The Role of Intuition in Expressing Support for Harsh Criminal Justice Policy

Abstract

Despite being largely ineffective in producing long term reductions in crime, harsh criminal justice policies receive continuing high levels of public support. This study tests the hypotheses that (i) punitive intuitions contribute to expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy, and that (ii) universal intergroup dynamics contribute to punitive intuitions. Cross-sectional and longitudinal data were collected among university students in the U.K. (N=60) and Canada (N=68) to determine the association between intuitive decisions to punish harshly and explicit support for harsh criminal justice policy. The results of multiple linear regression models suggest that a greater proportion of harsh intuitive punitive decisions (i.e., imposing a prison versus non-prison sentence) was positively and significantly associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policy (e.g., supporting the use of stiff sentences). However, this association was only partly consistent with intergroup dynamics, with ideological preferences also contributing to support for harsh criminal justice policies. Punitive intuitions, a form of rapid or automatic process tied to universal intergroup dynamics and political ideology, contribute to expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy. The findings are discussed in terms of implications for measuring public support for harsh criminal justice policy, and with regards to current social, cultural and political contexts.

Introduction

Evidence suggests that harsh criminal justice policies fail to meet many of their crime deterrence or rehabilitation goals (Doob & Webster, 2003; Tonry, 2017). Despite the limited effectiveness of severe sanctions in reducing crime, and the substantial social and economic costs associated with such practices (Davis, 2011; Hulsman & De Celis, 1982; Mathiesen, 2005; Tonry, 2017), public support for such policies and practices has been identified as a resounding factor contributing to punitive trends (Tonry, 1999; Useem, Liedka, & Piehl, 2003). Indeed, since the 1970s, various countries (e.g., United States, United Kingdom) have witnessed rising incarceration rates against a backdrop of declining crime rates (Doob, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Tonry, 1999; Webster & Doob, 2015; Weiss & MacKenzie, 2010).

Since the 1990s there is a growing interest in how an intuitive desire to punish, akin to an emotional response, may come to shape sustained public punitiveness (Robinson & Darley, 2007; Silver, 2017). Indeed, in the past 20 years there has been a surge in empirical and theoretical criminological works arguing that more attention should be paid to emotion in crime and punishment (Canton, 2015; Cassese & Weber, 2011; Côté-Lussier, 2013; Côté-Lussier & David, 2022; De Haan & Loader, 2002; Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Kort-Butler & Ray, 2019; Persak, 2019). Yet, links drawn between intuitive punitiveness (i.e., rapid, effortless, strong desires to punish) and public punitiveness (e.g., explicit support for harsh criminal justice policy) rely almost exclusively on theoretical propositions that public support for harsh criminal justice policy likely results from non-reasoned processes (e.g., emotion, heuristics, broader cultural and social processes). Recent research has demonstrated that intuitive processes (i.e., rapid or automatic judgments) contribute to the formation of intuitive punitive decisions (Côté-Lussier &

David, 2022), but research has yet to empirically establish that intuitive punitiveness underlies public support for harsh criminal justice policy.

There is therefore a call for research that moves beyond the traditional macro-sociological and methodological boundaries of "punishment and society" studies (Hannah-Moffat & Lynch, 2012). By measuring intuitive punitiveness and assessing its relation with public punitiveness, a more accurate understanding of public support for harsh criminal justice policy can be achieved. Such fundamental research on intuitive punitiveness must adopt an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on theories on cultural, socio-political and psychological processes that may reflect, and feed into, intuitive punitiveness. Moreover, such research must use a methodological approach that allows for the measurement of very rapid intuitive punitive decisions or preferences.

The present study takes seriously the hypothesis that public opinion surveys, which rely on broad attitudinal measures, likely elicit intuitive punitive responses (Robinson & Darley, 2007). Following work by Robinson and Darley (2007), intuitive punitiveness is defined here as a judgment that is arrived at quickly, even by people with little experience or information, and that is held with strong feelings of certainty. The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate that punitive intuitions (i.e., rapid decisions to punish criminalized individuals harshly) underlie support for harsh criminal justice policy (e.g., believing that norm and law violations should be punished as severely as possible). Both measures of punitiveness focus on the use of harsh sentences such as prison. Indeed, in most countries, prison presents itself as the most severe form of punishment available to lawmakers (Davis, 2003; Foucault, 1975; Leclerc & Tremblay, 2008; Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994). Because evidence suggests that the reasons behind intuitive judgments are generally inaccessible (Kruglanski & Gigerenzer, 2011), a second objective is to shed some light on the mechanisms shaping intuitive punitiveness. The study therefore uses an

experimental design to capture how intergroup dynamics shape punitive intuitions, and takes into account individual-level variation in ideology (e.g., Right-Wing Authoritarianism). The analyses draw on cross-sectional and longitudinal data collected among university students in the U.K. and Canada, respectively, and adjust for individual-level sociodemographic differences (i.e., gender, age, racioethnic identity, socioeconomic status).

Public support for harsh criminal justice policy in a culture of control

Consistent widespread punitive practices and discourse are defining features of modern societies in the Global North. The social and economic costs of punishment have led to research investigating the aggregate significance of harsh criminal justice policies for defining features of social systems (e.g., poverty, health) (Western, 2006; Western & Muller, 2013). Garland (1990, 2004) contends that we must examine punishment in modern society through the lens of a fundamentally cultural phenomenon. Penal institutions, laws, policies, and practices are constructed within the wider cultural system and in turn reflect and communicate a "continuous, repetitive set of instructions as to how we should think about good and evil, normal and pathological, legitimate and illegitimate, order and disorder" (Garland, 1990, p. 252). This cultural system has evolved in the last few decades to become a culture of control with explicit notions of risk management at the forefront of criminal justice and social policies.

This cultural transformation implies changes in the deployment of the penal apparatus which takes on various forms. For instance, in response to this shift in penal culture a new relationship between concerned actors has emerged: public opinion and public approval have become paramount, and proposed responses to crime have become a critical political benchmark defining political parties and their ideology in the contest for governance (Loader & Sparks, 2016).

