

Characteristics that Influence Attitudes toward Retribution

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ABSTRACT Using a national sampling frame with a sample of over 3,000 responses (n=3,265), this study explored individual characteristics that influence attitudes toward retribution. Specifically, this study was interested in exploring who is more likely to support the punishment philosophy of retribution. Eleven independent variables were examined and only two indicate a retributive attitude. Males were more likely than females and gun owners were more likely than non-gun owners to indicate support for retribution..

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INTRODUCTION

Punishment is an integral part of our society. Most people believe the government is justified in punishing those who violate the law (Bronstein, 2009). As such, the practice of punishment is a constant reflection of a society's attempts at balancing the interests of individual offenders, as expressed in terms of equity, and the needs of society, expressed in terms of utility (Travis, 2015). Traditionally, four philosophies for punishment are acknowledged for responses to law violations in our society. These four philosophies include rehabilitation, deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution.

The philosophy of rehabilitation seeks to reduce or prevent crime by eliminating the need or desire to commit crime; this philosophy assumes that crime is due to a variety of psychological, biological, or sociological factors. Deterrence posits that human beings are rational creatures and will choose to avoid negative consequences associated with violations of the law. Although, punishment avoidance – the capacity to avoid consequences for wrongdoing – likely does more to influence crime than punishment does to deter. Incapacitation seeks to decrease crime by reducing an offender's capacity to commit new crimes, typically through incarceration. Retribution proposes those who break the law (or commit any wrong) deserve to be punished because of their actions – offenders should receive their “just deserts.”

Retribution is the motivation for harsh punishment (Carlsmith, Darley & Robinson, 2002) and calls for sanctions that restore justice or act as an “expression of vindictiveness” (Gerber & Jackson, 2013, p. 62). Retribution is considered a “backward looking” philosophy because it is the only one of the four that is not concerned with future crime or criminality (Travis III, 2015, p. 174). Rather, this punishment philosophy sees punishment of wrongdoers not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. Retribution argues that we punish offenders because it is our duty. Offenders have harmed society, they must be harmed in return, and the punishment should be proportional to the crime (or wrong) committed (Banks, 2008; Carlsmith, 2006; Finkenauer, 1988). Retributivists see punishment as necessary and determined by the seriousness of the offense committed (Bronstein, 2009; Vidmar, 2000), and justified by the wrong act committed by the offender (Bronstein, 2009; Miller, 2009). Hogan and Emler (1981) believe “the process of retribution is older, more primitive, and socially more significant” than other punishment motivations (p. 13).

Examples of retributive policies include mandatory minimum sentences (Stith & Cabranes, 1998); Truth in Sentencing laws, a policy whose purpose was to increase prison populations (Sabol, Rosich, Mallik-Kane, Kirk, & Dubin 2002); Three Strikes laws; and the death penalty. Mandatory minimum sentences limit the discretion of judges. Specifically, mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines were put in place to prevent a judge from being too lenient in sentencing (Stith & Cabranes, 1998),

thereby ensuring that the punishment was proportionate to the crime committed; a tenet of retribution. While judges have always used their discretion and professional judgement when deciding how long an offender's sentence should be, they traditionally have only been constrained by maximum sentencing guidelines (Bernard, Hass, Siler & Weatherby, 2017). In other words, judges were only limited in deciding how long a sentence could be; therefore, they were not perceived as being too harsh.

Truth in Sentencing laws require repeat offenders to serve at least 85% of their sentences. The federal government promoted these laws and provided grant funding to states where they were implemented (Bernard et al., 2017). In 1999 there were 29 states that adopted Truth in Sentencing laws and studies suggested this led to increased prison populations in each of these states (Sabol et al., 2002). Three Strikes laws were introduced in the 1990s as a response to repeat offenders; yet, they have received an increasing amount of controversy since their implementation (Bernard et al., 2017). Though these laws vary in application from state to state and between states and the federal government, they generally require that an offender who is convicted of a third serious crime (usually a felony) is sentenced to a substantial period of time, possibly life in prison without parole. While these laws were popular when first introduced in the mid-1990s (see Schultz, 2000), studies demonstrated that they have been used to imprison non-violent drug offenders (Sabol et al.; Schultz, 2000). Retribution is often cited as a supportive philosophy for the death penalty. Typically, supporters recite the "eye for an eye" edict as justification for its use. This justification was used in many jurisdictions to lower the age for which juveniles can be transferred to adult court, as it is believed by many that certain crimes should receive proportional consequences, regardless of age or development.

