index (Jo and Choi, 2019; Lee and Kwon, 2019). The effect, however, is found to vary (see Jo, 2016).

SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS MATTERS...

The material conditions in which people grow up and live play a key role in shaping individuals' life trajectories in profound ways (Adler et al., 1994) and influencing how they think and react to their social environment.

Lower status individuals act politically less than their more advantaged counterparts (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017).



Higher status individuals are more likely to engage in formal participation and direct actions (Berman and Wittig, 2004).

COVID-19 HAS LED TO DRAMATIC CHANGES IN SOCIETIES



+4% IN GINI INDEX (SIMULATION BY BANK OF ITALY, 2021)

This increase is substantial! it is larger than the one observed over the entire period of recession (between 2009 and 2014 the Gini index increased by 3.1%)

AMPLIFIED SOCIAL UNREST AND POLITICAL PROTESTS

(IACOELLA, 2021; COEN ET AL. 2022)

The disease yields uncertainty in the health care system, and the unprecedented containment measures cause social and economical disruptions..



THE DISADVANTAGED IN SOCIETY HAVE BEEN MOST NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY COVID-19 IN TERMS OF HEALTH AND FINANCES (JETTEN, 2020)

The efforts to fight COVID-19 have adversely affected the most vulnerable (Goldin et al, 2020). Substantial job losses, particularly among those employed in low-skilled jobs (Sedik and Xu, 2020).



RESEARCH QUESTION

**HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN PERCEIVED ECONOMIC INEQUALITY
AND POLITICAL ACTION ACROSS SOCIAL
CLASSES?**

SAMPLE

- We administered a survey to a representative sample of 1446 Italians (51% were women; Mean age = 42.42, SD = 12.87)
- The sample is stratified based on gender, age, working status, education level, and regional area of residency
- Participants were recruited from an Ipsos panel in January 2021



DEFINING SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSES

We standardized and averaged income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige (Adler et al., 2000)

