

Understanding the Relationship Between Racial Prejudice and Support for the Death Penalty: The Racist Punitive Bias Hypothesis

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Many studies have shown that there are significant racial disparities in the application of death penalties. In this paper, three studies (N = 484, 94% female), conducted in France, test and explore why racial prejudice and support for the death penalty (SDP) are strongly and positively related. First, prejudice against Arabs remains a significant predictor of SDP, even when ethnocentrism/authoritarianism (Study 1) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; Study 2) are statistically controlled. Second, the attribution of criminal traits to Arabs (Study 1) or criminality-based prejudice (Studies 2 and 3) significantly mediates the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. Finally, a path analysis illustrates that two relatively independent processes could explain the relationship between prejudice towards Arabs and SDP: criminality-based prejudice leading to specific SDP for Arabs and Social Dominance Orientation (Study 3). Together, these results provide support for the racist punitive bias hypothesis. When racist people think about questions of crime and punishment, they frame the issue in racial terms, leading them to support a punitive law which in their minds will mainly punish minority racial groups.

KEY WORDS: death penalty; racial prejudice; SDO; RWA.

INTRODUCTION

It is now well documented that there are significant racial disparities in the imposition of death sentences (Amnesty International, 2001). In the

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United States, many studies have revealed that race is a significant predictor of capital punishment, with Blacks being treated more unfairly than Whites (Amnesty USA, 2001; Gross and Mauro, 1989; Paternoster, 1983). Several authors have postulated that racial prejudice is a likely predictor of racial disparities in the application of death sentences (Cohn *et al.*, 1991; Ford, 1997). Many studies have found that the greater the racial prejudice among Whites, the greater the support for the death penalty (Aguirre and Baker, 1993; Barkan and Cohn, 1994; Ford, 1997). However, the reason why racial prejudice is significantly related to support for the death penalty (SDP) still remains relatively unclear. Thus, more research is needed.

On the Relationship Between Racial Prejudice and Support for the Death Penalty

How can one explain the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty? According to Stack (2000), this relationship may be indirect and accounted for by levels of personal authoritarianism. The theory of the authoritarian personality, proposed by Adorno *et al.* (1950), has been used to explain fascist attitudes. The basic assumption of this approach is to assume that prejudiced people are those whose personalities render them susceptible to racist or fascist ideas prevalent in a society. Despite the limitations of such an approach (see Brown, 1995, for a discussion), this theory continues to be influential (see for example, Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland, 1999; Whitley, 1999). Several studies, in many countries, have found substantial positive correlations between measures of authoritarianism and racial prejudice (see Altemeyer, 1998; Campbell and McCandless, 1951; Heaven and Quintin, 2003; McFarland, 1999; Sinha and Hassan, 1975; Whitley, 1999). Additionally, several studies have shown that authoritarianism is positively and significantly correlated with attitudes towards the death penalty (e.g., Stack, 2000; Young, 1992). It is thus possible that the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty reflects the effect of a third variable: authoritarianism. Providing direct evidence for this thesis, Stack (2000) found that if authoritarianism was controlled, the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP disappeared. However, the authoritarianism scale used by Stack (2000) strongly limits his results. The internal consistency of his scale (i.e., Cronbach $\alpha = 0.37$) was too low, raising serious doubts about the validity of levels of authoritarianism as a unique explanation. Recent research conducted by Soss *et al.* (2003) reinforced these doubts. Even after more than 15 factors (including authoritarianism) were adjusted for, the relationship between individual levels of racial prejudice and SDP still remained significant.

Additionally, prejudice had the largest influence on SDP than any of the other factors. It would thus seem that levels of authoritarianism are not sufficient to explain this relationship.

Cohn *et al.* (1991) have proposed another explanation for the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty. They suggest that the punitive attitudes of White people towards criminals are a reflection of the White group's prejudice toward stigmatized minorities. It is possible that members of dominant groups control minorities by the use of punitive practices such as the death penalty. In our view, because those who are racially prejudiced tend to believe that criminals come from stigmatized ethnic minorities (Banaji and Bhaskar, 2000; Roberts and Stalans, 1997), support for the death penalty can reflect a motive to punish members of ethnic minorities through the punishment of criminals in general. This would suggest that racially prejudiced people who support the death penalty believe that ethnic minorities will disproportionately be the target groups. Thus, racism would involve an underlying punitive bias that could explain racial disparities in death sentences. While previous findings seem consistent with this approach (see Soss *et al.*, 2003), to our knowledge there is no study that provides direct evidence for this hypothesis. Thus, one of the main objectives of this series of studies was to test directly the appropriateness of this "racist punitive bias" hypothesis by attempting to understand the underlying processes.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) provides an entirely different explanation for the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. According to social dominance theory, every society develops ideologies that promote, or attenuate group inequality. These ideologies, called "legitimizing myths", are divided into two categories: "hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths," which accentuate inequality and social hierarchy, and "hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myths," which legitimate equality. Racism, sexism, conservatism, and support for the death penalty are examples of the former while socialism, feminism, and universal rights of man are examples of the latter. The empirical contribution of this approach rests, in major aspects, in the construction of the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale. Scores on this scale measure "the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchy and the domination of inferior groups by superior groups" (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Pratto *et al.*, 1994). Consistent with SDT, several studies reveal that SDO is significantly and positively related to hierarchy enhancing legitimizing myths and negatively related to hierarchy attenuating legitimizing myths (Duarte *et al.*, 2004; Pratto *et al.*, 1994). For example, people high in SDO are found to be more hostile toward stigmatized outgroups, like Blacks in the United States (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) or Arabs in France (Guimond *et al.*, 2003). Interestingly, as previously noted, support for the death penalty can also be

conceptualized as a hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth. SDO has also been found to be positively and significantly correlated with SDP (see Pratto *et al.*, 1994). Thus, according to SDT, if one controls for SDO, the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP should be reduced significantly.