In this sense, no political party wants to be perceived as soft on crime (Webster & Doob, 2007, 2015; Zinger, 2016). Furthermore, politicians have become much more instructive, thus reducing the ability of penal practitioners to use professional discretion (Garland, 2004).

In the Global North, these trends have been most apparent in the U.S. and U.K., with Canada having been an exception to this trend (Doob, 2012; Webster & Doob, 2015). Research in the U.S. and U.K. provides empirical evidence of the effects of public opinion on penal practices (Enns, 2014; Jennings, Farrall, Gray, & Hay, 2017). In countries such as the U.S. and U.K., large nationally representative surveys suggest that a majority believes that courts are not harsh enough and that sentences are too lenient (Enns, 2014; Hough, Bradford, Jackson, & Roberts, 2013; Hough & Roberts, 2005; Ramirez, 2013; Sato & Hough, 2013), a trend which has withstood significant changes in penal and criminal contexts (e.g., abolition of the death penalty, growth of the prison population, decline in crime rates) (Garland, 1990, 2004; Tonry, 1999). Although punitive preferences are dynamic, complex, multifaceted and at times "mushy" (Cullen, Pealer, Fisher, Applegate, & Santana, 2013; Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Doob & Roberts, 1984; Ramirez, 2013), there is an overall trend of sustained public punitiveness. For instance, an aggregate measure of U.S. public support for criminal justice policies between 1951 and 2006 reveals a relatively consistent moderate to high level of public punitiveness (Ramirez, 2013).

In Canada, a recent normative shift toward "tough-on-crime" policies enacted by the most recent Canadian conservative government (2006 – 2015) may have steered the relative stability of incarceration trends in a new more punitive direction (Doob & Webster, 2015; Myers, 2017; Zinger, 2016). Some evidence suggests increased severity in punitive practices (e.g., more frequent but shorter custodial sentences) in Canada during this time period (David, Leclerc, & Johnson, 2023).

Public support for harsh criminal justice policy must therefore be understood in the context of this culture of control which permeates into the ways that penal institutions, laws, policies, and practices are organized. This culture of control likely reflects and feeds into an underlying intuition that criminals should or must be punished. Such a cultural phenomenon could help explain why, despite decreasing crime rates and growing incarceration rates, the public remains steadfast in their punitiveness. Loader (2009) argues that this persistent appetite for punishment is part of a contemporary social practice of excess and of consumer demands for security.

If intuitive punitiveness is akin to an appetite for punishment, a remaining question surrounds the "taste buds" influencing these intuitions. The argument is therefore that intuitive punitiveness is amenable to change, depending on socio-political, cultural and individual-level factors, but that the intuitive nature of punitiveness helps explain sustained public punitiveness independent of broader contextual factors. The following section looks toward intergroup relations as a framework for understanding intuitive punitiveness toward "criminals", as a social group, in the context of a culture of control.

Punitiveness in the context of intergroup relations

Cultural tropes and social structural factors can play a central role in defining how social groups are perceived and responded to. Changes in penal culture are associated with changes in how the public perceives criminalized people as a social group. Whereas between the 1950s and 1970s criminalized people were perceived as sick individuals that needed to be rehabilitated or rational people who could be deterred, they have subsequently been perceived as dangerous people who need to be neutralized (Garland, 2004; Phelps, 2011). Still, a common thread is the "othering" of criminalized individuals. Similarly, people think about penal sanctions as something far from their

reality and as something that happens to others (Davis, 2003). The willingness to support harsh criminal justice policy is easier when a social distance is maintained from those who face harsh punishment. Imprisonment is therefore conceptualized as a fate reserved for the "evildoers" (Davis, 2011).

This notion of criminalized persons as being fundamentally evil, cruel or callous is at the heart of stereotypes about criminalized people as a social group (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Côté-Lussier, 2016; Langworthy & Whitehead, 1986; Sargent, 2004; Tam, Au, & Leung, 2008). Positioning social groups in terms of how cold and callous they are is a defining feature of intergroup perception, and forms the basis of intergroup relations. Across cultures, social groups are situated along two fundamental dimensions of social perception: warmth and competence (Fiske, 2018). The positioning of groups along these dimensions results from social structural appraisals (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Competition between groups and differences in social status lead to inferences about a group's warmth and competence, respectively (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). A "warm" group is perceived as having good intent, and as being demarked by friendliness, helpfulness, and trustworthiness. A "competent" group is perceived as being capable of carrying out their intent, and as being demarked by intelligence, skillfulness, and efficacy. Changes in a group's actual or perceived social structural position leads to changes in perceived warmth and competence, although these universal principles are culturally variable (Cuddy et al., 2009).

A group's perceived warmth, for all intents and purposes, is the most important dimension of social perception for intergroup relations as it informs basic approach and avoidance behaviour. Briefly, social groups perceived as lacking warmth are likely to elicit, at one end of the spectrum, avoidance and exclusionary behaviours and, at the other extreme, attacking behaviours (Cuddy et

al., 2009). Comparatively, groups perceived as being highly warm are likely to elicit at one end of the spectrum cooperation, and at the other extreme, helping and protecting behaviours. Though perceptions of competence can also shape behaviours, this dimension is more central to passive behavioral tendencies (e.g., neglecting or associating with a group). Behavioural responses to social groups therefore follow variations in their perceived warmth and competence, though the former is more central in defining overall behavioural tendencies (Abele, Uchronski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008; Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Fiske et al., 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Wiggins, 1979). In particular, cross-cultural evidence suggests that a group's perceived lack of warmth contributes to negative emotions such as anger and contempt, which in turn are key in motivating or readying harmful behaviours toward the group (Becker & Asbrock, 2012; Bye & Herrebrøden, 2018; Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989)

Sociological theories of social statuses and social positioning suggest that social stereotypes are integrated into the collective imagination (Becker, 1963; Hughes, 1945). In particular, group threat theory posits that group positioning and competition (e.g., for political, economic and status resources) are the foundation of intergroup relations in the context of criminal punishment (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Behrens, Uggen, & Manza, 2003; Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; Jacobs, Carmichael, & Kent, 2005; King & Wheelock, 2007).