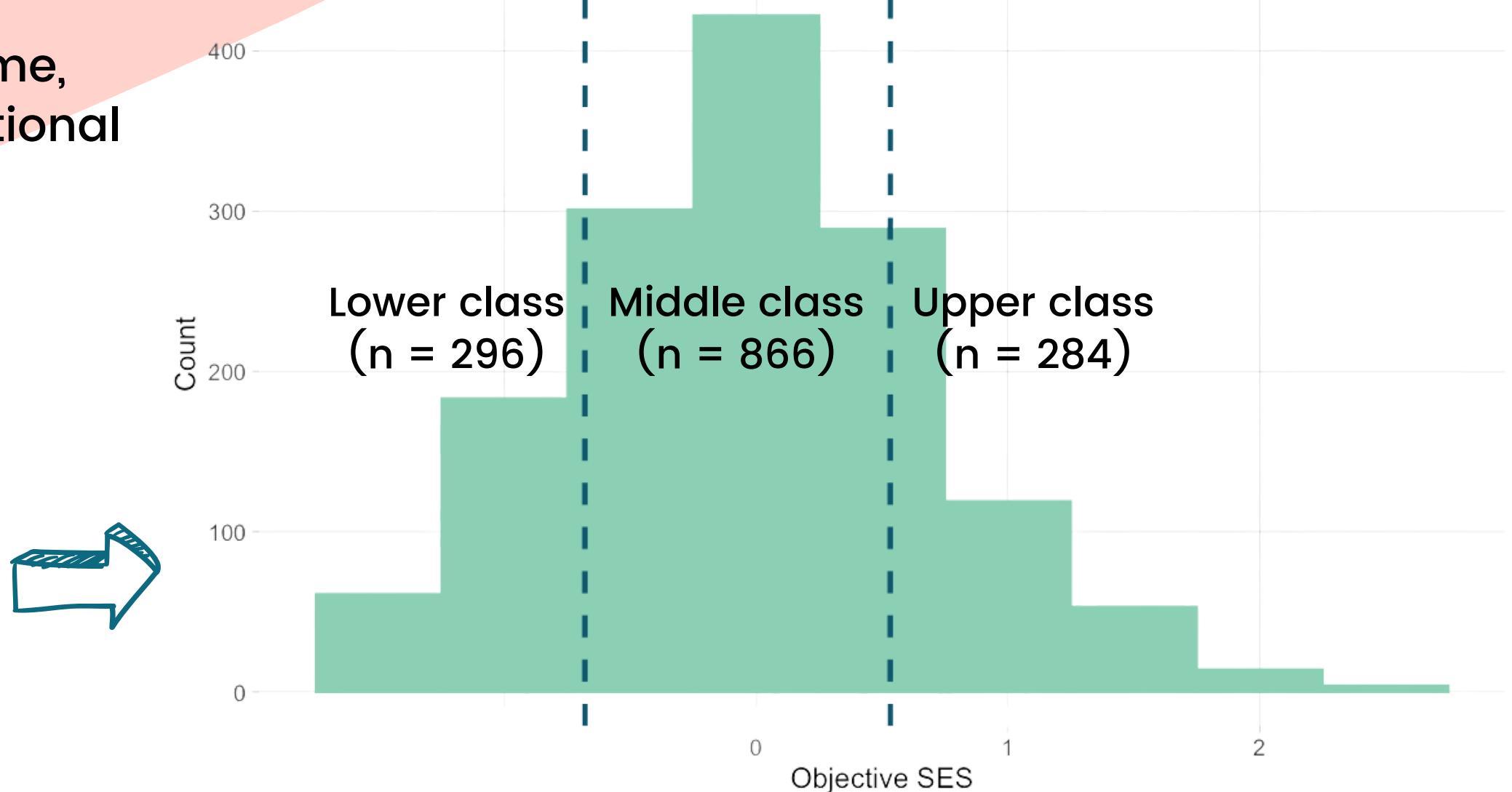


We cut the distribution into quintiles (Atkinson and Brandolini, 2011)

Lowest 20% -> lower class

Middle 60% -> middle class

Highest 20% -> upper class



MAIN PREDICTOR

PERCEIVED INEQUALITY

7 items (es. "In Italy there are few very rich people and many very poor people")

Range: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree
 $\alpha > .85$

MODERATORS

COVID-19 PERSONAL IMPACTS

Personal finances

2 items (e.g., "The COVID-19 has impacted me negatively from a financial point of view")
 $\alpha > .75$

Psychological health

2 items (e.g., "I have become depressed because of the COVID-19")
 $\alpha > .76$

Ability to procure resources

2 items (e.g., "It has been difficult for me to get the things I need due to the COVID-19")
 $\alpha > .63$

OUTCOMES

ACTIVISM

3 items (e.g., "Participates in strikes, protests, demonstrations")

Range: 1 = Not at all me; 5 = Totally me
 $\alpha > .84$

FORMAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3 items (e.g., "Runs for public office")
Range: 1 = Not at all me; 5 = Totally me
 $\alpha > .71$

LEGAL ACTIONS AGAINST UNSATISFYING ITALIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

2 items (e.g., "I would actively support a political party that represents my interests.")
Range: 1 = extremely unlikely; 5 = extremely likely
 $\alpha > .69$

CONTROLS

Gender, age, and political orientation (1 = extreme left; 9 = extreme right)

ACTIVISM

| | Lower Class (n = 296) | | | Middle Class (n = 866) | | | Upper Class (n = 284) | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------------|--------------------|------|
| | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p |
| Perceived inequality (PEI) | -0.001 | -0.12 – 0.11 | .973 | 0.08 | 0.02 – 0.15 | .014 | 0.20 | 0.08 – 0.31 | .001 |
| PEI * Impacts on finance | -0.03 | -0.18 – 0.13 | .722 | 0.02 | -0.07 – 0.10 | .669 | -0.06 | -0.22 – 0.10 | .467 |
| PEI * Impacts on resources | -0.08 | -0.22 – 0.06 | .255 | -0.11 | -0.20 – -0.03 | .008 | -0.03 | -0.18 – 0.11 | .657 |
| PEI * Impacts on psych. health | -0.02 | -0.17 – 0.13 | .803 | -0.02 | -0.10 – 0.06 | .641 | 0.20 | 0.06 – 0.34 | .006 |
| R2 / R2 adjusted | | .099 / .064 | | | .111 / .100 | | | .228 / .196 | |



