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A Field Experiment on the Effect of Social Status on Prosocial Behaviour

Funding: DFG project number: DI292/6-1 Nr. 465644158

Social Norms Conference 2024

Ascona, Monte Verità, July 07-10, 2024

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MOTIVATION

- Follow-up experiment to last year's study in Leipzig
 - Lost-Wallet experiment at tram stops
 - Observed interactions and return attempts
 - Experiment replicated in Leipzig in 2023 and in Zurich in 2019/20
 - No significant effects based on origin or status
- Measuring status of finder
 - Cars as indicator of social status
 - Lost-Wallet experiment with cars





THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS





- Controversy over whether status affects prosocial behavior
- Key Studies with contrasting results:
 - Piff et al. (2010) Lower status is linked to more prosocial behavior
 - Andreoni et al. (2021) Higher status does not predict decreased prosocial behavior

ADVANTAGES

- Non obtrusive
- Randomized -> causal statements possible
- Real behaviour and not self-reported behaviour
- Descriptive comparison with other cities such as Zurich
- Replications of this field experiment in other cities would provide information about honesty in different regions
- High stake of money: 50€ in each wallet

DESIGN

- Same material as in the previous one
- Same wallets
- Only two personas, both German but status high and status low
 - Focus on German, as the experiment in 2023 with 3 different origins (German, Jewish, Arabic) could not find any effect based on origin
- Paul Schneider was previously selected as most fitting German name (Pretest as Online Survey via prolific)
- Status of the supposed "loser" of the wallet
- Status of the finder (indicator "car")
- 2 x 2 Design

Status high (wallet) 	Status low (car) 
Status low (wallet) 	Status high (car) 

CARS AS STATUS INDICATOR

- Operationalizing based on methods by Diekmann et al. (1996), Doob & Gross (1968) and Jann et al. (1995)
- Categories:
 - Low-status cars: Lower-class vehicle segment
 - High-status cars: Luxury class and upper mid-range vehicles
- Data Source:
German Federal Motor Transport Authority (Bundeskraftfahrtamt)

LOWER CLASS VEHICLES VS.

LUXURY CLASS



BUSINESS CARDS PAUL SCHNEIDER

HIGH STATUS (MANAGING DIRECTOR)

LOW STATUS (TAILOR)



CONTENTS OF THE WALLETS



SAMPLING

- Random Route method
 - Based on walking instructions by Noelle (1963) and Noelle-Neumann & Petersen (2005)
 - starting from 4 different neighbourhoods
- 4 trials with 20 runs “drops” each + 3 pretests
- Total n = 83 runs

