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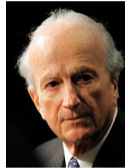Survey
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Why Do People Commit Crimes?
Evidence from Inmates' Survey

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June 19, 2023

Theories on the Origin of Crime

- ▶ Pseudo-biology (Lombroso): There is a criminal nature coming from phenotype/genes…
- ▶ Psychology (Freud): Criminals have a mental illness.
- ▶ Marginality (Durkheim): Criminals are the margin of society.
- ▶ Criminal identity (H. Becker): Criminal behavior is a counter-culture opposing the dominant one.
- ▶ Homo œconomicus (G. Becker): Criminals are people who have incentives to commit crimes.
- ▶ Procedural justice (Tyler): Crime is related to the trust/legitimacy of the state.

Theories on the Origin of Crime - Policy Implications

Those theories have different policy implications.

- ▶ Pseudo-biology/Psychology: Medical treatments.
- ▶ Marginality: Public policy toward homeless and people with weak social ties, helping the poor.
- ▶ Criminal identity: Target gangs, avoid creating prison counter-culture.
- ▶ Homo œconomicus: Increase sentences, reinforce police, reduce poverty.
- ▶ Procedural justice: Improve relations between institutions (police) and at-risk populations.

Understanding if/where/when a theory is true is key for public policy!

Theories on the Origin of Crime - Validation

Those theories have been tested in various contexts...

▶ Pseudo-biology/Psychology (Jacomé, 2020)

▶ Marginality (Corno, 2017; Cohen, 2020)

▶ Counter culture (Cohn & Maréchal, 2015)

▶ Homo œconomicus (Machin et al. 2015; Chalfin & McCrary 2017; Britto et al. 2022)
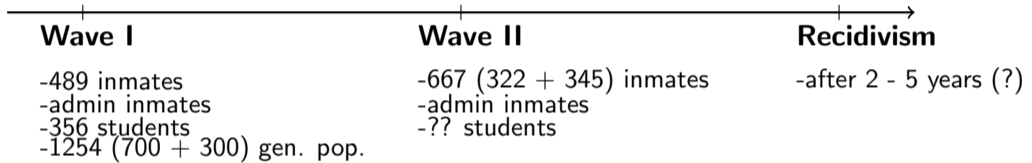
▶ Procedural justice (Nagin & Telep, 2017)

... and all are (at least) partly validated.

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This Project

Aims to measure inmates' preferences and perceptions

▶ to test the explanatory power of (some of) the theories

▶ to test and their predictive power for misbehavior in prison and recidivism

▶ to study the evolution over prison time (spin-off)

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This Project

Wave I	**Wave II**	**Recidivism**
-489 inmates	-667 (322 + 345) inmates	-after 2 - 5 years (?)
-admin inmates	-admin inmates	
-356 students	-?? students	
-1254 (700 + 300) gen. pop.		

▶ Survey inmates twice one year apart.

▶ Ask the same questions to students (also twice) and the general population.

▶ Merge inmates' survey and administrative data.

Research Questions

- ▶ How do inmates' responses correlate with crime and sanctions?
- ▶ How do inmates' responses differ from non-inmates (non-criminals)?
- ▶ How do inmates' responses evolve over prison time?
- ▶ Do (and how) inmates' responses predict (mis)behavior in prison?
- ▶ Do (and how) inmates' responses predict behavior after release?

Inmates

Surveys

▶ Wave 1: Aug-Nov 2021, 489 inmates from 15 Czech prisons

▶ Wave 2: Aug-Nov 2022, 667 (322 matched from wave 1 $+$ 345 new ones)

▶ Only males, relatively long sentences (wave 1)

Administrative data

▶ Crime, sentence length, criminal history

▶ Psychologist's assessment: attitude towards formal and informal norms (acceptance of illegal behavior), relationship to work, frequency of conflicts with authorities, membership in a defective group

▶ (Mis)behavior in prison between waves 1 and 2 and recidivism (reincarceration)

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Control Groups

Students

▶ Administered by us, group sessions (around 20 persons) and online.