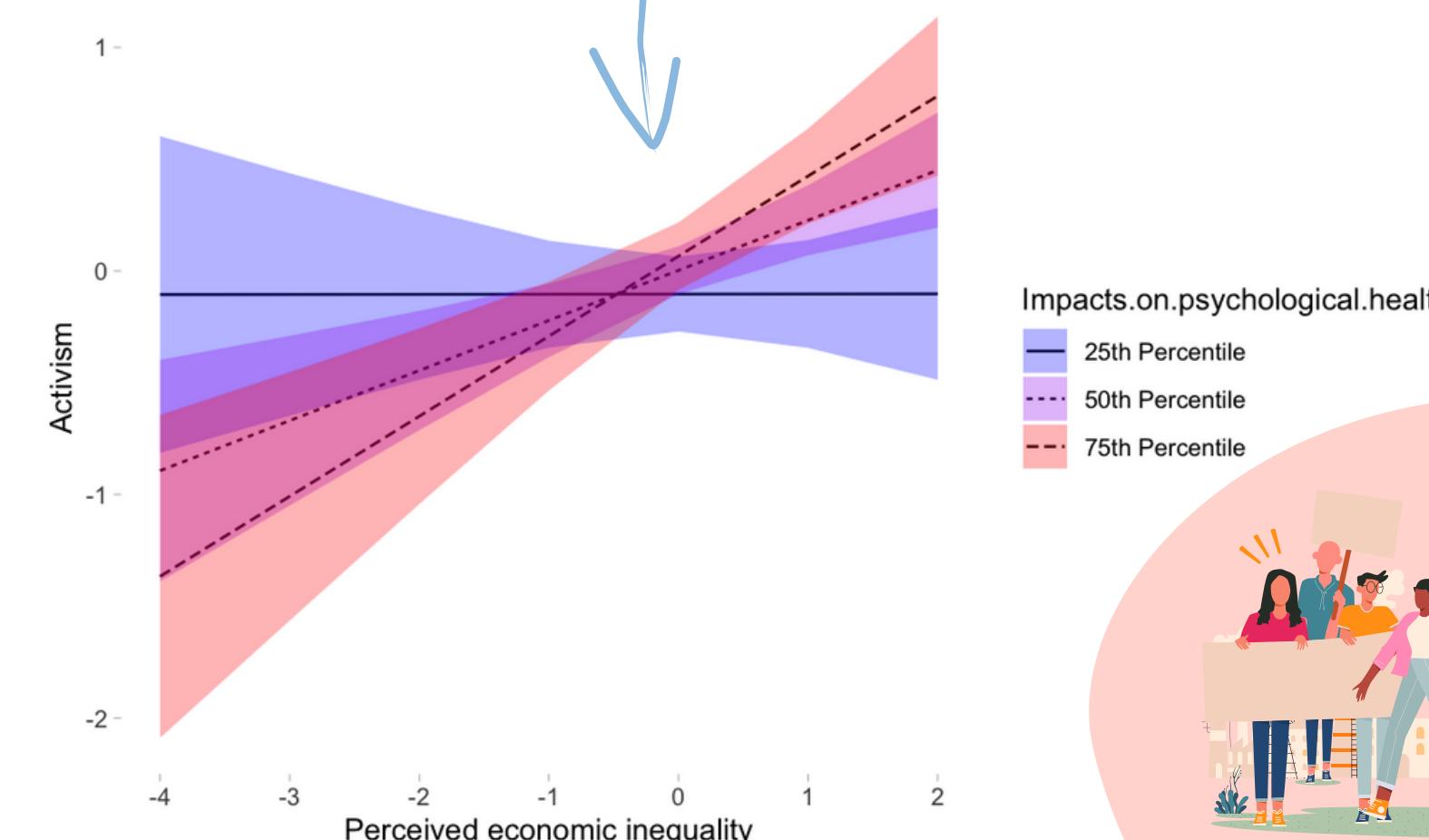
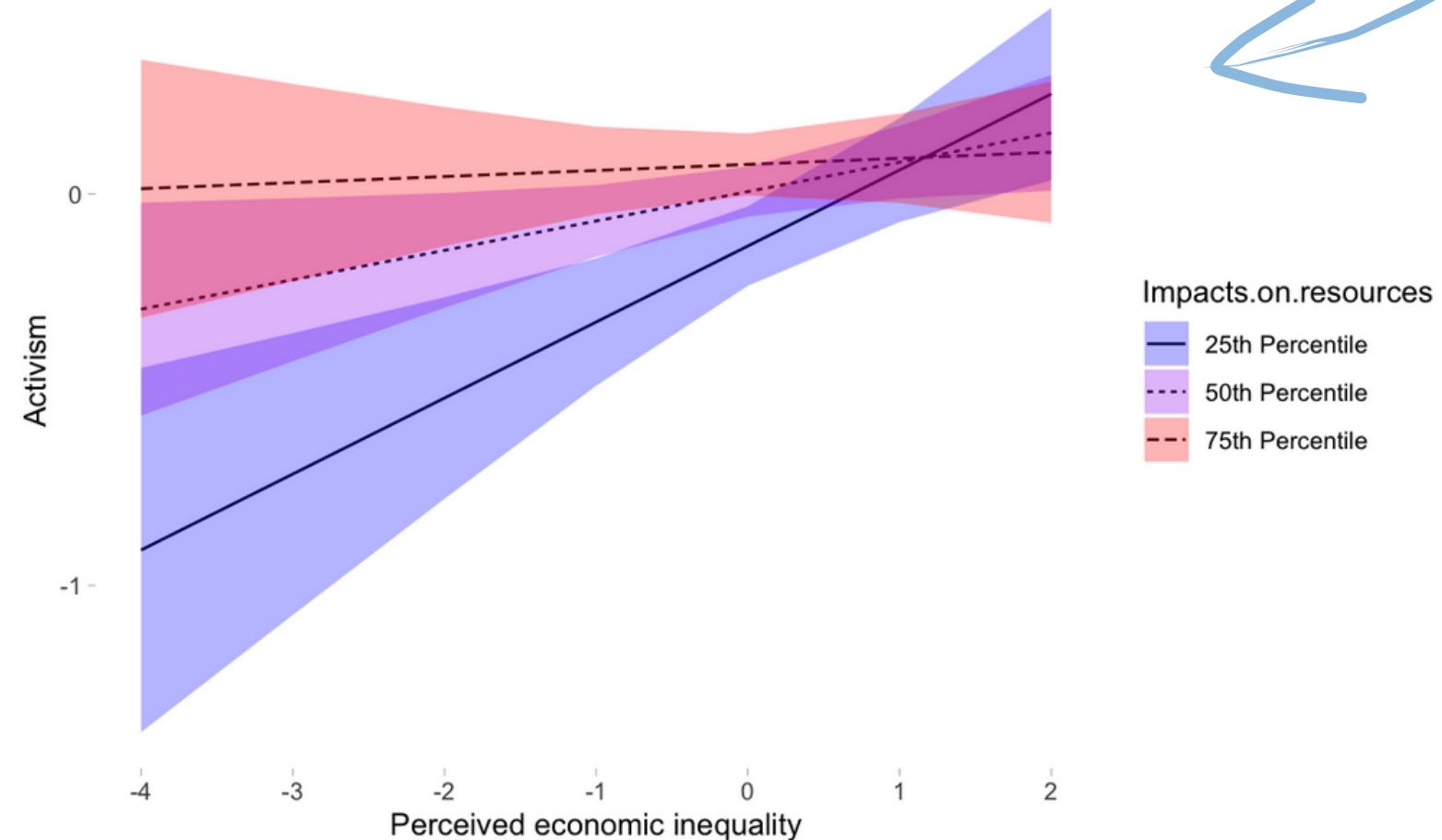
ACTIVISM