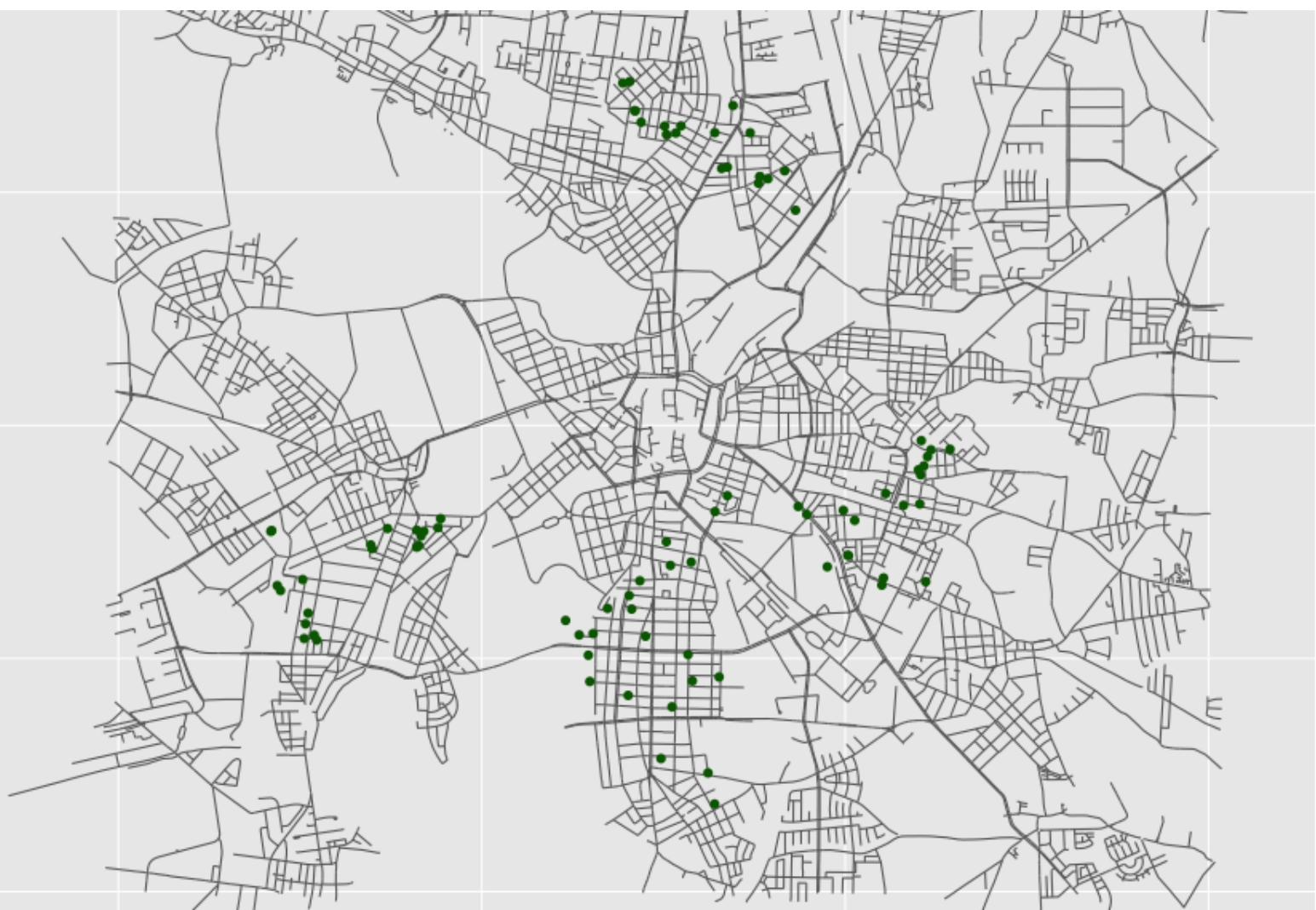
Latitude

51.36°N

51.34°N

51.32°N

