

Public Abstract

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Title: Individual vs. Systemic Justice: Using Trust and Moral Outrage to Predict Reactions to Vigilante Murder

Jurors can approach their charge of meting out justice in different ways, two of which include focusing on the outcome of a specific trial and/or focusing on upholding justice more broadly by adhering to procedures and laws set forth by the legal system. The present study investigated the role of trust and moral outrage on the perceived legitimacy of vigilante justice.

An experiment was designed to investigate two factors (trust in the legal system and moral outrage) that may influence mock jurors' orientations toward justice and affect their sentencing decisions. A 2 (system trust: high vs. low) x 2 (moral outrage: manslaughter vs. rape/murder) between subjects factorial design was used to predict participant reactions toward a murder committed in response to the death of the vigilante's daughter. While the manipulated trust variable did not influence the results, a continuous measure of personal trust interacted with moral outrage and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) to predict participant reactions toward the vigilante murderer. Individuals high on RWA showed greater reliance on the law (more punitive toward vigilante), and when trust in the system was lower and more support for the vigilante when trust was greater. The implications of these findings are discussed.