Lower Class
(n = 296)

Middle Class
(n = 866)

Upper Class
(n = 284)

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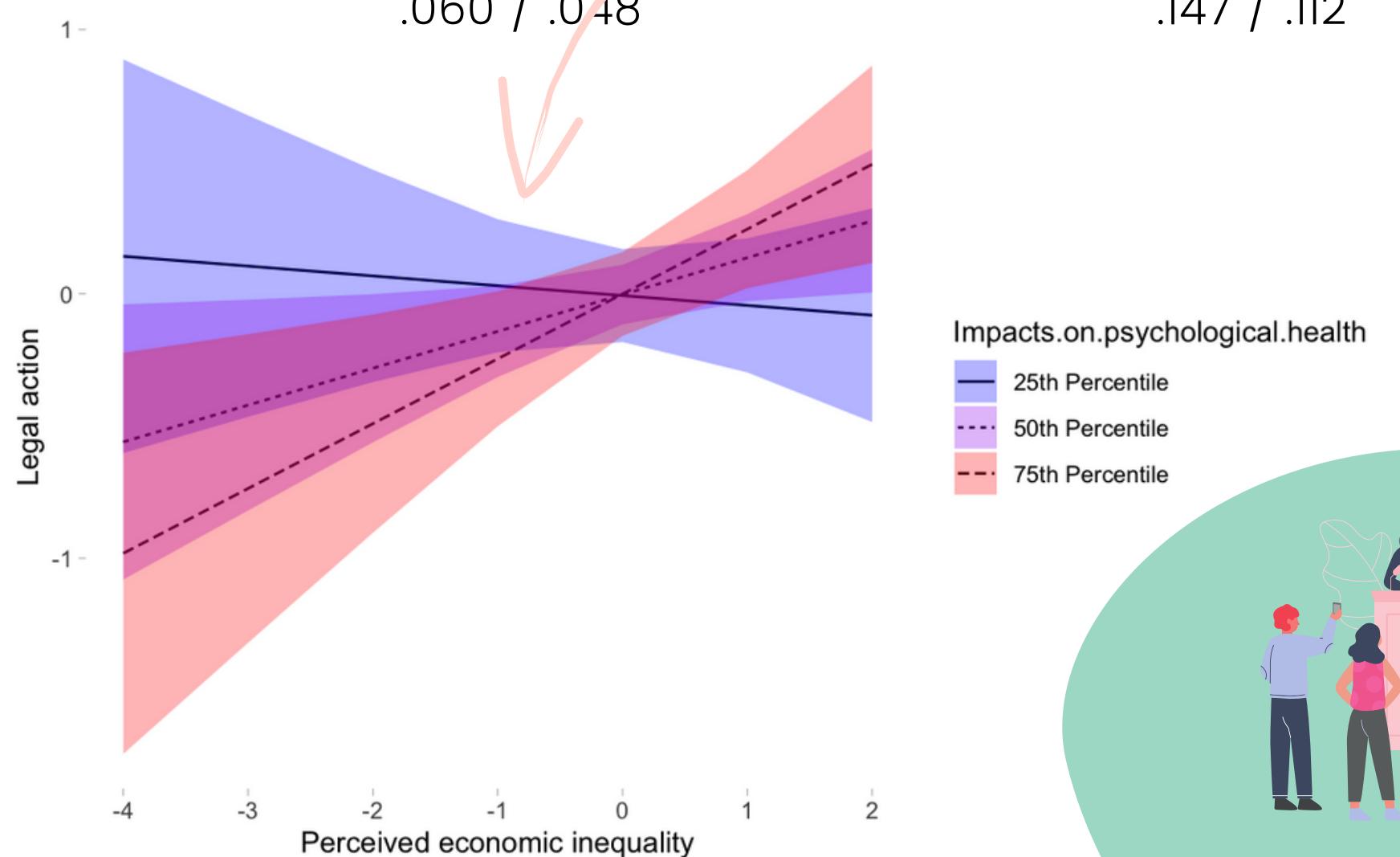
LEGAL ACTION