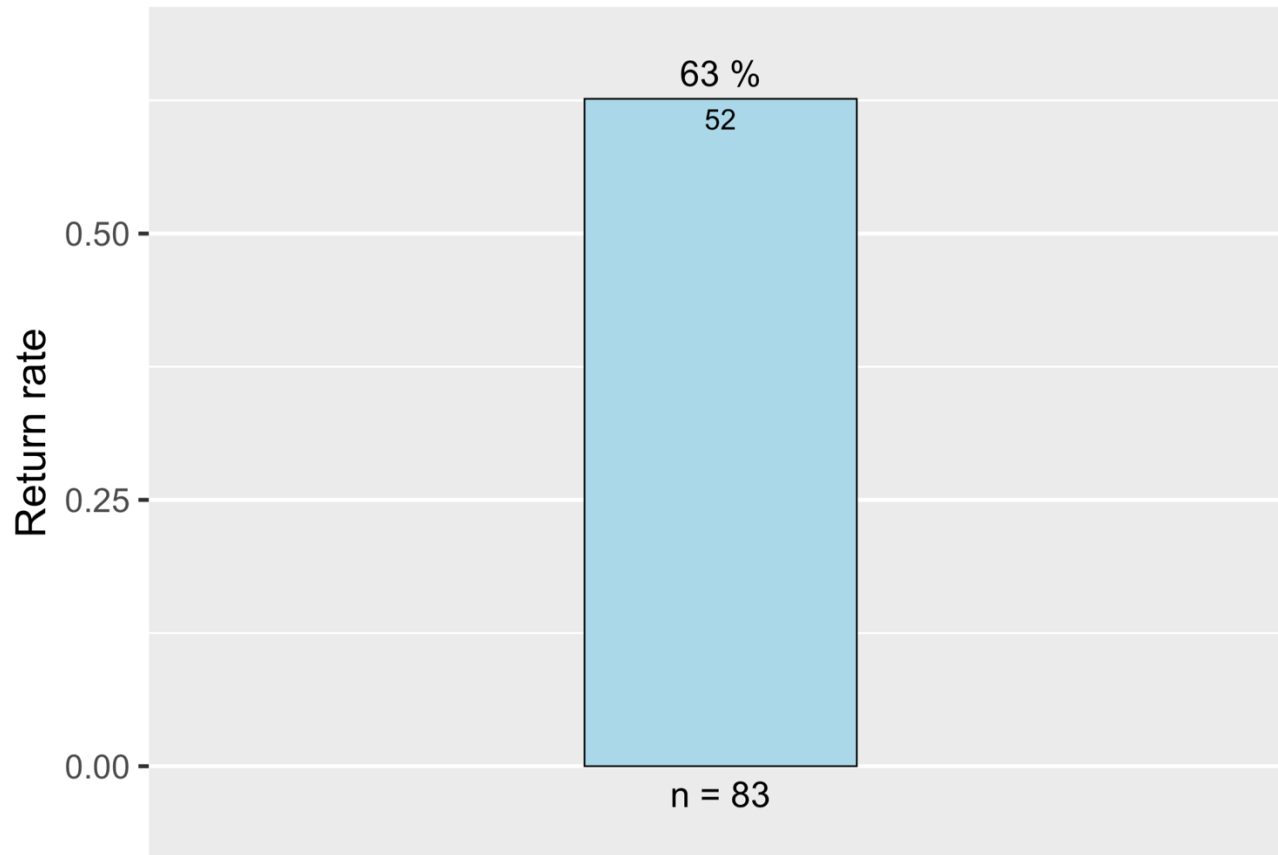
51.30°N



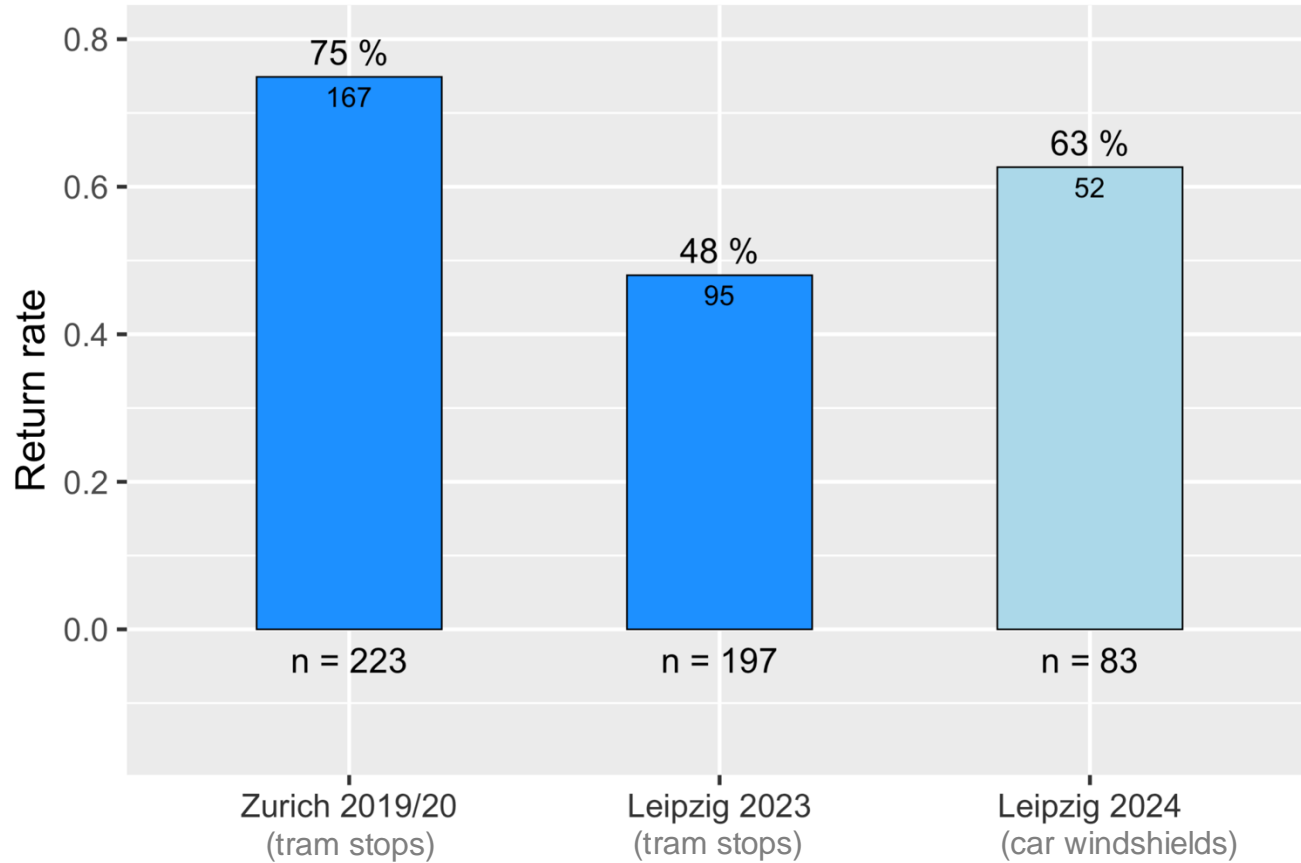


RESULTS