Mackie (1982) identifies a "paradox of retribution," which he describes as a contradiction within our capacity for moral reasoning (p. 3). The paradox refers to the notion that a retributive approach to punishment does not reconcile with a reasonable or practical system of moral thought; yet, it is impossible to eliminate retributive thoughts from our moral thought process. From this perspective, retribution is considered an emotional reflex. More importantly, many retributive policies have failed to have a significant impact on crime, yet the familiar view of "getting tough on crime" remains popular with enough of the masses. As such, individual characteristics could provide insight into different attitudes about retribution and those who are likely to support retributive policies. As Carlsmith (2006) said, it is important to study "the subtle factors that drive punishment" (p. 439) in addition

to the justifications, to give a more complete picture of punishment. Public attitudes about crime and criminals "shape the tone and tenor of crime control policy" (Gerber & Jackson, 2013, p. 61) and retribution seems to be the main reason people favor punitive policies, regardless of their effectiveness.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Current literature indicates that retribution is the predominant punishment philosophy of today and that we currently live in a punitive era (Bernard, et al., 2017) that is just as prevalent as ever (Patten, 2016). Politicians use the language of getting tough on crime to build more prisons, remove judges from the bench who they perceive to be lenient in sentencing, and pass laws that keep criminals locked up for longer periods of time (Schultz 2000; Travis & Western, 2014). For many Americans, the underlying viewpoint is that offenders should receive their just deserts, or "get what they deserve." As such, various factors may influence whether or not people support retributive policies.

Attitudes toward Retribution

Bernard, Hass, Siler, and Weatherby (2017) conducted a mixed methods study to examine attitudes toward retribution and rehabilitation for drug offenders. Nine interviews were conducted with reformed drug addicts, substance abuse counselors, two judges, and two first responders (a police officer and a firefighter). The interviews focused primarily on the war on drugs and whether rehabilitation (inpatient or outpatient treatment) or retribution (prison) is more effective in helping people with substance abuse problems. The interviewees supported rehabilitation across the board with one participant calling the war on drugs "a definite failure" (p. 11).

In order to compare professionals with the general public, Bernard et al. (2017) conducted two additional surveys with 94 and 67 participants¹. The surveys were "more or less identical" (one question was added to the second survey) with the second survey sent to a younger, more general audience. The surveys were sent to three universities in the United States. Survey results indicated a majority (89.25%) of participants preferred rehabilitation to retribution. Just over 90 percent (90.42%) of those surveyed said the current criminal justice system is not too soft on non-violent drug offenders, and about the same percentage (89.36%) did not think punishment for these offenders should be harsher. The study used a small sample size and the results were limited to "younger educated, and potentially more socially liberal college students"

¹ No demographic information on survey participants is presented in the study.

(p. 11). While the study found support for rehabilitation over retribution, the study focused on one offense type only (non-violent drug offenders), presented no arguments for why participants responded this way.

Carlsmith (2006) conducted a series of studies to determine if people are more inclined to use retribution, deterrence, or incapacitation as a justification for punishing wrongdoing. Between three studies, 212 undergraduate students at Princeton completed surveys in which they “imagined they were sentencing a convicted criminal” (p. 441). Participants read a scenario about the crime committed and were asked to determine which facts about the case would be most important in deciding how to sentence the offender. Across all three studies, retribution information was perceived as the most relevant for sentencing decisions. Carlsmith concluded that “when it comes to sentencing...they care most about retribution” (p. 447). This study was limited in that it used a small sample size at one location and, other than gender², no demographic information about research participants was collected.

Keller, Oswald, and Stucki (2010) replicated Carlsmith’s (2006) study to determine punishment motives. Using a total sample of 187 participants from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, Keller and colleagues conducted three studies about punishment preferences among four choices: retribution, incapacitation, general prevention (where a person is punished to crimes by others in society), and special prevention (where a person is punished to prevent them, specifically, from committing an illegal act again). Research participants read a scenario about a crime that had been committed and their task was to assign a sentence to a guilty offender. Participants were asked to determine what kind of information was most relevant for determining the proper punishment, and a rank preference score was computed to assess the importance of their sentencing motivations. Keller et al. (2010) found that, across all three studies, the preference score for retribution was higher than for other punishment motivations. They concluded that people punish for a desire to have “the punishment fit the crime” (p. 112). While Keller and colleagues extended Carlsmith’s (2006) research by using an international sample and by adding different choices for punishment motivations, the study was limited by a small sample size and, except for gender³, did not examine the effects of individual factors that might impact peoples’ retributive attitudes.