| | Lower Class (n = 296) | | | Middle Class (n = 866) | | | Upper Class (n = 284) | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|--------------|------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p |
| Perceived inequality (PEI) | 0.10 | -0.02 – 0.22 | .097 | 0.05 | -0.02 – 0.12 | .132 | 0.12 | -0.01 – 0.24 | .062 |
| PEI * Impacts on finance | 0.01 | -0.14 – 0.17 | .872 | 0.05 | -0.04 – 0.13 | .281 | -0.13 | -0.30 – 0.04 | .134 |
| PEI * Impacts on resources | -0.11 | -0.26 – 0.03 | .116 | -0.05 | -0.13 – 0.04 | .264 | 0.09 | -0.06 – 0.24 | .229 |
| PEI * Impacts on psych. health | 0.00 | -0.15 – 0.16 | .961 | -0.05 | -0.13 – 0.03 | .229 | 0.15 | 0.01 – 0.30 | .042 |
| R2 / R2 adjusted | | .058 / .022 | | | .060 / .048 | | | .147 / .112 | |



LEGAL ACTION

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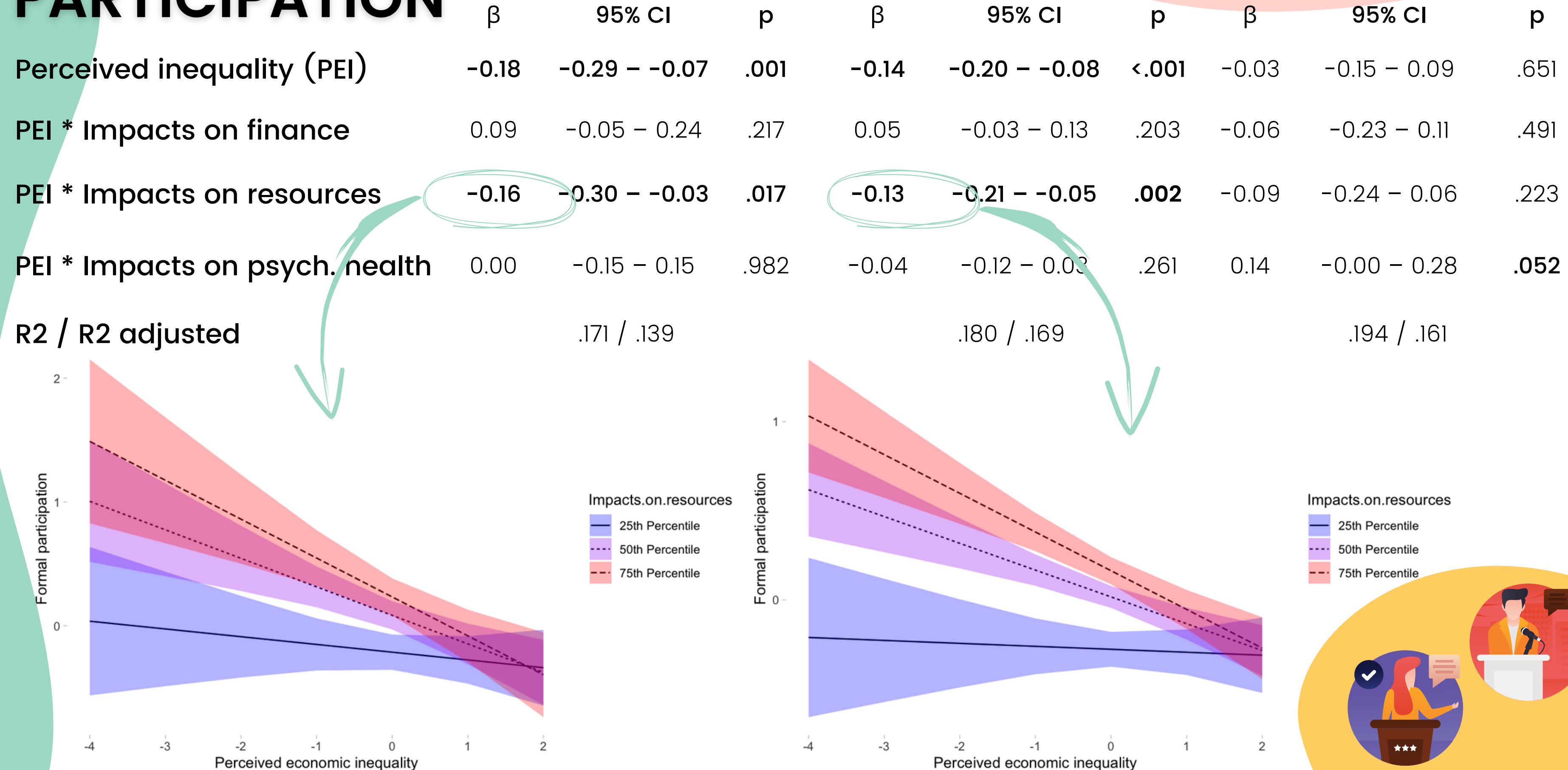