Taking into account theoretical and empirical work on the associations between social structure, competition and intergroup relations brings new light to intuitive public responses to "criminals" as a social group. Previous research demonstrates that criminalized people are assessed as being rivals for access to resources and power, and as having a fundamentally low social status, contributing to self-reported emotions of anger (Côté-Lussier, 2016). And while anger about crime is associated with expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy (Côté-Lussier, 2016;

Johnson, 2009), there is no evidence linking intuitive punitive dynamics to support for harsh criminal justice policy.

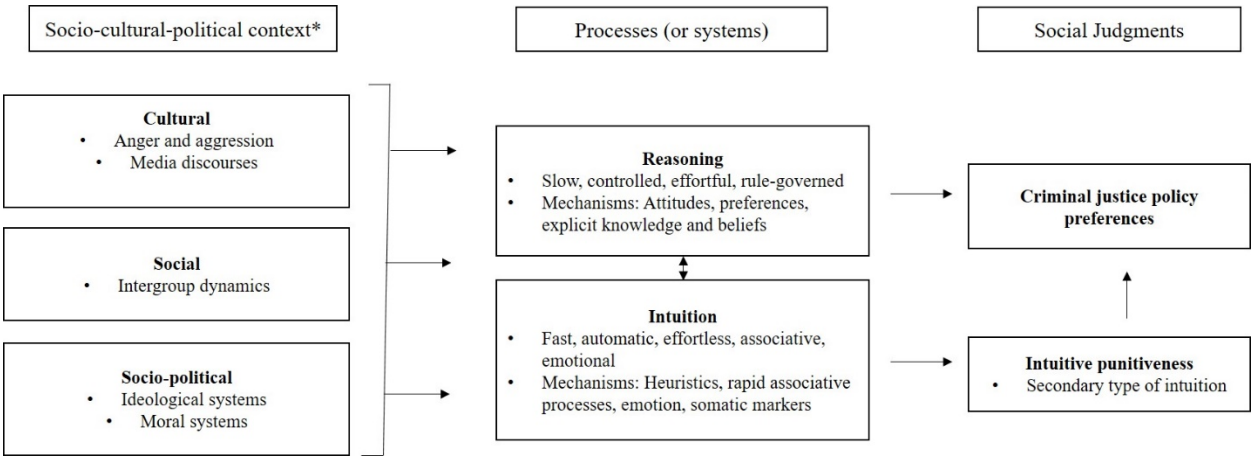
Intuitive punitiveness

It is against this backdrop of a culture of control and intergroup dynamics that it is possible to formulate hypotheses about the origins and nature of punitive intuitions, a type of social judgment. First, though, a brief discussion of the functioning of intuition as a process informing social judgment is necessary. Social judgments are generally understood as resulting from a dual-process model involving two interrelated processes (Kruglanski & Gigerenzer, 2011). The first process consists of slower controlled responses, while the second consists of more rapid automatic responses. The first implies a process of reasoning and assessment of one's own views, attitudes, morals, values, and the like. The second implies a rapid process that is more in line with rapid cognitive, emotional and somatic mechanisms and can be understood as a form of intuition (see Figure 1) (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011). In Kruglanski and Gigerenzer (2011)'s integrative framework for understanding intuitive and deliberative judgments, the socio-cultural-political context is understood as contributing to the acquisition of rules that guide heuristics and decision-making processes. These contextual factors are subsumed by acculturation and social development factors contributing to rule acquisition, which informs both reasoning and intuitive processes.

In the intuition literature, preferences with regards to criminal justice policy are seen as a secondary outcome of intuitions (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011). Punitive intuitions themselves are likely to follow cognitive and emotional processes that emanate from a culture of control which fosters an overall aggressive and angry response (Canton, 2015; Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012). In the context of intergroup relations, emotion has a central place in preceding and motivating cognition and behavior (Cuddy et al., 2007). Punitive intuitions may therefore partly emerge from

intergroup dynamics and related emotional reactions. Indeed, anger is frequently mobilized in political and media discourses (Cavender, 2004), potentially contributing to an intuitive angry

Fig. 1 Intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy in a dual-process model of social judgment



Note. * In Kruglanski & Gigerenzer's (2011) integrative framework for understanding intuitive and deliberative judgments, the socio-cultural-political context is understood as contributing to rule acquisition that guides heuristics and decision-making processes. These contextual factors are subsumed by acculturation and social development-based rule acquisition. References: Lapsley & Hill, 2008; Kruglanski & Gigerenzer, 2011; Robinson & Darley, 2007.

and punitive public response. Emotions related to intergroup phenomena tend to be better predictors of behaviors, self-reported discrimination, attitudes and social distance toward social groups, compared to cognitive evaluations or stereotypic beliefs (Kauff et al., 2017). However, punitive intuitions may also emerge from available heuristics linking criminalized people to negative intent. When forming rapid social judgments, bounded rationality may lead to satisficing, a decision-making strategy that allows actors to make decisions that are adequate, though not optimal, when slower rational processes are limited due to time constraints (Jacobs & Wright, 2010). Stereotypical perceptions of criminalized people, may therefore lead to rapid cognitive and/or emotional processes that contribute to punitive intuitions that are cohesive with intergroup dynamics.

Lastly, intuitive punitiveness could result from an overall socio-political orientation toward retributiveness (Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002). Underlying retributive punitive desires are consistently associated with ideological preferences that are at the heart of political preferences: Right Wing Authorianism (RWA) (i.e., a preference for authority, tradition and group loyalty) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (i.e., a preference for hierarchical systems, and a desire to be at the top of that hierarchical system) (McKee & Feather, 2008; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012). These ideological belief systems organize political opinions, with higher levels of RWA and SDO typically associated with a more right-wing politically conservative orientation (Jost, Federico & Napier, 2009) and evidence demonstrating that these two ideological systems predict left- or right-wing party preferences over time (Satherley, Sibley, & Osborne, 2021). In particular, RWA has been identified as a robust predictor of punitiveness (Côté-Lussier & Carmichael, 2018; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) and correlates positively with strong emotional reactions contributing to punitiveness (e.g., anger) (Skitka, Bauman, Aramovich, & Morgan, 2006). The aggressive component of RWA, in particular, is consistently correlated with retributive punitive tendencies (McKee & Feather, 2008; Okimoto et al., 2012). On the other hand, SDO is associated with expressing a lack of empathy toward outgroups, and in turn with punitiveness (Duckitt, 2009). However, evidence suggests that expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy is conceptually and empirically distinct from underlying ideological and moral systems (Côté-Lussier & Carmichael, 2018). Nevertheless, it is likely that widespread ideological preferences play a role in generating punitive intuitions.