2 Gender had no effect on sentencing justification.

3 Gender had no effect on sentencing justification.

Age and Retribution

There is little research about age and retribution, specifically. Some research suggests that younger people are generally more punitive in their punishment responses when compared to adults. However, recent trends related to attitudes toward the death penalty are showing some changes. Moore (2015) suggests that young Americans are less favorable in their support of the death penalty than are their elders, as 41% of 18-29 year olds opposed the death penalty and 45% favored use of capital punishment. While a majority of 18-29 year olds still favored the death penalty, numbers in each category for this group were more similar than numbers reported for other age groups. Among 30-44 year olds, 63% favored the death penalty, 26% opposed; 67% of 45-64 year olds favored the death penalty and 21% opposed; and 73% of those aged 65 and older favored the death penalty while 22% opposed.

Overall, public support for the death penalty reached a four-decade low in 2016, with 49% favoring its use. This is the lowest survey-recorded level of support for the death penalty dating back to the early 1970s. As of June, 2018, 54% of Americans surveyed favored the death penalty for persons convicted of murder and 39% were opposed (Oliphant, 2018). Thus, overall support has increased since 2016, but remains lower than it was in the 1990s and much of the 2000s.

Gender and Retribution

Gender differences related to criminal justice and other social and political issues have been of research interest for decades. Though empirically similar, differences between men and women exist across a number of social arenas. Consider Gilligan’s (1982) assertion that women tend to operate from an “ethic of care” while men tend to operate from an “ethic of justice.” This implies a preference in punishment impacted by gender. Hurwitz and Smithey (1998) examined gender differences related to crime and punishment and found that women in their study were more fearful of crime and supportive of prevention efforts than men. These findings are consistent with differences in “gendered” socialization experiences and could have important implications for criminal justice policies in the political arena.

Though some research exists, gender has largely been absent from analytical discussions about systems of punishment, both in terms of history and scholarship (Haney & Dao, 2018). Haney & Dao (2018) identify three major approaches for studying gender and punishment. The first approach emphasized creating a historical record of female offenders and trends related to female offenders

as early research concentrated on male offenders. In the 2000s, a second approach gaining popularity shifted the focus to the gendered dynamics of penal institutions. This movement focused on how gender was socially constituted. The third approach encourages scholars to examine the intersections of disadvantage (e.g., gender, race, poverty). Including gender in examinations about attitudes and perceptions of punishment can help to better ascertain common (mis)understandings about crime and punishment.

Race and Retribution

Synthesizing two decades of research, a 2014 report from The Sentencing Project found that “skewed racial perceptions of crime – particularly, white Americans’ strong associations of crime with racial minorities – have bolstered harsh and biased criminal justice policies” (Ghandnoosh, 2014, p. 3). Specifically, the report concluded that white Americans are more punitive than racial minorities even though whites are less likely to be victims of both property and violent crimes; white Americans overestimate the amount of crime committed by Blacks and Latinos, and associate racial minorities with criminality; and white Americans who more strongly associate crime with racial minorities are more likely to support punitive policies, including capital punishment and mandatory minimum sentencing, than whites with weaker racial associations of crime.

The report also identifies several consequences from these skewed racial perceptions (Ghandnoosh, 2014). Support for punitive policies because of racial misperceptions have resulted in more severe sentences for all offenders, regardless of race. In addition, skewed racial perceptions of crime (among other factors) have led to disparities in punishment for whites and non-whites. Consider that blacks and Latinos together comprise just 30% of the general population, yet they account for 58% of the prison population. Disproportionate penalties for racial minorities have also affected criminal justice processes, such as trust and cooperation with the police, which undermines public safety. Moreover, skewed racial perceptions of crime have led to deaths of innocent people of color at the hands of fearful civilians and police officers. Consequently, race is likely to influence attitudes about retribution.

Communities and Retribution

America is changing demographically. Numbers are increasing, the country is growing more racially and ethnically diverse, and the population is aging. These trends are occurring differently through various types of communities (Parker, Horowitz, Brown, Fry, Cohn, & Igielnik, 2018). Urban and rural communities are becoming

increasingly different from one another both demographically and politically. Americans in these communities have widely different views when it comes to social and political issues. For example, residents in urban and rural communities differ greatly in their views about abortion, same-sex marriage, racial inequality, role of government, immigration, feelings about President Trump, and if equal opportunities exist for men and women (Parker, et al., 2018). There is a more diverse range of opinions found among suburban residents. In addition, those who reside in urban communities express greater concerns about crime than residents in rural and suburban communities. As such, residents in urban, rural, and suburban communities might differ in their support for retributive policies.