To summarize, at least three different but complementary explanations can be used to address the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP: the approach based on the authoritarian personality (i.e., authoritarianism), the “racist punitive bias” hypothesis, and the explanation derived from social dominance theory. The main objective of our research was to determine which of these three alternative explanations would receive stronger empirical support in the French intergroup context. Studies 1 and 2 test directly the predictions derived from the “racist punitive bias” hypothesis. In order to also examine the authoritarianism explanation, an authoritarianism/ethnocentrism scale was included in the first study, while the RWA was included in the second one. Predictions derived from the “racist punitive bias” hypothesis and from social dominance theory were tested directly in Study 3.

STUDY 1

The first objective of this study was to test predictions derived from the “racist punitive bias” hypothesis. According to this explanation, racially prejudiced people would support the death penalty in order to punish criminals who are likely to be perceived as members of ethnic minority groups. Regarding the French intergroup context, the implication is that people who are prejudiced towards Arabs support the death penalty because they infer that Arabs are often criminals. Additionally, only people who attribute criminal traits to Arabs will support the death penalty. Attribution of non-criminal traits to Arabs should not be related to SDP. This approach suggests a mediation model in which attribution of criminal traits to Arabs mediates the relationship between prejudice towards Arabs and SDP. People who are hostile towards Arabs will support the death penalty because they will perceive that criminal traits are stereotypic of Arabs.

The second objective of this study was to examine whether controlling for authoritarianism would alter the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. That is, would the relationship remain significant, or would it disappear?

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty psychology students at the University of Blaise Pascal were recruited for the study. Their average age was 19. The sample included 109 females and 11 males.

Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in a study on “social perceptions.” Upon arrival in the laboratory, students were asked to complete a questionnaire that included a variety of measures. These are described below. During the study, participants were alone in the room. At the conclusion of the session, participants were fully debriefed.

Questionnaire

All measures used 7-point rating scales. The questionnaire included a measure of support for the death penalty, a measure of prejudice toward “Arabs” and immigrants, overall evaluations of “Arabs” and “Blacks”, a measure of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism, and a measure of traits attribution. Descriptive statistics of these scales (i.e., means and standard deviations) are presented in Tables I and II.

To assess support for the death penalty, participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they did not support (1) or supported (7) the death penalty (for a similar methodology, see Stack, 2000).

The measure of prejudice toward “Arabs” and immigrants was a 15-item scale developed on the basis of previous research (Guimond and Dambrun, 2002). This scale included eight positively valenced statements (e.g., “I consider our society to be unfair to North Africans”) and seven negatively valenced statements (e.g., “Those immigrants who do not have

Table I. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between SDP and Various Dependent Measures (Study 1)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1—Support for the Death Penalty (SDP)	2.7	1.9	–				
2—Prejudice scale toward “Arabs” and immigrants	3.1	1	0.31***	–			
3—Overall negative evaluation of “Arabs”	3.35	1.3	0.25**	0.49***	–		
4—Overall negative evaluation of “Blacks”	2.95	1.2	0.24**	0.25**	0.73***	–	
5—Ethnocentrism/Authoritarianism	2.5	0.80	0.21*	0.60***	0.30***	0.23**	–

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; $N = 120$.

Table II. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between SDP and Attribution of Traits to Arabs (Study 1)

	Mean	SD	SDP	1	2
1—Traits related to criminal behaviors	4.01	1.07	0.274**	–	–
2—Traits related to non-criminal behaviors	3.69	0.84	0.109	0.573***	–

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; $N = 120$.

immigration documents should be sent back to their country of origin”). Positive statements were reverse-coded so that higher scores on this scale indicated greater prejudice. The content of the items is similar to that of other measures of prejudice, such as Lepore and Brown’s (1997) prejudice scale, although it was adapted to the intergroup context in France, where the prime targets of prejudice and discrimination are North Africans, also referred to as “Arabs” (see Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995). The internal consistency of this scale was found to be satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.88$).

For overall evaluations of “Arabs” and “Blacks,” participants were asked to rate on 7-point scales the extent to which they were unfavorable (1) or favorable (7) towards the group of “Arabs” and the group of “Blacks.” These two items were reverse-coded. Higher scores on these items indicate greater negative evaluation.

The 6-item version of Adorno *et al.*’s (1950) ethnocentrism scale was also used. This scale ($\alpha = 0.67$) has been used extensively in past research (see Berry *et al.*, 1977). It assesses personality components that reflect both authoritarian and ethnocentric styles of thought (Lambert *et al.*, 1986). It correlated significantly with our scale of prejudice toward “Arabs” and immigrants ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), and with overall evaluations of both ethnic groups (“Arabs”, $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$; Blacks, $r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$), providing evidence for its convergent validity. Higher scores on this scale indicate greater authoritarianism/ethnocentrism.