Current study

The present study considers, first, whether punitive intuitions are predictive of support for harsh criminal justice policy, and second, whether this relation between punitive intuitions and support

for harsh criminal justice policy is partly attributable to intergroup dynamics. The present research is the first to simultaneously investigate the association between intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy, adopting an intergroup relations perspective. To date, empirical evidence demonstrates that punitive decisions and policy preferences can be changed, for instance, when individuals are given more time and information (Doob & Roberts, 1984; Ramirez, 2013). However, this only provides support for the functioning of reasoning-related processes in the context of punitive social judgments. Other studies provide evidence of intuitive punitiveness (Côté-Lussier, 2013), but do not establish an association with support for harsh criminal justice policy.

The present research will therefore use an experimental methodological approach that renders slower reasoning processes inaccessible, thus ensuring that intuitive processes alone are contributing to punitive decision-making. In order to measure punitive intuitions, the study (i) forces quick judgment, (ii) provides little information to guide judgment, and (iii) forces a strong judgment to be made (i.e., attributing a prison vs. nonprison sentence). Two central hypotheses are tested: (i) greater intuitive punitiveness will predict greater support for harsh criminal justice policy, and (ii) greater intuitive punitiveness that is cohesive with intergroup dynamics (i.e., a tendency to rapidly make more punitive decisions for stereotypical "criminals") will predict the greatest support for harsh criminal justice policy.

The hypotheses are first tested using cross-sectional data from the U.K.. However, because punitive intuitions and support for harsh criminal justice policy were obtained at the same time point, it is possible that individuals were primed to be more punitive when expressing policy preferences (e.g., due to semantic associations, or overriding criminal stereotypes) (Blair & Banaji, 1996). For this reason, we conducted a second longitudinal study in Canada where a 1-week delay

separated measures of punitive intuitions from measures of support for harsh criminal justice policy. The analyses therefore involve both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, providing a robust test of the hypotheses. The analyses adjust for a number of sociodemographic factors that may contribute to punitiveness (e.g., age, gender, racioethnic identity), as well as for ideological preferences (i.e., RWA, SDO).

Methodology

Data for this study were drawn from a sample of students from the United Kingdom and Canada. Student samples have several advantages for criminological research, including being easily accessible and allowing for cost and time-efficient data-collection, and reflecting the culture of the moment and the political actors of tomorrow. Nevertheless, there are limitations to using such samples, most notably in terms of generalizability. Student samples may not reflect the composition of society, whether in age, socioeconomic background, or social interests (Payne & Chappell, 2008). Still, as argued by Payne & Chappell (2008), students "are people too," meaning that certain fundamental social processes should be expected to emerge in both students and non-students. Intuition is a fundamental human process reflecting rapid cognitive, emotional and somatic mechanisms. It is unlikely that a different set of assumptions would need to emerge to address the particular population of university students to understand the role of punitive intuitions in the formation of criminal justice policy preferences.

U.K. data

Participants were university students (N = 60) from London, England, who were recruited from previous studies conducted on university campuses. Participants were invited to participate in a study on social attitudes and completed the study in a lab setting on a London university campus.

Participants received £10 for their participation. The study received ethics approval from the university's Research Ethics Committee.

Canada data

Participants were students (N = 82) at a Canadian university recruited through a research participation system that grants students credits in their classes in exchange for participating in research conducted at the university. Participants were invited to participate in a study about individuals' decisions to punish others. The decision to participate and the choice of the study were voluntary. We exclude participants who could not complete the study due to technical difficulties (i.e., computer malfunction) (N = 2) as well as participants who did not complete the second part of the study which took place at a later date (N = 12). The analytical sample therefore includes 68 participants. The study received ethics approval from the university's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity.

Procedure

The procedure used was identical to that used in previous research (Côté-Lussier, 2013). Briefly, participants were presented pictures of people said to have been convicted of either "minor assault, property theft, tax evasion, drug dealing, vandalism, drunk driving, fraud or burglary" and were asked to quickly decide whether to give each individual a prison or nonprison sentence. More severe crimes (e.g. murder, sexual assault, aggravated assault) were excluded in order to avoid systematic harsh sentencing decisions. Imposing a prison sentence would imply the typical prison sentence length for the type of offence committed (ranging from 2 months to 5 years in prison), whereas a non-prison sentence would also be typical for the type of offence committed (e.g.,

probation or community service). Participants were asked to make this decision as quickly as possible based on their gut reaction. A 1 second delay followed each decision, staggering the presentation of pictures. This methodological approach represents a within-subject (repeated measures) experimental design whereby each participant responded to two different types of stimuli, allowing for the measurement of the effect of picture type (i.e., stereotypical vs. atypical picture type) on rapid punitive decision-making within participants (see Figure 2). Before completing this task, participants completed a practice task (in which they identified fruits and vegetables, or men and women) to get them habituated to the set up and procedure.

Fig. 2 Within-subject experimental design for measuring intuitive punitiveness

Picture types	Stereotypical (low warmth) N = 26	Atypical (high warmth) N = 26
Presentation of picture types	13 blocks of 4 pictures: randomly selected 2 stereotypical and 2 atypical pictures (without replacement)	
Decision types	Prison vs. nonprison	
Total punitive decisions made by each participant	N = 52	
Total punitive decisions per study	U.K. N = 3,120	Canada N = 3,536

Note. For both picture types, possible offenses committed by pictured individuals are: minor assault, property theft, tax evasion, drug dealing, vandalism, drunk driving, fraud or burglary.