These political trends have become more distinct in the 21st Century as urban areas have become more Democratic and rural areas have become more Republican (Parker, et al., 2018). Americans who reside in the suburbs are more diverse in their political opinions, which has been consistent in recent decades. For some issues, the differences between urban and rural residents can be attributed to different opinions or perspectives that emerge from a particular type of community. These differences can also be attributed to political makeup of a particular community as urban areas tend to have a higher number of Democrats, or those who lean toward Democrat, and rural areas tend to have a higher number of Republicans or Republican-leaning Independents. Republicans, in general, tend to be supportive of retributive criminal justice policies as evidenced by legislation that is typically labeled “tough on crime.”

Residents in both urban and rural communities feel misunderstood and demeaned from those who reside outside of their respective community. In contrast, most suburban residents believe that people who live outside of the suburbs have a positive view of those who live in suburban areas. Specifically, members of urban and rural communities believe that people from outside their community do not understand the problems they face. These differences, real or perceived, might also contribute to decisions about whether to support retributive policies.

Southern Culture and Retribution

Rural can be defined as a geographic region in accordance with a countryside, or areas located outside of towns or cities. As such, rural areas are made up of different types of communities, including farming, manufacturing, service, or retirement, to name a few (Beck, Frandsen, & Randall, 2007). In addition, rural areas in the northeast will have both similarities and differences from rural areas in the south. Southern culture is gener-

ally more conservative than the rest of the United States and community members often develop strong associations with religious institutions. The South, or Southern culture, is a subculture of the United States, which has contributed to the American social fabric its own unique history, customs, literature, cuisine, music, and more.

Numerous explanations exist to explain what makes the South different from the rest of the country, including its history of slavery and later segregation, defeat in the Civil War, the importance of agriculture, the cultural transmission of conservatism, ethnic origins of inhabitants, and the weather (Beck, et al., 2007). Regardless of the reasons, the nation's politics are affected by these regional differences. In addition, Southerners and non-Southerners differ in their perceptions about the region and its culture. Some view the South as maintaining the traditional values America has thrived upon, while others prefer to focus on the region's progress in favor of certain times or events from the past. The subculture of the South is a variation of the dominant U.S. culture, evidenced by the distinctions in values, behaviors, and artifacts. As such, those who identify as "Southern" may have different views about retribution than those who do not identify as Southern.

Education and Retribution

Opinions about crime and punishment can differ based on level of education. For example, those without a bachelor's degree are more likely to say drug addiction is a major problem in their local community than those with more education (Parker et al., 2018). Much of the public is uninformed or misinformed about social and political issues. A summary of recent studies found the public is generally misinformed about crime and criminal justice policy; public opinion is more complex than policymakers assume; politicians misjudge public attitudes; public opinion shifts in relation to political initiatives; public opposition to rehabilitation and prevention is exaggerated; and the public embraces alternative sentencing options when offered (Crime, Punishment and Public Opinion, n. d.). Support for punitiveness in punishment is often a product of misinformation as people are generally unaware of the punitiveness currently within the system. Studies have shown that people tend to support a broader range of sentencing options when educated about those options. Level of education is likely to have some influence on whether people support retributive policies.

Political Ideology and Retribution

Political ideology remains an imperfect, yet important indicator of perceptions and attitudes about a variety of criminal justice issues and policies. Loader and Sparks

(2016) investigated the ways in which politics and criminal justice policy have been intertwined since the 1970s. The authors found that differences between political ideologies appear to drive liberals and conservatives into opposing camps where conflicting ideas about crime exist and compete for its necessary response. Conservatives tend to prefer a more retributive approach to justice that emphasizes being "tough" on offenders who should receive their "just deserts." Liberals, in contrast, emphasize the rights of the accused and advocate for more rehabilitative policies. Conservatives consider the liberal approach as "soft on crime."