▶ Wave 1: winter 2021-2022, 356 individuals.

▶ Wave 2: winter 2022-2023, the same students (to be done)

General population

▶ Administered by private firms.

▶ Summer 2022, 1,254 individuals (ca. 300 representative of our inmates' sample and ca. 700 of male population)

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Homo œconomicus

Hypothesis:

▶ Inmates have better knowledge of the parameters of criminal justice policies than non-inmates.

▶ It is particularly true for crimes they have been convicted for.

▶ When wrong, inmates tend to underestimate risks.

Questions : ▸ Arrest   ▸ Sanctions

▶ Short vignettes followed by questions about:
  ○ Probability of being arrested
  ○ Probability of being sent to jail conditional on being arrested
  ○ Average length of incarceration if sent to prison

▶ Answers compared to police and court statistics and incentivized.

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Counter Culture (Criminal Identity)

Hypothesis:

▶ Inmates trust other inmates more than they trust non-inmates (strong hypothesis)

▶ Inmates trust other inmates more than non-inmates trust inmates (weak hypothesis)

Trust games/dictator games:

▶ Each player played as the sender twice.

▶ Receiver is an inmate or a non-inmate (random order).

▶ Up to 7 postage stamps or currency units can be sent.

▶ Amount is tripled.

Procedural Justice

Hypothesis:

▶ Inmates do not trust the institutions.

▶ It is particularly the case when they think they haven't been treated fairly.

Questions (scale 1(no)-11(yes)):

▶ Generally, would you say that the *healthcare system/the judicial system* treats all people equally?

▶ Generally, would you say that you can trust the information from *health/judicial* authorities *(doctors, nurses)/(judges, prosecutors)*?

▶ Would you say that the law enforcement and the actors of the judicial system were fair in the handling of your specific case?

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Behavioral Explanations

Hypothesis:

- ▶ Inmates are less risk averse.
- ▶ Inmates are less patient.
- ▶ Inmates have higher negative reciprocity.
- ▶ Inmates are less optimistic about their future.
- ▶ Inmates are less cognitively capable.

Behavioral Explanations

Questions (scale 1(no)-11(yes)):

▶ *Patience*: Would you say that, relative to other people, you are willing to sacrifice something now to get greater benefits in the future?

▶ *Negative reciprocity*: To what extent are you willing to punish someone who treated you unfairly, even if it will have repercussions for you?

▶ *Risk preferences*: To what extent are you willing or not willing to risk?

▶ *Optimism*:
  - General: likelihood to find an apartment, get a job, get a ride, make a non-criminal friend for a person with no criminal record/released from prison ▸ More
  - Personal: likelihood to find a flat, get a job in 1 year (after release if relevant) ▸ More .

▶ *Cognitive capacity*: 5 cognitive reflection test questions

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Perception of Parameters of CJS (Homo œconomicus)