The pictured criminalized individuals were representative of a range of characteristics and dimensions. In a previous study conducted in the U.K., the pictures were rated by participants (N = 145) on various sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., perceived age, ethnicity, and social status), as well as interpersonal dimensions (e.g., perceived warmth, competency, remorsefulness). Based on these ratings, two groups were formed containing pictures reflecting “stereotypical criminals” (low perceived warmth) (N = 26) and “atypical criminals” (high perceived warmth) (N = 26). As in previous cross-cultural studies, perceived warmth was assessed based on the

following dimensions: warm, trustworthy, kind, likeable (Cuddy et al., 2009). These ratings were replicated in Canada (N = 146): pictures previously identified as being low warmth and high warmth differed significantly on the dimension of warmth (i.e., warm, trustworthy, kind, likeable) (t-test= 6.22, $p \leq 0.001$). This grouping therefore maximised the difference among pictures on the dimension of warmth, and minimized differences in other characteristics and dimensions (e.g., the groups do not significantly differ in perceived competence and social status). The 52 pictures were presented to participants in a structured randomized order (i.e., each block of 4 pictures contained 2 "stereotypical" and 2 "atypical" criminalized individuals) (see BLINDED & BLINDED, 2022, for picture examples).

Following the lab-based study, participants in the U.K. immediately completed a series of questionnaires to measure their support for harsh criminal justice policy, ideological preferences and sociodemographic features. Participants in Canada completed the same questionnaires immediately following the lab-based study, and one week later completed a follow-up study on their support for harsh criminal justice policy and other measures.

Measures

Support for harsh criminal justice policy. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements regarding criminal justice policies (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree a little, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree a little, or 5 = agree strongly): People who break the law should be given stiff sentences; The use of harsh punishment should be avoided whenever possible (reverse coded); Offences against laws and norms in our society should be punished as severely as possible (U.K.: $\alpha = 0.67$; Canada: $\alpha = 0.81$). A mean rating index of support for harsh criminal justice policy was computed. This variable was approximately normally distributed (Skewness = 0.01, Kurtosis = -0.61, W = 0.98, $p = 0.05$).

Intuitive punitiveness. Participants were asked to decide whether each pictured criminalized person should be given a prison or a non-prison sentence as quickly as possible based on their gut reaction. Punitive decisions were made in roughly 1.5 seconds (mean = 1.48). Each decision to impose a prison sentence was coded as 1, and a non-prison sentence was coded as 0. Each participant made 52 punishment decisions. A continuous level variable indicating the proportion of pictures that were given a prison sentence was derived for each participant (ranging from 0 to 1). Greater values therefore represent greater harsh intuitive punitiveness.

Cohesive and incohesive intuitive punitiveness. Two variables were derived to distinguish punitive intuitions in terms of whether they were cohesive or incohesive with intergroup dynamics. The proportion of prison sentences given to the "stereotypical" (low-warmth) group was taken to represent cohesive punitive intuitions, while the proportion of prison sentences given to the "atypical" (high-warmth) group was taken to represent incohesive punitive intuitions (both ranging from 0 to 1). Previous research has established that warmth is the key defining dimension of criminal stereotypes (Côté-Lussier, 2016), and that warmth more broadly is key in guiding intergroup relations (Becker & Asbrock, 2012). Greater values therefore represent greater cohesive and incohesive intuitive punitiveness.

Ideological preference. Ideological preference is assessed using two well established measures of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). The RWA measure is based on the work of Dunwoody, Hsiung, and Funke (2009). Participants rated the following statements from one to five (1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree a little, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree a little, or 5 = agree strongly): Strong force is necessary against threatening groups; Our leaders know what is best for us; Traditions are the foundation of a healthy society and should be respected; It is necessary to use force against people who are a threat to

authority; It would be better for society if more people followed social norms. A mean rating index of RWA was computed (U.K.: $\alpha = 0.65$; Canada: $\alpha = 0.73$). The SDO measure is adapted from the work of Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994). Using the same one to five scale, participants were asked to rate the following statements: It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom; To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups; If certain groups of people stayed in their place we would have fewer problems; Group equality should be our ideal; Increased social equality; We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups. The last three items were reverse coded, and a mean rating index of SDO was computed (U.K.: $\alpha = 0.69$; Canada: $\alpha = 0.72$). The items contained in these measures were previously shown to possess convergent and discriminant validity with one another (Dunwoody et al., 2009). These measures were previously found to be associated with support for harsh criminal justice policy (Côté-Lussier & Carmichael, 2018).

Sociodemographic characteristics. The study controls for basic sociodemographic characteristics commonly included in studies on punitiveness: age in years, gender (0 = women; 1 = men), social status (1 = working class, 2 = lower-middle class, 3 = middle class, 4 = upper-middle class, 5 = upper class) and racioethnic identity (including White, Black, Arab, Asian, South Asian, Hispanic) (Côté-Lussier & Carmichael, 2018; Gault & Sabini, 2000; King & Maruna, 2009; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). Given that all participants are students and most reported not being financially independent, participants were asked to assess their parents' socioeconomic status. Given the small proportion of individuals who self-identified as other than White or Black, a racialized identity will be compared to a non-racialized identity (i.e., White racioethnic identity).

Analytical strategy

As an initial step, univariate descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between all continuous-level variables are generated for the U.K. and Canada data. Next, multiple linear regression models assess whether a general tendency to demonstrate more intuitive punitiveness (i.e., making a greater proportion of prison decisions) is associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policy, adjusting for sociodemographic covariates. Separate models are estimated to assess whether the same effect is observed for intuitive punitive responses that are cohesive with intergroup dynamics and for those that are incohesive with intergroup dynamics. For the U.K. data, this represents a cross sectional analysis. For the Canada data, this represents a longitudinal analysis. Lastly, the models adjust for individual-level ideological preferences.