FORMAL PARTICIPATION

| | Lower Class (n = 296) | | | Middle Class (n = 866) | | | Upper Class (n = 284) | | |
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| Perceived inequality (PEI) | -0.18 | -0.29 – -0.07 | .001 | -0.14 | -0.20 – -0.08 | <.001 | -0.03 | -0.15 – 0.09 | .651 |
| PEI * Impacts on finance | 0.09 | -0.05 – 0.24 | .217 | 0.05 | -0.03 – 0.13 | .203 | -0.06 | -0.23 – 0.11 | .491 |
| PEI * Impacts on resources | -0.16 | -0.30 – -0.03 | .017 | -0.13 | -0.21 – -0.05 | .002 | -0.09 | -0.24 – 0.06 | .223 |
| PEI * Impacts on psych. health | 0.00 | -0.15 – 0.15 | .982 | -0.04 | -0.12 – 0.03 | .261 | 0.14 | -0.00 – 0.28 | .052 |
| R2 / R2 adjusted | | .171 / .139 | | | .180 / .169 | | | .194 / .161 | |

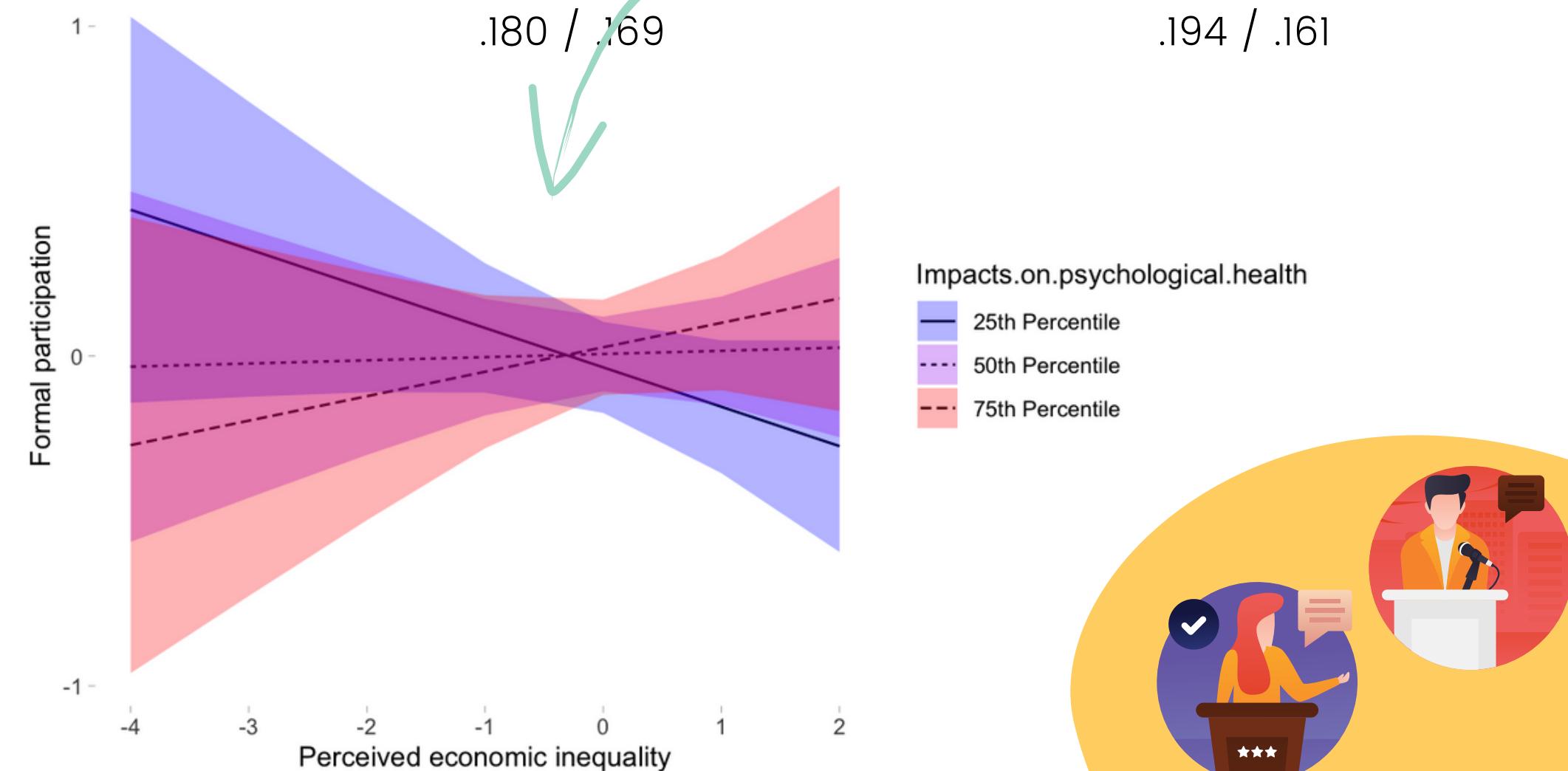


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DISCUSSION: GENERAL FINDINGS



The same set of variables predicts political participation in the upper class more substantially than in the lower and middle classes.