Criminal Identity

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Procedural Justice

o Inmates, Wave1	o Inmates, Wave 2
△ General pop, Wave 1	

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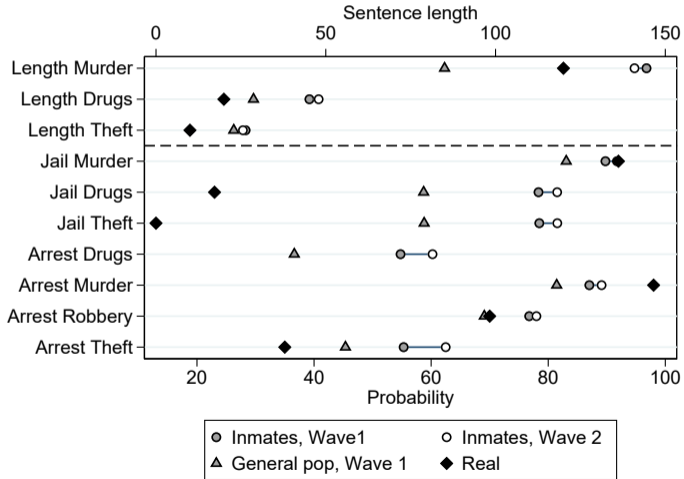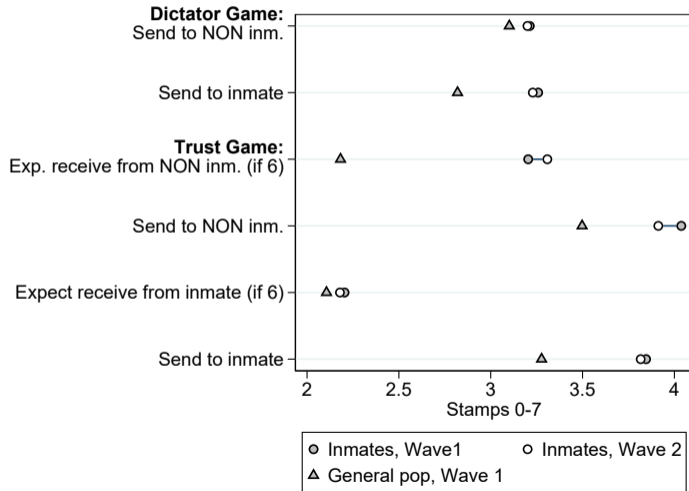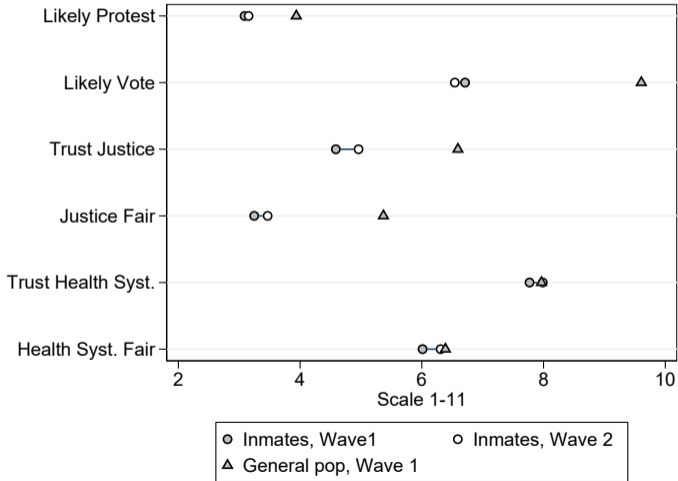
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Next Steps

- ▶ Finish wave 2 (student)
- ▶ Data analysis
- ▶ Replication and extension in India should start soon.
  - Larger sample size in Firozabad (Uttar Pradesh, India)
  - Add a question about social networks.
  - Add a question about an expected trial outcome to document the effect surprisingly harsh/lenient sentence.
  - Follow criminals after their release.

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Thank you for your attention!

Appendix

Homo œconomicus: probability of being arrested

1. How many people, out of every 100 who commit a motor vehicle theft, are, on average, arrested?

2. How many people, out of every 100 who commit an armed robbery, are, on average, arrested?

3. How many people, out of every 100 who commit a murder, are, on average, arrested?

4. How many people, out of every 100 who distribute drugs, are, on average, arrested? (Question without reward)

▸ Back

Homo œconomicus: sanctions

Imagine 100 people who were already convicted a few times before (3-5) and are now found guilty of *[a theft during which a not negligible damage was caused on a property belonging to someone else - that means it was the least serious form of theft]*.