Finally, participants were asked to judge, on a 7-point scale, how stereotypical six attributes were with regard to the group labeled “Arab.” The internal consistency of this scale was found to be adequate ($\alpha = 0.79$). A single factor emerged when factor analysis was done. In order to test our hypothesis, the six attributes were divided into two categories on the basis of their content: those that were related to criminal behaviors (i.e., violence, aggression, and theft; $\alpha = 0.80$) and those that were not related to such behaviors (i.e., insolence, ignorance, and egotism; $\alpha = 0.54$). These traits were selected on the basis of previous research (Dambrun and Guimond, 2004). Confirming that Arabs are stigmatized on the criminality dimension, attributes that related to criminal behaviors were rated as more stereotypic of Arabs ($M = 4.01$) than were stereotypic behaviors that were not related to such behaviors ($M = 3.69$; $t = 4.00$, $p < 0.001$).

Results

Ethnic Prejudice, Ethnocentrism/Authoritarianism and Support for the Death Penalty

As Table I shows, support for the death penalty is strongly and positively correlated with the scale of prejudice towards “Arabs” and immigrants, both overall evaluations of “Arabs” and “Blacks”, and the measure authoritarianism/ethnocentrism. The more the participants are prejudiced towards “Arabs” and immigrants and evaluate “Blacks” and “Arabs” negatively, the more they support the death penalty. Similarly, the more they are ethnocentric/authoritarian, the more they support the death penalty. Moreover, the three independent measures of ethnic attitudes are strongly and positively correlated with each other. Interestingly, the measure of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism is significantly correlated with each measure of ethnic attitudes.

Given that all the measures of ethnic attitudes (i.e., prejudice toward “Arabs” and immigrants, the overall evaluation of “Arabs” and the overall evaluation of “Blacks”) are positively correlated, an overall score of *ethnic prejudice* was obtained by averaging responses to these three separate measures ($\alpha = 0.75$). In order to examine whether the correlation between ethnic prejudice and support for the death penalty is explained by the measure of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism, a regression analysis with ethnic prejudice and ethnocentrism/authoritarianism as independent variables and support for the death penalty as a dependent variable was performed. Controlling for ethnocentrism/authoritarianism, the effect of ethnic prejudice on support for the death penalty remained significant ($\beta = 0.288, p < 0.004$), but the effect of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism on support for the death penalty became non-significant when the measure of ethnic prejudice was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.076, p > 0.44$).¹ In other words, the measure of ethnic prejudice accounted significantly for the relationship between ethnocentrism/authoritarianism and support for the death penalty. The Sobel z test was significant ($z = 2.66, p < 0.01$). However, the relationship between ethnic prejudice and support for the death penalty was not explained by the measure of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism ($z < 1$).

Attribution of Criminal vs. Non-criminal Traits to Arabs and Support for the Death Penalty

As previously mentioned, stereotypical traits were divided on the basis of their content into two categories: those that were directly related to

¹ Similar analyses with each of the measures that constituted the ethnic prejudice scale revealed the same effects.

criminal behaviors (violence, aggression, and theft) and those that were not directly related to such behaviors (insolence, ignorance, and egotism). As predicted, only the attribution of criminal traits to Arabs was significantly and positively related to support for the death penalty (see Table II). The more participants perceived Arabs as criminals, the more they supported the death penalty. On the other hand, the attribution of negatively valenced non-criminal traits to Arabs was not significantly correlated with SDP. Controlling for the scale of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism, the relationship between attribution of criminal traits and SDP remained significant ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01; z = 1.42, ns$). But, the effect of ethnocentrism/authoritarianism on support for the death penalty became non-significant when the attribution of criminal traits was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.14, p > 0.13; z = 2.06, p < 0.05$).

Does Attribution of Criminal Traits to Arabs Mediate the Relationship Between Prejudice Towards Arabs and SDP?

In order to test the mediating role of attribution of criminal traits to Arabs in the relationship between prejudice towards Arabs and support for the death penalty, the regression procedure advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used. Since the overall evaluation of Arabs was the only

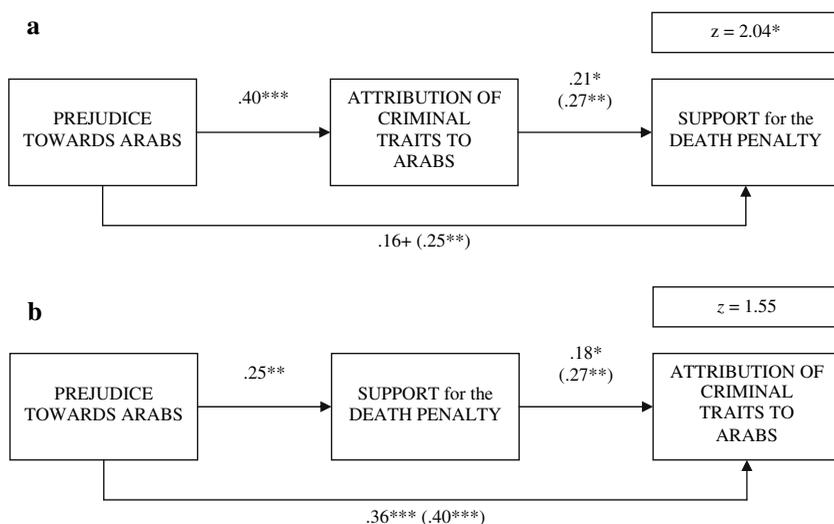


Fig. 1. Attribution of criminal traits to Arabs as a mediator of the effect of prejudice towards Arabs on support for the death penalty (Study 1).