Except for intuitive punitiveness variables, ordered categorical variables in the multiple linear regression models were standardized as a way of providing a meaningful value of zero (i.e., average score).

Results

U.K. sample

Participants were university students (N = 60) from London, England. Only 25 men (43%) and 33 women (57%) reported demographic information; for these participants, mean age was 23.52 years (S.D. = 5.36, min. = 18, max. = 47). White students from a British and non-British background made up 43% of the sample. The remainder were Asian British (e.g., Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani) (22%), British African or Caribbean (5%), and were from other racioethnic categories (e.g., Chinese British and non-British mixed or other) (30%). In terms of social class, 34% reported being from the working class or lower middle class, 42% from the middle class, and 24% from upper middle and upper classes.

Canada sample

Participants were university students (N = 68) from Canada. The sample is mostly composed of women (N = 54; 81%) with only 19% of participants identifying as men (N = 13). One participant omitted gender information. Participants were young adults, with an average age of 19.12 years old (S.D. = 1.70; min. = 17; max. = 27). Overall, 43% of participants were White, 24% were Black and 33% were from other racioethnic groups (e.g., Arab, Asian, South Asian and Hispanic). In terms of social class, 18% reported being from the working class or lower middle class, 35% from the middle class, and 47% from upper middle and upper classes.

[Table 1]

[Table 2]

Intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy

Descriptive analyses suggest that participants in the U.K. expressed statistically significantly greater support for harsh criminal justice policy compared to their Canadian counterparts (U.K. mean = 2.97; Canada mean = 2.60, $p \leq 0.05$) (see Table 1). However, intuitive punitiveness was comparable between the U.K. and Canada. Moreover, individuals in the U.K. and Canada demonstrated intuitive punitiveness that was cohesive with intergroup dynamics. Specifically, "stereotypical" criminalized individuals were given harsh sentences in the majority of cases (UK: 64%; Canada: 63%), whereas "atypical" criminalized individuals were given harsh sentences in the minority of cases (U.K.: 45%; Canada: 45%). On average, participants in the U.K. took 1.62 seconds to make punitive decisions (median = 1.28, min. = 0.14, max. = 14.46). In Canada, participants took on average 1.35 seconds to make punitive decisions (median = 1.10, min. = 0.30, max. = 98.44). The rapidity of these punitive decisions suggests the methodology was successful in allowing individuals to make rapid decisions with little information, indicating intuitive as opposed to reasoned processes.

Correlations between forms of intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy were generally consistent for the U.K. and Canada, although correlations were slightly stronger in Canada (see Table 2).

U.K. cross-sectional study of intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy

The results of a multiple linear regression model for the U.K data suggest that greater overall intuitive punitiveness was associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policy (Model 1: $\beta = 1.17$; S.E. = 0.49; $p \leq 0.05$), adjusting for gender, age, socioeconomic status and racioethnic group (see Table 3). Adjusting for the same covariates, intuitive punitiveness that was cohesive with intergroup dynamics was comparatively more strongly associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policies (Model 2: $\beta = 1.20$; S.E. = 0.48; $p \leq 0.05$). Incohesive intuitive punitiveness was comparatively more weakly associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policies (Model 3: $\beta = 0.93$; S.E. = 0.45; $p \leq 0.05$).

When introducing measures of ideological preferences (i.e., RWA and SDO), the effect size of the overall intuitive punitive response on support for harsh criminal justice policy was considerably reduced and the effect was no longer statistically significant (Model 4: $\beta = 0.74$; S.E. = 0.50; $p > 0.05$). There was no indication of multicollinearity for the final model (VIFs < 2).

Canada longitudinal study of intuitive punitiveness and support for harsh criminal justice policy

The results of a multiple linear regression model for the Canada data suggest that greater overall intuitive punitiveness at Time 1 was associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal

justice policies at Time 2 (Model 1: β = 1.75; S.E. = 0.59; $p \leq 0.01$), adjusting for gender, age, socioeconomic status and racioethnic group (see Table 4). Controlling for the same covariates, a similar association was observed with cohesive intuitive punitiveness (Model 2: β = 1.50; S.E. = 0.57; $p \leq 0.05$), although the effect size was relatively smaller. Incohesive intuitive punitiveness at Time 1 was also associated with support for harsh criminal justice policies at Time 2 (Model 3: β = 1.70; S.E. = 0.56; $p \leq 0.01$), with a slightly larger effect size than that for cohesive intuitive punitiveness.

When introducing measure of ideological preferences (i.e., RWA and SDO), the effect size of the overall intuitive punitive response was considerably reduced, and the effect was no longer statistically significant (Model 4: β = 0.71; S.E. = 0.58; $p > 0.05$). There was no indication of multicollinearity for the final model (VIFs < 2).

[Table 3]

[Table 4]

Robustness tests

A series of bivariate analyses were used to assess the associations between sociodemographic variables and support for harsh criminal justice policy. Regression models predicting support for harsh criminal justice policy were also estimated separately for sociodemographic variables, and for variables of interest. The results are consistent with those reported above (available upon request).

Discussion

The present study aimed, first, to provide empirical evidence of an association between an intuition to punish and expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy. The results provide evidence of

intuitive punitiveness: decisions to punish others were made in roughly 1.5 seconds, and were arrived at with relatively little information. As expected, the findings suggest that demonstrating particularly harsh intuitive punitiveness (i.e., a tendency of making quick and more punitive prison decisions) was associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policy (e.g., agreeing that offences against laws and norms in our society should be punished as severely as possible). This finding was supported by both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, based on data collected in two different countries of the Global North (the U.K. and Canada). The study therefore provides robust evidence of the role of rapid and readily accessible intuitive desires to punish others in generating support for broader harsh criminal justice policies. Moreover, the findings add to the body of research demonstrating that greater reliance on intuition is associated with harsher forms of moral judgment (Ward & King, 2018).