Researchers from Marquette University Law School have conducted an annual poll since 2012 to explore public attitudes about various issues, including political affiliation and support for rehabilitation (O'Hear & Wheelock, 2016). According to their research, self-identified Republicans were significantly more punitive than were self-identified Democrats. In addition, 58% of Republicans said that it was "absolutely essential" for offenders to receive the punishment they deserve, which is a tenet of retribution. Consider that, since the mid-1990s, support for the death penalty has remained strong among Republicans, but has fallen among Democrats and Independents (Oliphant, 2018). Currently, about 77% of Republicans favor the death penalty, compared with 35% of Democrats and 52% of Independents. Since 1996, support for the death penalty has fallen 36 percentage points for Democrats (from 71% to 35%) and 27 percentage points for Independents (from 79% to 52%), and has dropped just 10 percentage points for Republicans (from 87% to 77%). Opinions have not changed much from 2016 for Republicans and Democrats; however, the percentage of Independents who support the death penalty has increased eight percentage points from 44% to 52%.

Republicans' punitive attitudes were strong, but not inflexible (O'Hear & Wheelock, 2016). Perhaps this is partly due to Republicans' dissatisfaction with current levels of punishment. Republicans tend to view punishment of offenders as an overriding policy objective, despite the party's aversion to taxing and spending. One area where Republicans and Democrats agreed was a desire for an increase in public safety – this was a top priority for Democrats and a near-top priority for Republicans. The authors were more surprised to learn the extent to which participants in their study "lived in" different mental worlds of criminal justice, with different sources of information about the system, different perceptions of how the system performs, and different views about what the system should prioritize.

McKee and Feather (2008) examined attitudes toward sentencing by using scales that measure right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). RWA is “consistent with authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism” (p. 163), and SDO is consistent with “status and power” (p. 142). A sample of 148 college students (105 women 42 men, and 1 participant who did not specify a gender) in an introductory psychology class in Australia completed a vengeance scale, measures of RWA and SDO, and a sentencing goals scale. McKee and Feather (2008) wanted to examine the effect of RWA and SDO on attitudes toward retribution, rehabilitation, incapacitation and deterrence. They found that participants who scored higher in RWA and SDO were more likely to support retribution as a sentencing goal over the other three goals (2008). Students with higher RWA and SDO scores were also more likely to support capital punishment.

Gerber and Jackson (2013) utilized an online survey to study crime and punishment. While their sample (n=176) was mostly white (86%), it was diverse in terms of gender (50% male), age (m=34, sd=13.3), and ideology (56% described their political views as left, 24% as right, and 21% center). Over half (52%) of their sample worked and 14 percent were unemployed (the rest were students). Participants completed a questionnaire that, in addition to obtaining demographic information, ascertained their levels of right wing authoritarianism (RWA), social dominance orientation (SDO), attitudes toward due process, punishment goals, and motives for punishment. Two scales were used as dependent variables in the study designed to capture “retribution as revenge: suffering and getting even” (p. 69). Instead of focusing on only one offense type, Gerber and Jackson (2013) asked participants what offense they had in mind when completing the survey, with the following options: violent crime, property crime, fraud, drug offenses, sexual crime, vandalism, fraud, and other⁴. The purpose of the study was to determine the motive behind retributive punishment, vengeance, or just deserts. The results indicated that participants who scored higher in RWA were more likely to support retribution; although, only when it “followed legitimized proceedings, but not when an individual seeks personal revenge” (p. 77). While Gerber and Jackson examined attitudes related to punishment, they did not associate any demographic factors with these attitudes.

Personal Victimization and Retribution

Criminal victimization is a personal experience, usually with a lasting impact. Criminal victimization also can in-

cite strong feelings of revenge (Orth, 2004), or retribution. Orth (2004) completed two studies to investigate whether crime victims’ feelings of revenge decreased after the offender received legal punishment. A cross-sectional study of 174 crime victims reported that punishment severity did not predict feelings of revenge at a time several years after trial.

A second longitudinal study with 31 crime victims revealed that punishment severity significantly predicted a decrease in feelings of revenge from a few weeks before trial to a few weeks after trial. Together, results from these two studies indicate that legal punishment of offenders only partially, and likely temporarily, fulfills victims’ desires for revenge, or retribution. Thus, emotional desires for revenge should not satisfy as empirical arguments in favor of punitive policies, though, for some, these feelings and emotions are inescapable and likely to increase or decrease support for retributive policies.

Gun Ownership and Retribution

Research indicates that gun owners typically own firearms for either sport or protection. Research has also examined the types of firearms that gun owners likely possess (Kleck, 1997; Lizotte, Bordua, & White, 1981; Lizotte & Bordua, 1980b). Logically, the reasons for ownership and types of guns owned may be connected, in general, to attitudes about justice or punishment, or, specifically, to attitudes about retribution.