measure that directly assessed attitudes towards Arabs, we used it as an independent variable in the regression procedure. The first requirement as specified by Baron and Kenny is that the independent variable (i.e., prejudice towards Arabs) be related to the dependent variable (i.e., SDP). As shown in Fig. 1a, prejudice is significantly and positively related to SDP ($\beta = 0.246$, $p < 0.007$). Second, the mediating variable (i.e., attribution of criminal traits to Arabs) should be related to the independent variable and the dependent variable. As Fig. 1a illustrates, these two requirements were satisfied. Attribution of criminal traits towards Arabs and prejudice correlate positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.399$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, SDP is significantly and positively related to the mediating variable ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.003$).

The final and most basic requirement specified by Baron *et al.* (1986) is that a mediating variable should predict the dependent variable even when the independent variable is statistically controlled, while the effect of the independent variable on the dependent measure should be significantly reduced when the mediating variable is statistically controlled. As expected, the relationship between prejudice and SDP became marginally significant when the measure of criminal-traits attribution was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.097$). The relationship between criminal-traits attribution and SDP remained significant even when prejudice was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.03$). The Sobel z test, which was used to test the significance of the mediation, indicated significant mediation ($z = 2.04$, $p < 0.05$). We found no support for the reverse model (see Fig. 1b). That is, when SDP is controlled for, the relationship between prejudice and attribution of criminal traits to Arabs remains strongly significant.

Discussion

Contrary to the explanation based on the authoritarian personality, the results of the present study reveal that once authoritarianism/ethnocentrism is statistically controlled, the relationship between prejudice and support for the death penalty remains significant. Thus, these results validate those of Soss *et al.* (2003) and suggest that authoritarianism does not account for the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty. In the present study, the French translation of Adorno's 6-item scale was used as the measure of authoritarianism/ethnocentrism. Since the Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale as developed by Altemeyer (1988) is currently seen as a better measure of authoritarianism (see Altemeyer, 1988, 1998), it was deemed useful to replicate the first study using this scale. Since, Bougie and Perreault (2005) recently proposed a French translation of the 20-item

RWA scale, the second study was designed to examine relationships among SDP, prejudice, and RWA using this better measure.

Concerning the measures of trait attribution, support for the death penalty was associated only with the attribution of criminal traits to Arabs. This was consistent with our “racist punitive bias” hypothesis. The more the participants’ perceived criminal traits as stereotypic of Arabs, the more they supported the death penalty. This effect significantly mediated the effect of racial prejudice on SDP. As the mediation analysis showed, racially prejudiced people attribute greater criminal traits to Arabs than do non-prejudiced people. This leads these people to support the death penalty in order to punish criminals whom they perceive as belonging to the Arab group. We believe that our first study provides direct evidence for a social psychological mechanism which underlies the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. When racially prejudiced people think about questions of crime and punishment, they frame the issues in racial terms, leading them to support a punitive law which in their minds will punish minority ethnic groups.

The fact that the attribution of negatively valenced but non-criminal traits was unrelated to SDP is quite interesting. Since these traits are negatively valenced, it suggests that dislike of Arabs is not a sufficient condition for support of the death penalty. Only the perception of Arabs as criminals significantly favors SDP. Thus, these results suggest that when people who are prejudiced toward outgroups in such a way that they are more likely to perceive them as engaging in criminal acts, they are also more likely to support the death penalty.

STUDY 2

The second study was designed to examine the relationships among SDP, prejudice, and RWA. Since in Study 1 the internal consistency of Adorno’s 6-item scale was found to be relatively low, we chose to use a recent French translation of Altemeyer’s (1988) Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale (Bougie and Perreault, 2005). The first objective of the present study was to test whether adjusting for ethnic prejudice would alter the relationship between RWA and SDP. Since the effect of authoritarianism on SDP was found to be relatively indirect in Study 1, it was important to replicate this finding with a better measure. Basing our study on the racist punitive bias hypothesis, we predicted that when the criminality dimension of prejudice towards Arabs was controlled, the relationship between ethnic prejudice and SDP on the one hand, and RWA and SDP on the other hand, would significantly decrease.

Method

Participants

One hundred and five students in psychology at the University of Blaise Pascal were recruited for the study. Their average age was 18.8. This sample was composed of 102 females and 3 males.

Procedure

The general procedure was the same as that used in Study 1.

Questionnaire

A single item was used to assess support for the death penalty. Participants were asked to rate, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which they were unsupportive (1) or supportive (7) of the death penalty.

The measure of prejudice toward “Arabs” was a 15-item scale developed on the basis of previous research (Dambrun, 2004). This scale includes seven negative statements and eight positive statements (e.g., “Arabs and French people have similar intellectual ability”; reverse coded). The content of the items is similar to that of other measures of prejudice such as Pettigrew and Meertens’s (1995) prejudice scale ($\alpha = 0.80$). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater prejudice. The 20-item version of Altemeyer’s (1988) RWA scale proposed by Bougie and Perrault (2005) was also used ($\alpha = 0.78$).