In the case of participation in extra-parliamentary actions, the proportion of variance explained in the upper class is more than twice as high as in the other two social classes.

Perceiving economic inequality leads middle-class and, to a larger extent, upper-class individuals to participate more in extra-parliamentary actions, but not lower-class individuals.

These are also less likely to participate through more formal pathways.

So, despite lower-class individuals being more adversely affected by economic inequality (Keeley, 2015), they hardly react to it even when they believe that inequality is problematic and unfair.



DISCUSSION: WHAT ABOUT COVID-19?



People of different socioeconomic backgrounds are influenced by different impacts of COVID-19 in the relationship between perceived inequality and individual political participation.

These effects take a different direction according to socioeconomic status.

LOWER CLASS

In general, a greater impact of COVID-19 at the personal level does not affect the relationship between perceived inequality and political action in the lower class.

MIDDLE CLASS

Middle-class individuals most affected by COVID-19 on resource procurement are less likely to take political action in response to higher levels of inequality.

UPPER CLASS

Upper-class individuals are likely to take political action in response to perceived inequality, especially when they feel that they have been negatively affected by COVID-19 at the psychological level.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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MEAN DIFFERENCES ACROSS SOCIAL CLASSES

| Variable | Lower class | Middle class | Upper class | Test | η^2 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Perceived inequality | 3.92 (0.73) | 3.99 (0.68) | 3.87 (0.75) | $F(2,1443) = 3.61^*$ | 0.005 |
| Impact on finance | 3.23 (1.05) | 2.82 (1.14) | 2.50 (1.19) | $F(2,1443) = 31.93^{***}$ | 0.04 |
| Impact on resources | 2.70 (0.97) | 2.42 (0.95) | 2.20 (1.00) | $F(2,1443) = 19.91^{***}$ | 0.03 |
| Impact on psych. health | 2.86 (1.08) | 2.71 (1.09) | 2.60 (1.09) | $F(2,1443) = 4.34^*$ | 0.006 |
| Activism | 2.19 (0.93) | 2.32 (0.90) | 2.40 (0.89) | $F(2,1443) = 3.87^*$ | 0.005 |
| Formal participation | 1.70 (0.84) | 1.73 (0.86) | 1.90 (0.94) | $F(2,1443) = 4.80^{**}$ | 0.007 |
| Legal actions | 2.56 (1.14) | 2.62 (1.06) | 2.95 (1.08) | $F(2,1443) = 12.27^{***}$ | 0.020 |
| Political orientation | 4.98 (1.60) | 4.95 (1.69) | 4.81 (1.81) | $F(2,1443) = 0.86$ | 0.001 |

LOWER CLASS CORRELATIONS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|------|
| 1. COVID-19 Impacts on finance | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. COVID-19 Impacts on resources | .46** | | | | | | | | |
| 3. COVID-19 Impacts on psychological health | .46** | .47** | | | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived economic inequality | .10 | .02 | .06 | | | | | | |
| 5. Activism | -.02 | .10 | .05 | .02 | | | | | |
| 6. Formal participation | .02 | .24** | .11* | -.20** | .62** | | | | |
| 7. Legal actions | .08 | .07 | .07 | .11* | .50** | .35** | | | |
| 8. Political orientation | -.02 | .09 | -.03 | -.19** | -.18** | .05 | -.12* | | |
| 9. Age | -.12* | -.15* | -.22** | .07 | -.06 | -.18** | -.05 | -.05 | |
| 10. Gender | .10 | .04 | .02 | .08 | -.13* | -.17** | -.08 | .03 | -.08 |

MIDDLE CLASS CORRELATIONS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|-------|
| 1. COVID-19 Impacts on finance | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. COVID-19 Impacts on resources | | .49** | | | | | | | |
| 3. COVID-19 Impacts on psychological health | .42** | | .48** | | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived economic inequality | .05 | -.04 | | .05 | | | | | |
| 5. Activism | .14** | .17** | .15** | .12** | | | | | |
| 6. Formal participation | .16** | .31** | .17** | -.17** | .57** | | | | |
| 7. Legal actions | .10** | .12** | .11** | .06 | .49** | .43** | | | |
| 8. Political orientation | .07* | .08* | .05 | -.25** | -.18** | .04 | -.10** | | |
| 9. Age | -.03 | -.07* | -.14** | .08* | -.02 | -.15** | -.05 | -.01 | |
| 10. Gender | .01 | -.05 | .04 | .05 | -.13** | -.18** | -.14** | .02 | -.07* |