Certain sports and the need for protection are, perhaps, of greater interest or concern in specific geographic locations as previous research has indicated gun ownership is more likely to occur in rural areas and in certain regions in the United States (Kleck, 1997; Sheley, Brody, Wright, & Williams, 1994; Wiktor, Gallaher, Baron, Watson, & Sewell, 1993; Smith & Uchida, 1988; Dixon & Lizotte, 1987; Wright, Rossi, & Daly, 1983; Lizotte & Bordua, 1980a; Bordua & Lizotte, 1979; DeFronzo, 1979; Wright & Marston, 1975). Socialization in rural areas tends to include exposure to firearms and cultural indicators that support positive views about firearms as high rates of gun ownership are historically recorded in these areas (Kleck, 1997; Tonso, 1982; Kennett & Anderson, 1975). Socialization teaches individuals about cultural ways to behave, think, feel, and talk, including attitudes and perceptions about crime, justice, and punishments. As such, socialization for gun owners may differ from the experiences of non-gun owners.

Consider that gun owners are more likely to have parents who owned guns, to have been raised in the South, and to have learned how to handle or shoot firearms from

4 The majority of participants (64.2%) chose violent crime.

family members or individuals close to them. These patterns have been consistent over decades of gun research in America, which indicates a process of mentoring for youth and implies a cultural connection to firearms, as noted by Kleck (1997). These early introductions to guns may initiate more than just gun ownership in general as cultural exposure within the socialization process may also influence gun owners' attitudes about punishment, in general, or, specifically, retribution. Essentially, gun owners may think differently about punishment, or retribution, evidenced by their willingness to own guns specifically for protecting themselves and others.

While there is substantial literature about retribution as a punishment philosophy, prior research lacks a particular focus on the influence that individual characteristics have for attitudes about retribution, specifically. Characteristics such as age, gender, race, community type, level of education, political ideology, personal victimization, or owning a firearm could provide insight about whether people consider themselves retributivists or are likely to support retributive policies. The authors include a measure of the respondent perceptions of the significance of crime as a problem to attempt to tap into the role of these views on the overall model. The purpose of this study was to identify the effect of individual characteristics on the likelihood of respondents' preference for retribution or retributive policies.

DATA AND MEASURES

The current study was conducted using a panel sample from more than 30 million possible respondents managed by the Qualtrics company. Data collection was completed over five days during March, 2017. Gun owners were oversampled to allow for comparisons within the sample between gun owners and non-gun owners. The sample was requested to be at least 50% gun owners, no more than 70% white to increase racial diversity, and evenly split on gender. The sample is limited to American residents over the age of 18.

Independent Variables⁵

Several demographic variables were analyzed in this study, including age, gender, race, education, political ideology, and community. Participants were asked to record their responses to questions about these variables. The average age of the sample was 25.66 (sd=16.48); the youngest participants were 18 years of age and the oldest participant was 96. For gender, males were coded as 1 and females were coded as 2. Over half (55.6%) of the

sample was female. Race was coded as 1 for nonwhite and 2 for white. The majority of the sample was white (52.1%). Level of education was dichotomized as some college or less (coded as 1) and college degree or higher (coded as 2). Most of the sample (59%) indicated some college or less. Response options for political ideology were initially recorded as Strong Democrat, Democrat, Leaning Democrat, Independent, Leaning Republican, Republican, and Strong Republican. In order to dichotomize this variable, the three Democrat attributes were combined into Liberal (coded as 1) and the three Republican attributes into Conservative (coded as 2); the Independents were eliminated. Community refers to whether a respondent lives in a urban, suburban, or rural area. The majority (74.2%) of the sample indicated living in an urban/suburban area, which was coded as 1. Rural area was coded as 2.

Additional independent variables examined were southerner, personal victimization (property and violent crime), and gun ownership. Southerner refers to cultural identity. The majority (66.8%) of the sample strongly agreed with the statement, "I consider myself to be Southern." Those who agreed with this statement were coded as 1; disagreement with this statement was coded as 2. Personal victimization measured victimization of both property crime and violent crime. For property crime, participants were asked to respond to the question, "Have you ever been a victim of a property crime" (coded 1 for yes and 2 for no). Just under half (49.0%) of the sample indicated they had been victims of a property crime. For violent crime, participants were asked to respond to the question, "have you ever been a victim of a violent crime" (coded 1 for yes and 2 for no). Just over a quarter (26.2%) of the sample indicated victimization from a violent crime. Gun Ownership refers to whether or not participants own a firearm. A slight majority (51.3%) owns at least one firearm, which was coded as 1. Not owning a firearm was coded as 2. The independent variables used for this study can be found in Table 1.