A single item was used to assess specific prejudice toward Arabs on the criminality dimension (i.e., criminality-based prejudice). Participants were asked to rate, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which they would agree (1) or disagree (7) with the following statement: “Criminality in France would be much lower if Arabs were sent back to their country of origin.”

Results

Correlations Between Various Variables

As predicted, support for the death penalty, ethnic prejudice, criminality-based prejudice, and RWA were all positively and significantly correlated (see Table III). Interestingly, after adjusting for RWA, the effect of ethnic prejudice on SDP remained significant ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.03$; $z = 1.80$, $p < 0.10$). On the other hand, when controlling for ethnic prejudice, the effect

Table III. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Support for the Death Penalty, Ethnic Prejudice, Criminality-Based Prejudice, and RWA (Study 2)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1—Support for the Death Penalty (SDP)	2.21	1.68	–			
2—Prejudice towards Arabs	2.84	0.76	0.25**	–		
3—Criminality-based prejudice	2.19	1.43	0.30**	0.66***	–	
4—RWA	2.81	0.62	0.19*	0.28**	0.33***	–

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $N = 105$.

of RWA on SDP became non-significant ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.19$; $z = 1.26$, $p > 0.10$).

Criminality-Based Prejudice, Ethnic Prejudice, and SDP

As implied by the racist punitive bias hypothesis, criminality-based prejudice significantly mediated the effect of ethnic prejudice on SDP ($z = 1.96$, $p < 0.05$; see Fig. 2a). Controlling for criminality-based prejudice, the effect of ethnic prejudice on SDP disappeared ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.44$). However, when controlling for ethnic prejudice, the effect of criminality-based prejudice on SDP remained marginally significant ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.06$; $z < 1$). We found no support for the reverse model (see Fig. 2b).

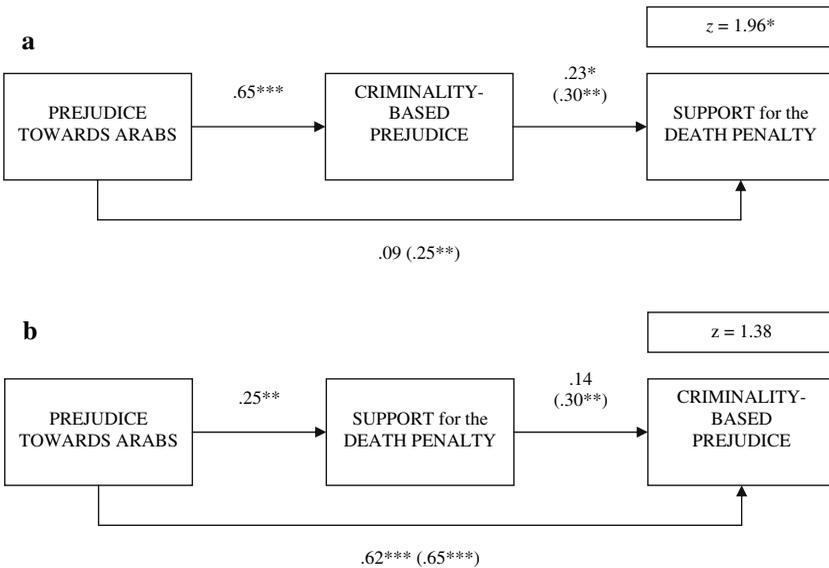


Fig. 2. Criminality-based prejudice as a mediator of the effect of prejudice towards Arabs on support for the death penalty (Study 2).

Criminality-Based Prejudice, RWA, and SDP

As predicted, after controlling for criminality-based prejudice, the effect of RWA on SDP disappeared ($\beta = 0.10, p > 0.30$). However, after adjusting for RWA, the effect of criminality-based prejudice on SDP remained significant ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.009; z = 1$). The z test indicated significant mediation ($z = 2.2, p < 0.01$; see Fig. 3a). Again, we found no support for the reverse model (see Fig. 3b).

Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, the effect of authoritarianism on support for the death penalty seems to be relatively indirect. Controlling for ethnic prejudice, the relationship between SDP and Right-Wing Authoritarianism vanishes. This result confirms those obtained by Soss *et al.* (2003) in another intergroup context and strongly suggests that RWA does not explain the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty. These results provide strong support for the racist punitive bias hypothesis. Specifically, prejudice on the criminality dimension significantly mediated

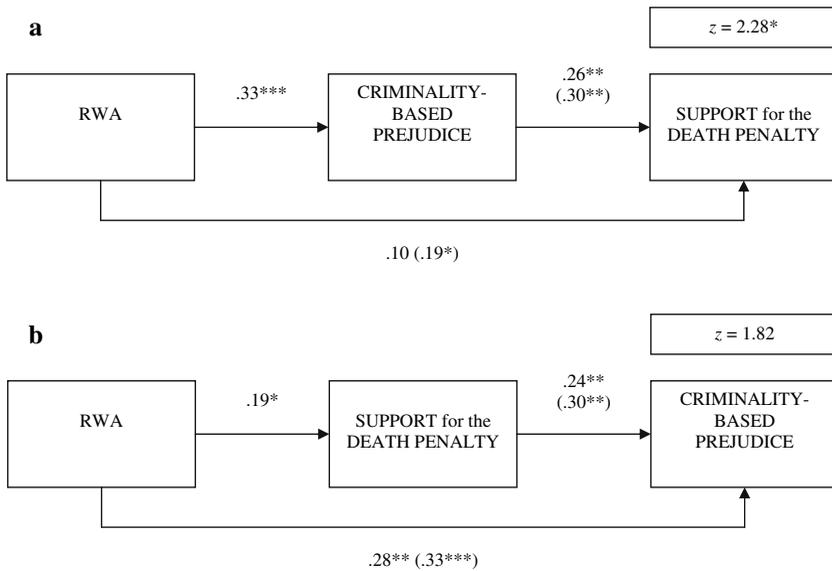


Fig. 3. Criminality-based prejudice as a mediator of the relationship between RWA and support for the death penalty (Study 2).