UPPER CLASS CORRELATIONS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|-----|
| 1. COVID-19 Impacts on finance | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. COVID-19 Impacts on resources | .64** | | | | | | | | |
| 3. COVID-19 Impacts on psychological health | .51** | .49** | | | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived economic inequality | .08 | .01 | .08 | | | | | | |
| 5. Activism | .31** | .27** | .25** | .26** | | | | | |
| 6. Formal participation | .27** | .37** | .24** | -.04 | .60** | | | | |
| 7. Legal actions | .26** | .15* | .15** | .14* | .55** | .42** | | | |
| 8. Political orientation | .03 | .11 | .06 | -.34** | -.18** | .08 | -.06 | | |
| 9. Age | -.07 | -.07 | -.19** | .16** | .01 | -.12* | -.07 | -.05 | |
| 10. Gender | -.03 | -.05 | .01 | -.03 | -.14* | -.18** | -.19** | -.03 | .01 |

ACTIVISM: ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS

| | Lower Class | | | Middle class | | | Upper class | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------|------|
| | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p |
| Impacts on finance | -0.07 | -0.20 – 0.07 | .343 | 0.06 | -0.02 – 0.14 | .137 | 0.16 | 0.02 – 0.31 | .027 |
| Impact on resource | 0.17 | 0.04 – 0.31 | .012 | 0.13 | 0.05 – 0.21 | .001 | 0.13 | -0.01 – 0.27 | .070 |
| Impacts on psych. health | 0.00 | -0.14 – 0.14 | .988 | 0.09 | 0.01 – 0.17 | .022 | 0.09 | -0.04 – 0.22 | .160 |
| Political orientation | -0.17 | -0.29 – -0.06 | .004 | -0.18 | -0.25 – -0.12 | <.001 | -0.17 | -0.28 – -0.05 | .004 |
| Gender [female] | -0.32 | -0.55 – -0.09 | .006 | -0.25 | -0.38 – -0.12 | <.001 | -0.27 | -0.49 – -0.05 | .015 |
| Gender [non-binary] | 1.29 | -0.68 – 3.26 | .200 | -1.08 | -2.95 – 0.79 | .259 | -0.14 | -1.93 – 1.65 | .879 |
| Age | -0.07 | -0.18 – 0.05 | .264 | 0.00 | -0.06 – 0.06 | .998 | 0.01 | -0.10 – 0.12 | .858 |

LEGAL ACTIONS: ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS

| | Lower Class | | | Middle class | | | Upper class | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
| | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p |
| Impacts on finance | 0.03 | -0.11 – 0.17 | .665 | 0.03 | -0.05 – 0.11 | .454 | 0.27 | 0.12 – 0.42 | .001 |
| Impact on resource | 0.07 | -0.07 – 0.21 | .320 | 0.09 | 0.01 – 0.17 | .037 | -0.04 | -0.18 – 0.11 | .643 |
| Impacts on psych. health | 0.00 | -0.14 – 0.14 | .987 | 0.07 | -0.01 – 0.15 | .097 | 0.00 | -0.13 – 0.14 | .958 |
| Political orientation | -0.11 | -0.23 – 0.00 | .059 | -0.10 | -0.16 – -0.03 | .005 | -0.05 | -0.17 – 0.07 | .449 |
| Gender [female] | -0.17 | -0.41 – 0.06 | .144 | -0.28 | -0.42 – -0.15 | <.001 | -0.37 | -0.60 – -0.14 | .002 |
| Gender [non-binary] | -1.88 | -3.89 – 0.14 | .067 | -1.29 | -3.22 – 0.63 | .188 | 0.24 | -1.64 – 2.12 | .798 |
| Age | -0.06 | -0.18 – 0.05 | .284 | -0.04 | -0.11 – 0.03 | .254 | -0.07 | -0.19 – 0.04 | .228 |

FORMAL PARTICIPATION: ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS

| | Lower Class | | | Middle class | | | Upper class | | | p |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|---|
| | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | β | 95% CI | p | |
| Impacts on finance | -0.10 | -0.24 – 0.03 | .123 | 0.02 | -0.06 – 0.09 | .640 | 0.06 | -0.09 – 0.21 | .424 | |
| Impact on resource | 0.29 | 0.16 – 0.42 | <.001 | 0.28 | 0.20 – 0.35 | <.001 | 0.29 | 0.15 – 0.44 | <.001 | |
| Impacts on psych. health | 0.01 | -0.12 – 0.14 | .883 | 0.05 | -0.02 – 0.12 | .177 | 0.04 | -0.09 – 0.18 | .514 | |
| Political orientation | -0.01 | -0.12 – 0.10 | .809 | -0.02 | -0.08 – 0.04 | .551 | 0.02 | -0.10 – 0.13 | .765 | |
| Gender [female] | -0.37 | -0.59 – -0.15 | .001 | -0.33 | -0.45 – -0.21 | <.001 | -0.34 | -0.56 – -0.11 | .003 | |
| Gender [non-binary] | -0.87 | -2.76 – 1.02 | .363 | -1.00 | -2.79 – 0.80 | .277 | -0.91 | -2.74 – 0.92 | .329 | |
| Age | -0.15 | -0.26 – -0.04 | .009 | -0.12 | -0.18 – -0.05 | <.001 | -0.09 | -0.20 – 0.02 | .122 | |