1. How many, out of these 100 people, are, on average, sentenced to jail?
2. How long will their sentence be, on average? (in months in prison)

Other crimes:

▶ *[manufacturing and possessing narcotics in small amounts - the least serious form of narcotics manufacturing considered to be a criminal offense]*

▶ *[murder]*

Behavioral explanations: optimism (general)

▶ Imagine the following situations and indicate how likely do you think it is that they will happen to the two following types of men. These two men are very similar (age, looks, region), but man no. 1 was recently released from prison while man no.2 has no criminal record. The people who deal with them know about their past, but do not know anything else about the men.

① Get an apartment for rent
② Befriend a person with no criminal record
③ Get a new job
④ Someone will offer to give them a ride had they need it

▶ Imagine that, in addition to the two men above, people will also deal with a third man, who is currently incarcerated. How do you think people will generally treat these three men?

▸ Back

Behavioral explanations: optimism (individual)

How likely do you think it is that you will...

1. ...have a stable job in the first year after your release from prison?
2. ...have quality and stable accommodation in the first year after your release from prison?
3. ...vote in the first five years after your release from prison?
4. ...participate in an anti-government protest in the first five years after your release from prison?
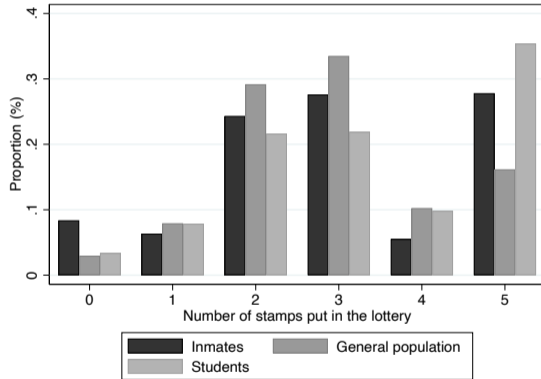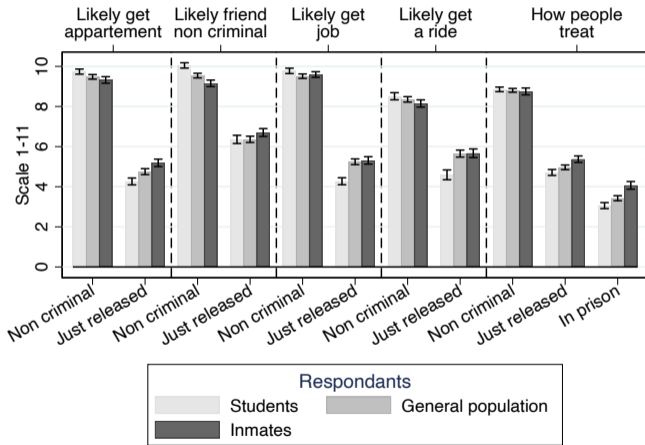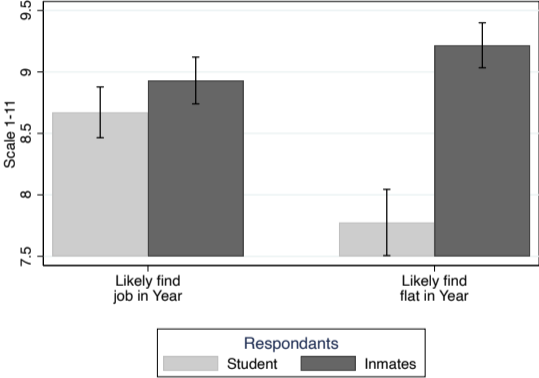
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Behavioral explanations: results(II)
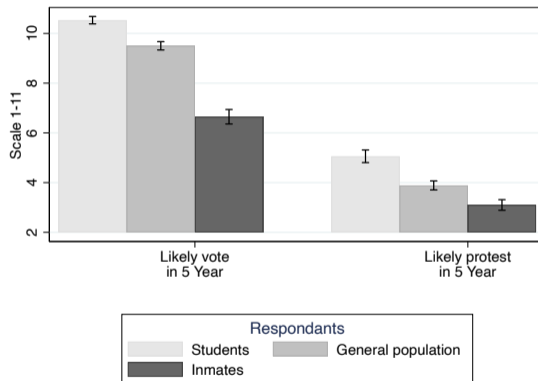
Behavioral explanations
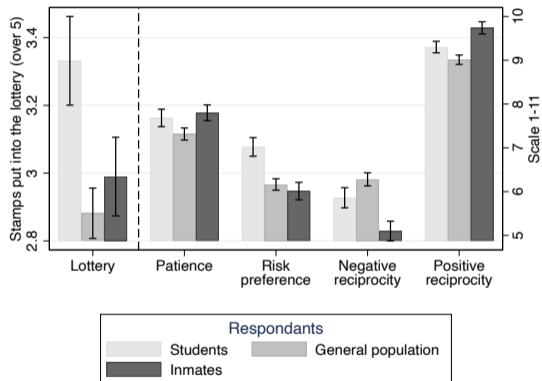
Lottery