the effect of both ethnic prejudice and RWA on support for the death penalty. Thus, perception of criminality plays a key role in the relationship between racial attitudes and support for the death penalty, confirming that prejudiced people frame the issue of capital punishment in racial terms.

STUDY 3

This third study was designed to test two main hypotheses. On the basis of Studies 1 and 2, it seems reasonable to believe that when people are prejudiced towards Arabs and support the death penalty, in reality they are supporting the death penalty for the groups against whom they are prejudiced (i.e., Arabs). Thus, SDP for Arabs should mediate the relationship between prejudice towards Arabs and general support for the death penalty. Since prejudice on the criminality dimension is an underlying process, it should mediate the effect of ethnic prejudice on SDP for Arabs. Thus, the racist punitive bias leads us to propose a model in which: (a) specific prejudice toward Arabs on the criminality dimension should mediate the effect of general prejudice toward Arabs on specific SDP for Arabs; and (b) specific SDP for Arabs should mediate the effect of criminality-based prejudice on general SDP (i.e., general prejudice towards Arabs → criminality-based prejudice → SDP for Arabs → general SDP). Path analysis was used to examine the validity of this model.

The second hypothesis was derived from Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Specifically, SDT suggests that because both prejudice towards Arabs and SDP are hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths, their relationship should be largely explained by social dominance orientation (SDO). That is, once SDO is statistically controlled, the relationship between prejudice towards Arabs and SDP will be significantly reduced.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and fifty-nine students in psychology at the University of Blaise Pascal were recruited for the study. Their average age was 20.7. The sample was composed of 245 females and 14 males.

Procedure

The same procedure used in Studies 1 and 2 was followed, except that participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire at the beginning of a lecture.

Questionnaire

All measures used 7-point rating scales. As in the previous studies, a single item was used to assess general support for the death penalty. Participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they were unsupportive (1) or supportive (7) of the death penalty. The same methodology was used in assessing death penalty support for “Arabs”. Participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they were unsupportive (1) or supportive (7) toward the death penalty for “Arabs” who were responsible for a crime.

The measure of prejudice towards “Arabs” was a 7-item scale developed on the basis of previous research (Dambrun *et al.*, 2002). This scale includes four positive statements (e.g., “Arabs and French have equivalent intellectual capacities”; reverse coded) and three negative statements (e.g., “French are genetically superior to Arabs”). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater blatant prejudice ($\alpha = 0.66$).

As in Study 2, a single item was used to assess specific prejudice toward Arabs on the criminality dimension. Participants were asked to rate, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which they would agree (1) or disagree (7) with the following statement: “Criminality in France would be much lower if Arabs were sent back to their country of origin.”

Finally, we included the French version of the Social Dominance Orientation Scale (16 items; Duarte, Dambrun and Guimond, 2004) developed by Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994). Eight items indicate a favorable orientation toward group dominance (e.g., “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups at the bottom”) and eight items indicate a favorable orientation toward social equality (e.g., “Group equality should be our ideal”; reverse coded). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater social dominance orientation ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Results

Correlations Between Various Variables

As Table IV shows, general prejudice toward Arabs, criminality-based prejudice, SDP for Arabs, general SDP, and SDO were all positively and significantly correlated.

Criminality-Based Prejudice and SDP for Arabs as two Consecutive Mediators

According to the racist punitive bias hypothesis, two consecutive psychological processes should mediate the effect of racial prejudice on support

Table IV. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Support for the Death Penalty and Various Dependent Measures (Study 3)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1—SDP	2.4	1.72	—			
2—Prejudice towards “Arabs”	1.8	0.73	0.31***	—		
3—Criminality-based prejudice	2.1	1.35	0.36***	0.59***	—	
4—SDP for “Arabs”	2.5	2	0.77***	0.29***	0.37***	—
5—SDO	2.1	0.85	0.37***	0.45***	0.34***	0.26***

Note. *** $p < 0.001$; $N = 259$.