Dependent Variable

For this study a "retribution index" was created by combining three Likert type statements. The first statement asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' is a good rule to live by." Responses were coded from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The second statement asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, "When someone does wrong, he/she should be paid back for it." Again, responses were coded from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Finally, the third statement asked participants to respond to the

5 The independent variables can be found in Table 1.

following statement: “When a person harms you, you should turn the other cheek and forgive them.” Responses were coded from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), but were reverse coded for the purpose of making the “retribution index.”

A score of three on the index indicates that a participant strongly disagrees with all three statements, while a score of 15 indicates that a participant strongly agrees with all three statements. Of the 3,047 participants who responded to the statements, 19 (.6%) scored a 3 on the index while 74 (2.4%) scored a 15. Higher scores on the index indicate agreement with retribution and lower scores indicate disagreement. The average score was 9.42 (sd=2.30), indicating that the sample as a whole scored in the middle when it comes to agreeing with retribution⁶. The Cronbach’s alpha for the index was .684.

ANALYTIC PLAN

The dependent variable was dichotomized in order to run logistic regression models because the goal was to predict the probability of membership in one of two groups (pro or anti retribution). Participants were dichotomized into two groups; those with an index score of 3-9 (n=1,584) were categorized as anti-retribution and those who scored 10-15 (n=1,483) were categorized as pro-retribution. Logistic regression does not require stringent assumptions about the distribution of predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), and this analysis was interested in learning if any combinations of the eleven independent variables would accurately predict the probability of agreeing or disagreeing with retribution as a punishment philosophy.

FINDINGS

A logistic regression model was created to determine which independent variables were predictors of attitude towards supporting retribution. Regression results indicate that the overall model was statistically reliable (Model $\chi^2(9)=270.450$, $p<.0001$). The model for the first dependent variable correctly predicted just over half of the responses (51.2%).

This model revealed that gun owners were more likely to be in favor retribution than those who do not own a gun ($\beta=-.592$, $p<.001$). Gun owners were about 55% more likely to support retribution than non-gun owners (Exp(B)=.553). Also, males ($\beta=-.371$, $p<.01$) were more likely

⁶ The mode was 9 (n=607, 19.9%) which is exactly in the middle of the index.

than females to support retribution, and were about 70% more likely to support retribution (Exp(B)=.690). No other independent variables had a significant effect on the retribution index. The results of the logistic regression model can be found in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Not surprisingly, males were more likely to be retributive than females and gun owners were more likely to be retributive than non-gun owners. Males tend to operate from an “ethic of justice” rather than an “ethic of care” (Gilligan, 1982). An “ethic of justice” is more synonymous with rules orientation, regulations, and consequences, whereas an “ethic of care” is rooted in relationships or nurturing. Furthermore, the public’s relationship with the government and its system of punishment reflects, to some degree, the level of trust citizens have with the government. Previous research has found gender to have an effect on attitudes toward trust in government and feelings of safety (see Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2015); therefore, future research could explore differences within and between genders as they relate to retribution.

Several of the independent variables had not been explored in regards to their relationship (if any) with attitudes toward retribution, specifically. The decision to include gun ownership as a variable was mostly exploratory. Although gun owners purchase firearms for either sport or protection, it was hypothesized that cultural attributes that account for gun ownership, for any reason or type, are likely to also influence support for retributive policies. The real or perceived need for protection or support for retribution could relate to a distrust of the system and a corresponding need to protect oneself or family rather than a fear of crime. For example, previous research has found a weak relationship between prior criminal victimization and gun purchase (Kleck, 1997). Furthermore, there is no reason to expect gun owners who own for sport or recreation to indicate fear of crime. Therefore, cultural assimilation could influence whether gun owners support retributive policies. Additional research is required to explore both gender and gun ownership and their respective relationships with attitudes about retribution.

Somewhat unexpected was finding no statistically significant relationship between political ideology and retribution. Previous research found Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) was significantly related with retributive attitudes (see Gerber & Jackson, 2013; McKee & Feather, 2008). It was hypothesized that respondents who identi-

fied as conservative would share these beliefs, but that was not the case for this study. Additional research is needed to further explore political ideology. The study also hypothesized that experiences with victimization might engender a more retributive attitude, but that, too, was not the case. Perhaps, the media's influence for perceptions about crime and the subjective nature of victimization could be explored with further research, at least as each relates to attitudes about retribution.