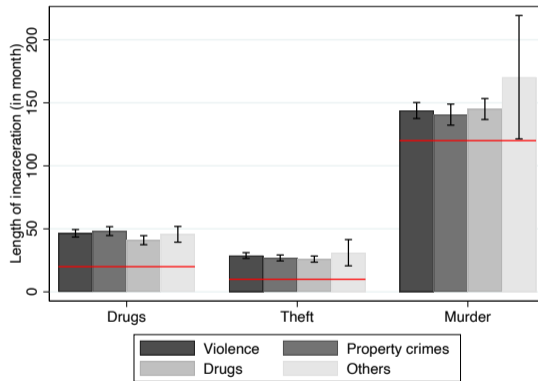# Optimism (I)

Optimism (II)

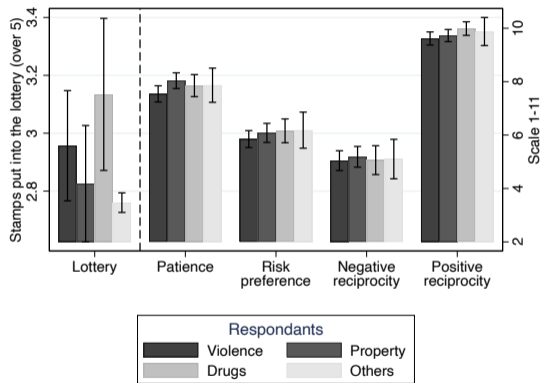# Difference by crime: risk perception
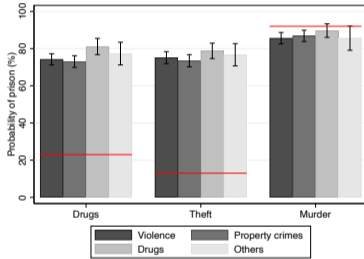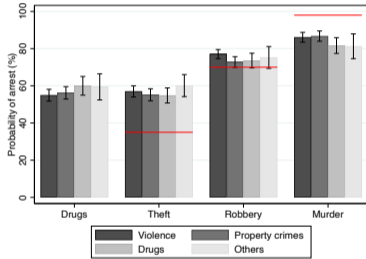
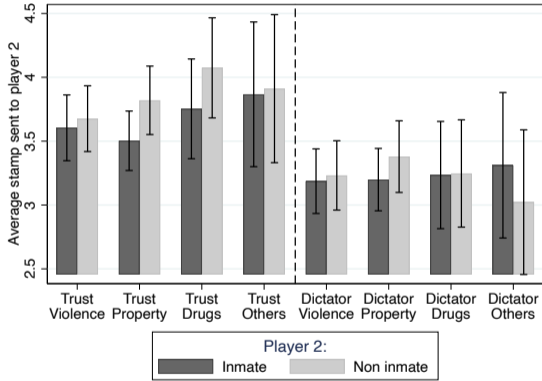

Jail if arrested

Arrest

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Difference by crime: risk perception

Difference by crime: behavioural

Difference by crime: games

Difference by crime: trust in institutions