The second objective was to establish whether support for harsh criminal justice policy was partly explained by intuitive punitiveness that follows universal intergroup dynamics. The results suggest that individuals tended to demonstrate intuitive punitiveness that is cohesive with intergroup dynamics (i.e., demonstrating more intuitive punitiveness toward stereotypical low warmth criminalized individuals), and that demonstrating more cohesive intuitive punitiveness was associated with expressing greater support for harsh criminal justice policy. However, there was also evidence that incohesive intuitive punitiveness (i.e., demonstrating more intuitive punitiveness toward atypical criminalized individuals) was a predictor of support for harsh criminal justice policy, particularly in Canada. The findings therefore partly support previous findings demonstrating a functional link between intergroup dynamics linked to social structural inequalities and support for harsh criminal justice policy (Côté-Lussier, 2016). However, the findings also suggest that other processes are likely linking intuitive punitiveness to expressing

support for harsh criminal justice policy. For instance, it is possible that in contexts where limited information or time is available, a form of bounded rationality leads to greater punitive intuitions due to satisficing as a decision-making strategy (Jacobs & Wright, 2010)

In both the U.K. and Canada, the effect of overall intuitive punitiveness on support for harsh criminal justice policy was significantly weakened after adjusting for ideological preferences. Right Wing Authoritarianism was found to be particularly strongly associated with expressing support for harsh criminal justice policy in the U.K, while Social Dominance Orientation was more important in Canada. The results lend some credence to the idea that punitive preferences are in some respects expressive of a preference for authority and social hierarchies (Silver, 2017). There is indeed an overlap between authoritarian aggression and group-based dominance, both of which help explain preferences for policies that emphasize hostility and aggression (Womick, Rothmund, Azevedo, King, & Jost, 2019). Individuals who prefer authoritarian aggression and group-based dominance may therefore be indiscriminately more punitive: both in their intuitions and their attitudes. However, the results may also suggest that the emotion of anger, subsumed by the aggressive nature of these dimensions, may at times outweigh intergroup dynamics in explaining support for harsh criminal justice policy. In previous research, the aggression component of RWA has been shown to be particularly correlated with retributive punitive desires (McKee & Feather, 2008).

The evidence therefore suggests that support for harsh criminal justice policy is partly linked to punitive intuitions that follow intergroup dynamics, but also broader cultural and socio-political factors. The culture of control, the availability of heuristics linking crime and punishment (e.g., due to the accessibility of crime information and real-time reporting of crime) and the prevalence of emotions such as anger, may contribute to ideological preferences that foster

intuitive punitiveness and a political preference for harsh criminal justice policies. Standard measures of public support for harsh criminal justice policy likely elicit rapid intuitive preferences to punish others, based in part on strong cognitive and emotional mechanisms tied to intergroup dynamics, ideological preferences and a reigning culture of control. Ideological preferences might themselves be an indicator of cultural trends that foster anger and a cognitive risk management approach. Future research could, for instance, adjust for this culture of control by measuring media coverage of crime-related news and the importance of crime-related issues in the political landscape (e.g., political debates and proceedings, policy proposals). Nevertheless, research on measures of public support for harsh criminal justice policy should take into account the role of intuitive processes when drawing conclusions about public punitive preferences. Moreover, measures of public support for harsh criminal justice policy may benefit from adopting a measurement approach that minimizes the role of intuition, perhaps by forcing a slower, more reasoned response (e.g., by drawing attention to views, attitudes, morals, values, and the like) (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011; Roberts, 1992).

The study is limited in part due to the relatively small sample sizes, and non-representative composition of the samples. The U.K. and Canada data were based on samples of young adults with a slightly higher than average socioeconomic position. However, the objective of this study was to elucidate some of the processes that contribute to public support for harsh criminal justice policy, and not to derive population-level estimates of intuitive punitiveness and of support for harsh criminal justice policy. Sampling issues could also help explain some divergence in the U.K. and Canada results. The Canadian study included more women, Black individuals and individuals with a higher socioeconomic status. Gender differences in emotion may contribute to differences in policy preferences, with women demonstrating more empathy and less anger (Gault & Sabini,

2000). In the U.S., there is a noted racial divide between White and Black Americans in terms of punitiveness, with Black individuals being consistently less punitive (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Unnever & Cullen, 2007). This may explain the weaker association between cohesive punitive intuitions and support for harsh criminal justice policy in the Canada data. The research is also limited by its failure to directly assess the certainty with which individuals made their judgments. On the other hand, the study's strength was its capacity to force rapid judgments and provide very little information to guide these judgments. Future research might consider alternative approaches to measuring intuitive punitiveness (e.g., addressing the certainty component of intuitive processes), using a more representative sample and taking into account broader cultural and socio-political contexts.

It is also possible that the cross-sectional nature of the U.K. study led to a priming of intergroup dynamics and in turn to increased support for harsh criminal justice policy. In contrast, the longitudinal nature of the Canada study allowed individuals to return to a "baseline" prior to expressing support for criminal justice policy. The results of the longitudinal data may therefore provide evidence of a consistent and cohesive social positioning that leads to greater overall punitiveness, somewhat independent of intergroup dynamics.

Lastly, the research is limited in that it does not address another key component of public punitiveness: racism. In the U.S., the racial divide between White and Black Americans' punitiveness, and current punitive trends, is thought to reflect pervading racism (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Dunbar, 2020; Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2007). The overall framework of the present study couches punitive intuitions in intergroup dynamics, a framework that is in line with current understandings of group threat theory (Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; King & Wheelock, 2007). Indeed, Black American's social, economic and political position has

been linked to disproportionate punitiveness in terms of judicial decision-making and public support for crime control (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Behrens et al., 2003; Dunbar, 2020; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Jacobs et al., 2005; King & Wheelock, 2007). In this respect, punitive intuitions may also partly reflect underlying racism. On a related note, the overall significance of the models was at times marginal and the explanatory power was relatively modest: 8-33% of the variance in support for harsh criminal justice policy was explained. The findings should therefore be interpreted with caution, though they shed some light on the intuitive processes linking social, cultural and political factors to public punitiveness.