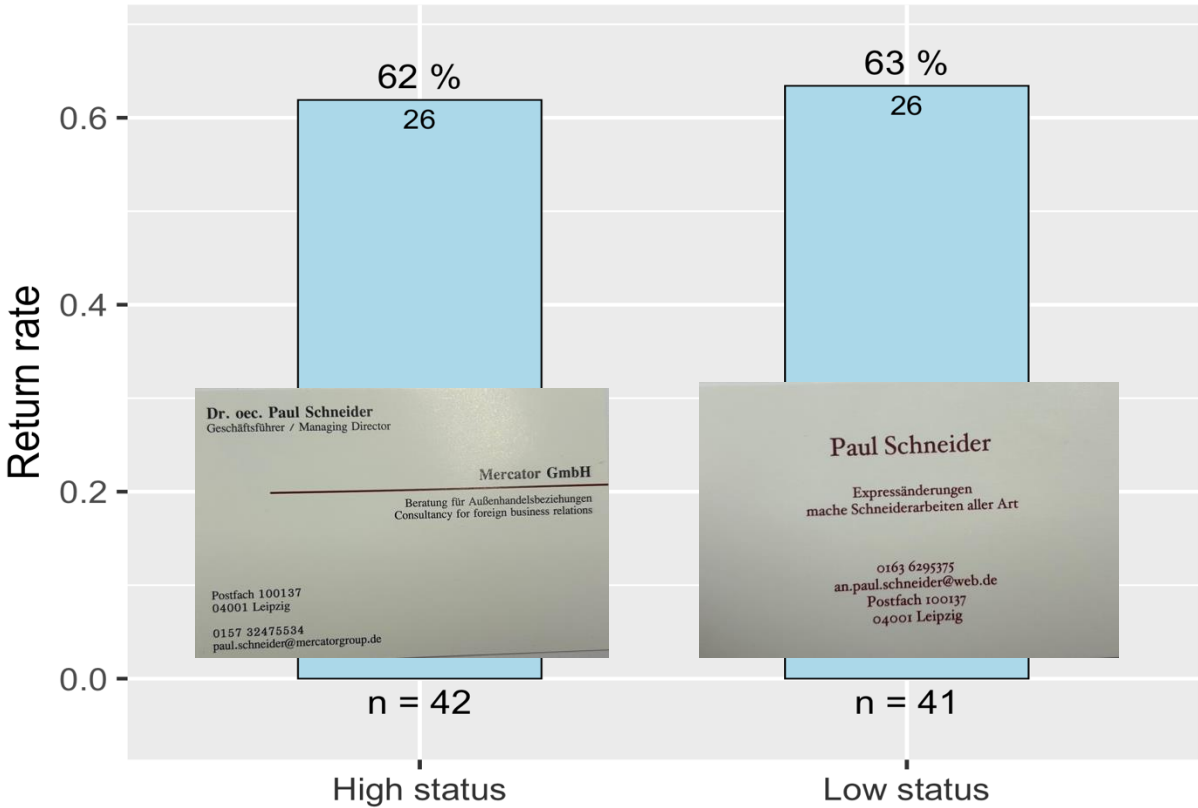
Overall return rate with complete wallets