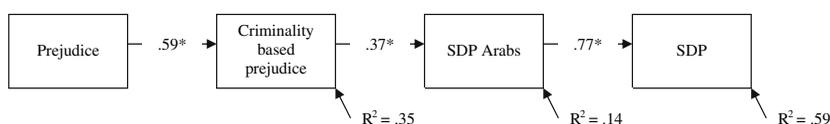


Fig. 4. Path analysis. Criminality-based prejudice, and SDP for “Arabs” as two consecutive mediators of the effect of general prejudice towards “Arabs” on general support for the death penalty (Study 3). Note: $X^2 = 9.32$, $p < .03$; $NFI = .976$, $NNFI = .967$, $CFI = .983$, $RMSEA = .09$; * $p < .001$; $N = 259$; Prejudice = General prejudice toward “Arabs”; SDP “Arabs” = Support for the Death Penalty for “Arabs”; SDP = Support for the Death Penalty.

for the death penalty, namely: (a) criminality-based prejudice and (b) SDP for Arabs, higher perception of criminality-based prejudice producing greater support for the death penalty for Arabs. We test the validity of this model by using path analysis (EQS, Bentler and Hu, 1995). Our predicted model (see Fig. 4) had a good fit with the observed covariance. The chi-square value was low ($X^2(3) = 9.32$, $p < 0.03$), and the various indices² were found to be satisfactory ($NFI = 0.976$; $NNFI = 0.967$; $CFI = 0.983$; $RMSEA = 0.09$). This model accounted for a relatively high percentage of the variance in SDP: 59%. As expected, the link between ethnic prejudice and general support for the death penalty was not significant ($\beta = 0.08$). The relationship between ethnic prejudice and SDP for Arabs was no longer significant when criminality-based prejudice was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.11$), supporting the mediating role of criminality-based prejudice and SDP for Arabs. Additionally, the relationship between criminality-based prejudice and general SDP became non-significant when SDP for Arabs was statistically controlled ($\beta = 0.05$). Further validation for our model rests in the fact that we did not find better support for alternative models (see Table V).

²Model fit was assessed with several fit indices: Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root-Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Criteria for acceptable model fit include NFI, NNFI, and CFI values above 0.90 and RMSEA value below 0.08.

Table V. Comparisons Between Predicted and Alternative Models (Study 3)

	χ^2 (ddl = 3)	NFI	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA
<i>Predicted model</i>					
Prejudice → Criminality → SDP Arabs → SDP	9.32*	0.976	0.967	0.983	0.109
<i>Alternative models</i>					
1. Prejudice → Criminality → SDP → SDP Arabs	11.05**	0.971	0.958	0.979	0.102
2. Prejudice → SDP Arabs → Criminality → SDP	289.82***	0.249	-0.509	0.246	0.609
2. Prejudice → SDP Arabs → SDP → Criminality	98.80***	0.744	0.496	0.748	0.352
4. Prejudice → SDP → SDP Arabs → Criminality	92.58***	0.760	0.529	0.764	0.340
5. Prejudice → SDP → Criminality → SDP Arabs	285.40***	0.261	-0.484	0.257	0.604

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; $N = 259$. Prejudice = General prejudice toward Arabs; Criminality = Criminality-based prejudice; SDP Arabs = Support for the death penalty for Arabs; SDP = Support for the death penalty.

SDO

According to social dominance theory, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is supposed to account, at least partly, for the relationship between ethnic prejudice and support for the death penalty. When we controlled for SDO, the relationship between general prejudice and general support for the death penalty was significantly reduced; from 0.31 ($p < 0.001$) to 0.18 ($p < 0.005$; $z = 4.28$, $p < 0.01$). Interestingly, controlling for general prejudice, the relationship between SDO and SDP is also significantly reduced; from 0.37 ($p < 0.001$) to 0.29 ($p < 0.001$; $z = 2.67$, $p < 0.01$). The EQS model, derived from social dominance theory (with parts between SDO and prejudice, and between SDO and support for the death penalty) showed a good fit with the observed covariance. The chi-square value was low ($\chi^2(1) = 8.24$, $p < 0.004$), and most of the various indices³ were adequate (NFI = 0.922; NNFI = 0.788; CFI = 0.928; RMSEA = 0.16). A comparison between this model and the one derived from the racist punitive bias hypothesis (see above) showed no significant difference in term of chi-square (diff $\chi^2 = 1.08$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.10$). However, the various indices of fitness were found to be better when the racist punitive bias model was used.

Integrative Model

The integrative model presented in Fig. 5 has a good fit with the observed covariance. The chi-square value was not significant ($\chi^2(5) = 10.41$, $p > 0.064$), and the various indices were satisfactory (NFI = 0.978;

³Model fit was assessed with several fit indices: Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root-Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Criteria for acceptable model fit include NFI, NNFI, and CFI values above 0.90 and RMSEA value below 0.08.

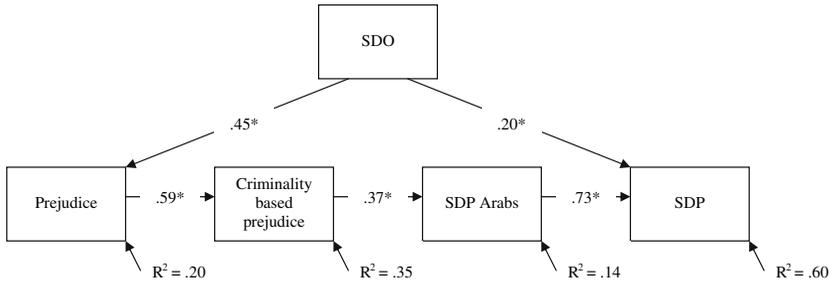


Fig. 5. Path analysis. Integrative model (Study 3). *Note:* $\chi^2 = 10.41$, $p > .064$; $NFI = .978$, $NNFI = .976$, $CFI = .988$, $RMSEA = .065$; * $p < .001$; $N = 259$; Prejudice = Prejudice toward “Arabs”; SDP “Arabs” = Support for the Death Penalty for “Arabs”; SDP = Support for the Death Penalty; SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

NNFI = 0.976; CFI = 0.988; RMSEA = 0.065). This model accounted for a relatively high percentage of the variance in SDP: 60%. As expected, the link between ethnic prejudice and general support for the death penalty was not significant ($\beta = 0.01$). According to this model, prejudice towards Arabs leads to the perception that Arabs are often criminals, favoring support for severe sanctions against them such as the death penalty and inducing prejudiced people to support the death penalty in general. Finally, because high SDO people are high in both prejudice and support for the death penalty, adjusting for SDO significantly reduces the relationship between prejudice and support for the death penalty.