Additional research could further explore influences for political ideology and cultural influences about retribution. Previous research has found that political ideology had an effect on attitudes about trust in government (see Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2016) and carrying concealed weapons on a college or university campus (see Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018), which also has roots in both cultural and political ideologies. Future research is needed to explore political ideology and retribution as there could be other factors that affect partisanship. Ultimately, this variable was dichotomized into liberal or conservative for analysis. Measurement could be improved for this item as this study excluded independents from the analysis. Given the changing political landscape, some independents could lean more Republican and some could lean more Democrat.

Southern culture was examined separately from community or area where you live as it was hypothesized that those identifying as "Southern" might have different attitudes about retribution than those who simply identify with living in a rural area. Due to the differences within and between rural areas, and the differences in cultural attributes between the South and the rest of the country, the authors believe that culture, specifically Southern culture, should be measured separately from community or area where one resides. For example, it is possible that someone who identifies as both Southern and Democrat could support retributive policies because of their cultural influences rather than geographic location. Future research is needed to explore the differences between community and culture.

Several limitations exist for this study. This was an exploratory study with methodological limitations. Since this is cross sectional research, any insights found regarding attitudes toward retribution cannot be used to forecast the future and specific claims cannot be made about the generalizability of the results. Another limitation is the study measured whether someone was a victim of a violent crime or a property crime, but there was no way in the data to distinguish if someone was a victim of both types of offense. In addition, the reliability index for the dependent variable in this study ($\alpha=.684$) was slightly

lower than the accepted standard (.700). Finally, since an outside agency was used to conduct the survey, the overall response rate is unknown. However, the survey did receive over 3,000 responses from a national sampling frame.

Of the eleven independent variables included in this study, a significant relationship with retributive attitudes was found with gender and gun ownership, specifically males and gun owners were more retributive than females or non-gun owners. Future research could further explore these findings with additional survey research or through qualitative analysis. In addition, future research in this area could include gender and gun ownership as independent variables to see if these relationships exist outside of this study. This study has added to the literature and laid the groundwork for future research to follow up on these findings. They concluded that people punish. They concluded that people punish.

Table 1
Independent Variables

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	1091	44.4
Female	1364	55.6
Total	2455	100.0
Race	Frequency	Percent
Nonwhite	1563	47.9
White	1702	52.1
Total	3265	100
Own a Firearm	Frequency	Percent
Yes	1603	53.1
No	1418	46.9
Total	3021	100
Area in Which I Live	Frequency	Percent
Urban/Suburban	1518	74.2
Rural	529	25.8
Total	2047	100
Political Category	Frequency	Percent
Liberal	686	47.8
Conservative	749	52.2
Total	1435	100
I consider myself to be Southerner	Frequency	Percent
Yes	1159	66.8
No	576	33.2
Total	1530	100
Victimization (Violent Crime)	Frequency	Percent
Yes	643	26.2
No	1814	73.8
Total	2457	100
Victimization (Property Crime)	Frequency	Percent
Yes	1204	49.0
No	1253	38.4
Education	Frequency	Percent
Some college or less	1448	59.0
College degree or higher	1007	41.0
Total	2455	100
Crime is a Problem	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	112	6.2
Agree	1694	93.8
Total	1806	100
Age	Frequency	Percent
18-27	549	22.36
28-37	609	24.08
38-47	358	14.58
48-57	367	14.95
58-67	366	14.91
68-77	177	7.21
78-87	26	1.06
88-97	3	.01
Total	2,455	100

Table 2**Logistic Regression Results Support for Retribution**

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	
Own a firearm***	-.592	.138	18.407	1	.000	.553	
Race		-.044	.155	.080	1	.777	.957
Gender**		-.371	.128	8.455	1	.004	.690
Victim (property)	-.068	.132	.268	1	.605	.934	
Victim (violent)	-.147	.148	.989	1	.320	.863	
Politics		.078	.140	.311	1	.577	1.081
Crime ^A		.478	.271	3.113	1	.078	1.612
Education		-.050	.126	.157	1	.692	.951
Southerner		-.014	.134	.010	1	.919	.987
Area ^A		-.245	.149	2.716	1	.099	.783
Age		.004	.004	.807	1	.369	1.004
Constant		1.099	.698	2.476	1	.116	.013
Model Chi-Square	55.378						
Nagelkerke R ²	.420						

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, A=p<.10

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