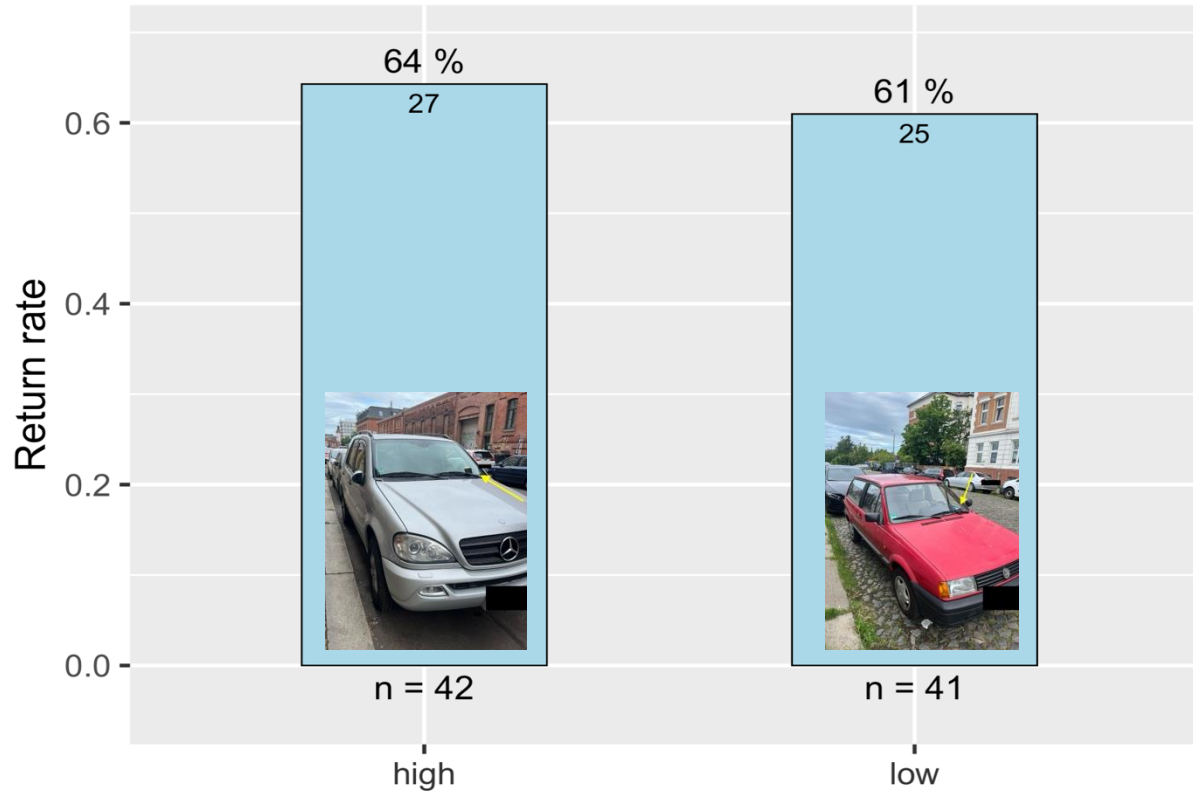
Overall return rate by city



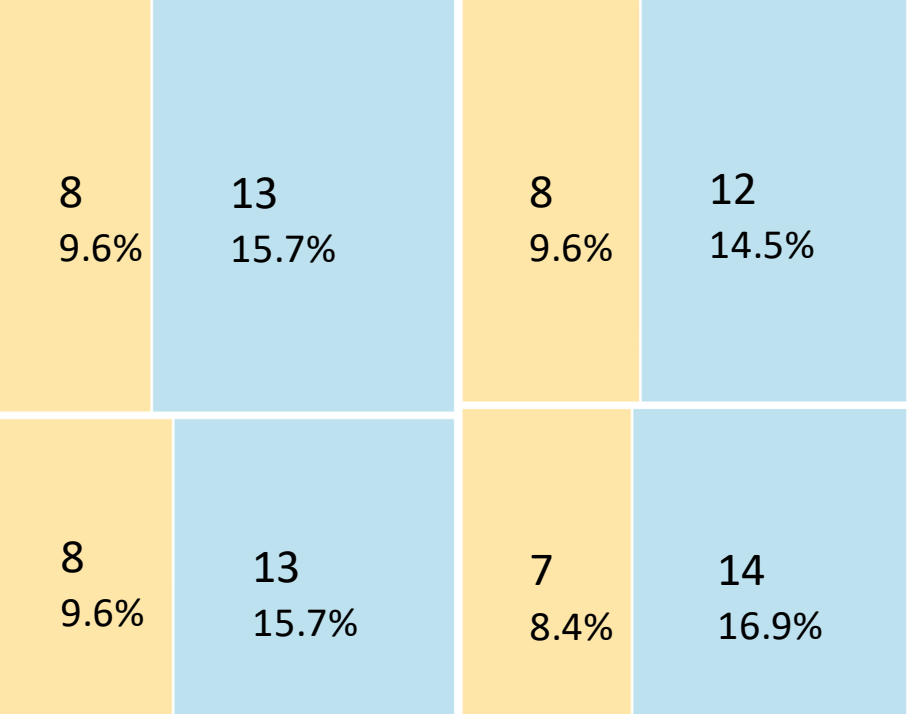
Return rate by status



Return rate by status car



Status of finder



Wallet returned?
■ Not returned
■ Returned

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Status of "loser"

DISCUSSION

- No evidence found that social status has an effect on prosocial behaviour
 - In contrast to Piff et al. (2010)
- Status does not seem to make a difference, neither in public transport nor in private cars
- Interesting and instructive to see the results of replicated experiments in different cities and to observe possible regional differences



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THANK YOU!