This research is the first to empirically demonstrate that punitive intuitions contribute to expressing support for harsh criminal justice policies. This mechanism may help explain sustained public support for detrimental and unsuccessful harsh criminal justice policies, and the relative stability of public punitiveness that is independent of criminal and penal contexts (e.g., decreasing crime rates). A cultural setting in which risk management, control and emotional rhetoric are at the forefront of political and media discourses, and in which security is commodified, is likely to foster and support this intuition to harshly punish norm violators and criminalized individuals. Moreover, a social setting demarked by growing social inequality (United Nations, 2020) is also likely to contribute to a sociopolitical context in which intergroup dynamics lead to particularly harsh punitive intuitions and preferences (Barry & Leonardsen, 2012; Côté-Lussier, 2016). By considering the role of intuition in shaping punitive preferences and the origins of these intuitions, a more accurate understanding of public support for harsh criminal justice policy can be achieved.

Statements and Declarations

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Table 1. U.K. and Canada Descriptive Statistics

	U.K.				Canada				Mean Comparison (T-Test)
	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	
Dependent Variable									
Support for harsh criminal justice policies	2.97	0.84	1.33	5.00	2.60	0.84	1.00	4.33	*
Sociodemographic Covariates									
Gender (1 = Men)	0.43		0.00	1.00	0.19		0.00	1.00	*
Age	23.52	5.36	18.00	47.00	19.12	1.70	17.00	27.00	***
White	0.43		0.00	1.00	0.43		0.00	1.00	
Black	0.05		0.00	1.00	0.24		0.00	1.00	**
Other Race/Ethnicity	0.52		0.00	1.00	0.33		0.00	1.00	*
Socioeconomic Status	2.81	1.16	1.00	5.00	3.32	0.95	1.00	5.00	**
Intuitive Punitive Responses									
Intuitive punitiveness	0.55	0.22	0.00	1.00	0.54	0.18	0.00	0.87	
Cohesive intuitive punitiveness	0.64	0.22	0.00	1.00	0.63	0.19	0.00	0.88	
Incohesive intuitive punitiveness	0.45	0.25	0.00	1.00	0.45	0.19	0.00	0.85	
Political Orientations									
Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)	2.92	0.79	1.20	5.00	2.85	0.64	1.80	4.40	
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	1.85	0.70	1.00	4.33	1.91	0.63	1.00	3.33	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 2. U.K. and Canada Correlations between Support for Harsh Criminal Justice Policy, Intuitive Punitiveness, and Ideology

	a		b		c		d		e	
United Kingdom										
a. Support Criminal Justice Policy										
b. Intuitive Punitiveness	0.34	**								
c. Cohesive Intuitive Punitiveness	0.34	**	0.94	***						
d. Incohesive Intuitive Punitiveness	0.31	*	0.95	***	0.80	***				
e. RWA	0.41	**	0.24		0.19		0.26	*		
f. SDO	0.18		0.19		0.19		0.29	*	0.27	*
Canada										
a. Support Criminal Justice Policy										
b. Intuitive Punitiveness	0.42	**								
c. Cohesive Intuitive Punitiveness	0.40	**	0.93	***						
d. Incohesive Intuitive Punitiveness	0.39	**	0.93	***	0.72	***				
e. RWA	0.50	***	0.40	**	0.37	**	0.38	**		
f. SDO	0.53	***	0.38	**	0.29	*	0.42	**	0.54	***

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 3. U.K. cross-sectional multiple linear regression models predicting support for harsh criminal justice policy

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.
Sociodemographic Covariates												
Gender	-0.22	0.22		-0.20	0.22		-0.22	0.22		-0.37	0.22	
Age	0.00	0.02		0.00	0.02		0.00	0.02		0.01	0.02	
Black	-0.11	0.49		-0.15	0.48		-0.08	0.49		-0.38	0.50	
Other - Race/Ethnicity	0.34	0.23		0.39	0.23		0.31	0.24		0.23	0.23	
Socioeconomic Status	-0.05	0.09		-0.04	0.09		-0.06	0.10		-0.06	0.09	
Intuitive Punitive Responses												
Intuitive Punitiveness	1.17	0.49	*							0.74	0.50	
Cohesive Intuitive Punitiveness				1.20	0.48	*						
Incohesive Intuitive Punitiveness							0.93	0.45	*			
Political Orientations												
Right-Wing Authoritarianism										0.35	0.14	*
Social Dominance Orientation										0.13	0.17	
Intercept	2.32	0.67		2.13	0.70		2.57	0.66		1.42	0.75	
N	58			58			58			57		
F-statistic	1.84			1.92			1.57			2.27		
Sig	0.11			0.10			0.17			0.04		
Adjusted R-Squared	0.08			0.09			0.06			0.15		

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

Note. Except for Intuitive Punitive Responses, all ordered categorical variables are standardized.

Table 4. Canada longitudinal multiple linear regression models predicting support for harsh criminal justice policy

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.
Sociodemographic Covariates												
Gender	-0.37	0.31		-0.34	0.31		-0.42	0.28		-0.50	0.28	
Age	-0.02	0.07		-0.03	0.07		-0.01	0.06		-0.02	0.06	
Black	-0.06	0.31		-0.06	0.32		-0.06	0.28		0.12	0.28	
Other - Race/Ethnicity	0.20	0.26		0.13	0.27		0.29	0.24		0.23	0.24	
Socioeconomic Status	0.04	0.12		0.03	0.12		0.06	0.11		0.00	0.11	
Intuitive Punitive Responses												
Intuitive Punitiveness	1.75	0.59	**							0.71	0.58	
Cohesive Intuitive Punitiveness				1.50	0.57	*						
Incohesive Intuitive Punitiveness							1.70	0.56	**			
Political Orientations												
Right-Wing Authoritarianism										0.32	0.20	
Social Dominance Orientation										0.50	0.19	*
Intercept	1.89	1.43		2.21	1.44		1.86	1.37		0.80	1.18	
N	51			51			51			50		
F-statistic	2.14			1.79			2.17			4.00		
Sig	0.07			0.12			0.06			0.00		
Adjusted R-Squared	0.12			0.09			0.12			0.33		

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

Note. Except for Intuitive Punitive Responses, all ordered categorical variables are standardized.