Discussion

As predicted, we find strong support for our model in which three processes explain the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. The general racist punitive bias hypothesis was confirmed. It appears that when racially prejudiced people support the death penalty, it reflects their motive to punish racial minorities who are perceived to be criminals (Arabs in our case). Thus, the general relationship between racial prejudice and general SDP seems to mask a more specific relationship between a definite kind of racial prejudice and specific support for the death penalty. The relationship between racial prejudice and SDP is fully accounted for by both criminality-based prejudice and specific SDP for Arabs. The order of our three-step model was confirmed by ancillary analyses. First, general prejudice leads to the perception that Arabs are often criminals (step one). Second, this criminality-based prejudice favors specific punishment through SDP for Arabs (step 2). Finally, specific SDP leads to general SDP (step 3).

In line with Social Dominance Theory, controlling for SDO, the relationship between prejudice and SDP is substantially reduced but still significant. This means that an SDO explanation is not sufficient to entirely explain the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. The present results replicate previous studies that showed a significant relationship between SDO and SDP (see Pratto and al., 1994). They also confirm the theoretical classification of both prejudice and SDP as hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). However, it seems that complex dynamics not involved in SDT can also affect the relationship between these two types of hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies. Thus, while the SDT approach appears to be valuable, it also incomplete.

However, as predicted, once SDO was added to the model in which both criminality-based prejudice and SDP for Arabs were already included, the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP vanished; from 0.08 to 0.01. These results seem to suggest that these variables reflect two relatively independent processes, both of which account for the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main objective of this series of studies was to provide new insights concerning the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. While several studies had already shown that racially prejudiced people were more supportive of the death sentence (Aguirre *et al.*, 1993; Barkan *et al.*, 1994; Cohn *et al.*, 1991; Ford, 1997; Soss *et al.*, 2003; Stack, 2000), the processes underlying this relationship were relatively unknown. Results of the present research confirm the robustness of this relationship and also provide some explanation for it. As Soss *et al.* (2003) argued, without evidence regarding the ways in which race-based prejudice may be abridged or mediated, there remain good reasons for skepticism about the claim that racial attitudes solely underpin White peoples' support for the death penalty. The results of the present research represent a first step in answering this question.

Concerning the limitations of this study, because of their correlational nature, the present results need to be confirmed using an experimental design. For example, future research should examine the impact of priming criminality among a minority ethnic group on support for the death penalty. Including both RWA and SDO in the same study could provide further evidence for the racist punitive bias hypothesis. Nonetheless, we can be confident in the robustness of the racial punitive bias because the relationship between racial prejudice and support for the death penalty was not significantly accounted for by authoritarianism and only partially by SDO. Additionally, prejudice accounted for the relationship between social

dominance orientation and SDP. Regarding the external validity of our results, since only students served as participants (with a very large majority of them female), the present research should be replicated with a more representative sample. Nonetheless, the present set of studies represents significant progress in understanding the factors underlying the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP.

Among the three theories we used in order to explain the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP, we found support for both the “racist punitive bias” and the social dominance approaches, with only moderate support for the authoritarian personality approach. The three studies strongly suggest that one of the reasons why racially prejudiced people are more supportive of capital punishment is because they frame the issue in racial terms. They support the death penalty in order to punish members of ethnic minorities, whom they tend to perceive as being criminals. The attribution of criminal traits to Arabs was found to be related to SDP, while the attribution of negative but non-criminal traits was not. Furthermore, in studies 2 and 3, criminality-based prejudice significantly mediated the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. Thus, the criminality dimension seems particularly relevant in explaining White people’s (especially White women’s) support for the death penalty. Soss *et al.* (2003) have similarly found that contextual factors such as higher murder rates among a group significantly enhanced support for the death penalty.

As previously noted, we also found support for the social dominance based explanation derived from SDT (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). In the third study, SDO was found to explain a relatively small but significant part of the variance in the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP. Thus, while SDT does not entirely explain the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP, it does provide a significant contribution. This was not the case when French translations of authoritarian personality scales were used as variables. The relationship between authoritarianism and support for the death penalty was significant but moderate in terms of effect size (from 0.036 to 0.044). Authoritarianism did not significantly account for the relationship between racial prejudice and SDP.

In sum, the results of the present studies are consistent with those of Soss *et al.* (2003), who demonstrated that out of more than 15 variables, racial prejudice emerged as the strongest predictor of Whites’ support for the death penalty in the United States. Even in different cultural contexts, racial prejudice is a robust predictor of SDP. Thus, the determinant role of racism in support for the death penalty cannot be ignored. To the extent that the imposition of death sentences reflects racial disparities and is underlined by racist ideologies, representatives of the justice system should reevaluate the legitimacy of capital punishment.

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