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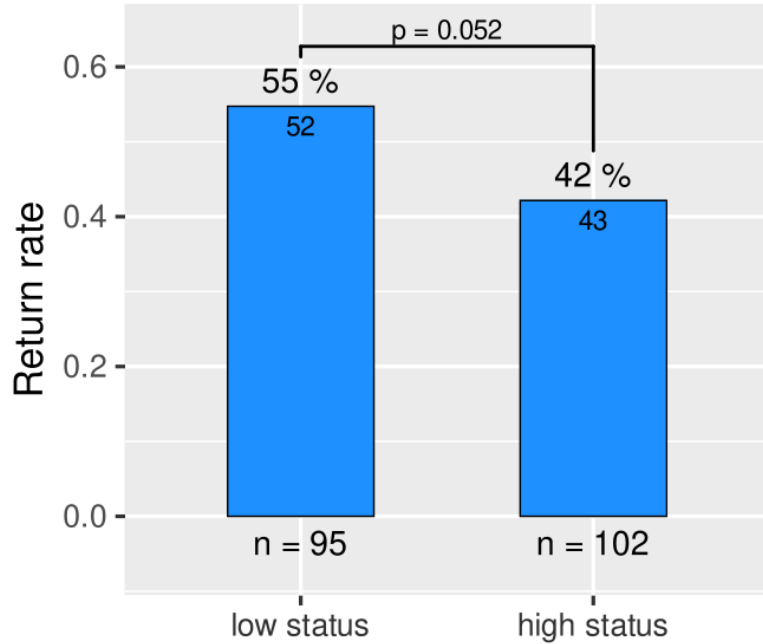
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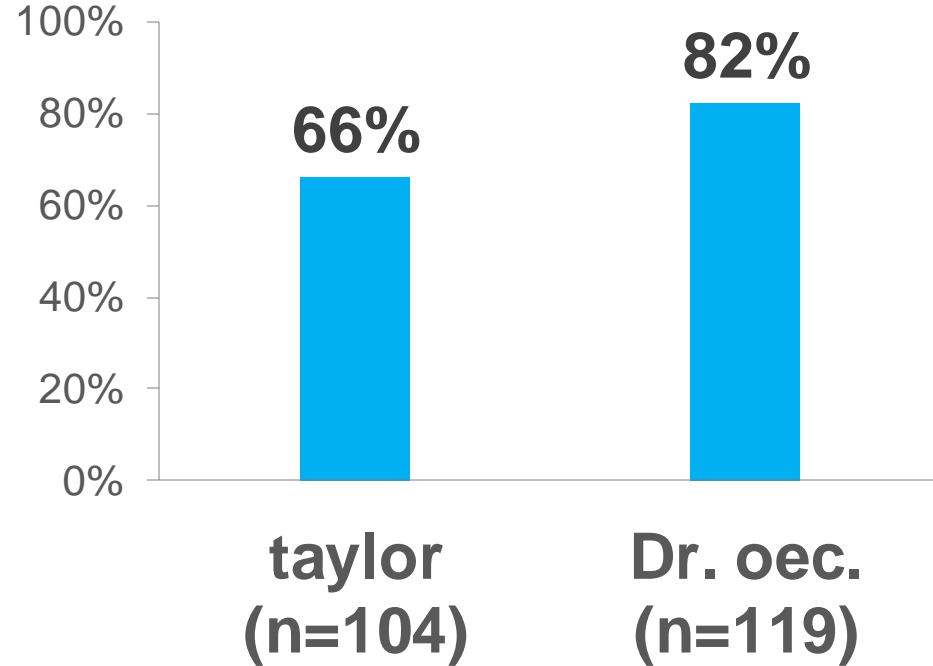
BACKUP SLIDES

Return rate by status



Leipzig: „Giving to the poor!“

data: complete sample (p=0.006)



Zurich: „Giving to the rich“