

Article

How Does Race Moderate the Effect of Religion Dimensions on Attitudes toward the Death Penalty?

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Abstract: We examined the moderating role of race on the relationship between religion and death penalty attitudes in the United States. We operationalized religion by distinguishing four dimensions: religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and denomination. Using 2018 General Social Survey data from 1054 adults, collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, we show that the impact of each dimension of religion varies across racial groups. Logistic Regression results showed that the likelihood of support for the death penalty was associated with religiosity, spirituality, belief in hell, being female, and being liberal. Adding race as an interaction term moderated the associations of religiosity and spirituality.

Keywords: religion; race; death penalty; religiosity; spirituality; denomination

1. Introduction

Capital punishment, in the United States, has been an accepted response to crime since the establishment of the Republic and remains a widespread practice across the land [1,2]. Public opinion plays an important role in the criminal justice system's use of capital punishment [3]. According to a 2019 Gallup report, about 56% of Americans favor the death penalty for a person convicted of murder [4]. However, as Ellsworth and Gross [5] explain, most proponents and opponents of the death penalty rely on emotional rather than rational grounds. Race and religion are important predictors in this regard. However, let us elucidate our definitions of race, ethnicity and religion before we further elaborate on their inter-relationships. First, with respect to race, following Edna Bonacich, we define race and ethnicity together: "Both terms refer to groups defined socially as sharing a common ancestry in which membership is therefore inherited or ascribed, whether or not members are currently physically or culturally distinctive" [6]. Concerning the categories of "black" and "white" races, the research, conducted in the United States, relied on the vernacular self-identification of the research subjects, without further analytical scrutiny. This is the standard practice in racial and ethnic surveys in the United States.

Secondly, with respect to the respondents' degree of belief and level of practice of their declared religion, the researchers relied on what the respondents reported rather than trying to gauge the sincerity or diligence of religious faith or practice. Scholars of race and religion have often discussed the relationship between the two in the history and culture of the United States, particularly with reference to slavery and its aftermath. The relationship between race and religion has, obviously, been contentious [7,8]. Race has a historically salient role in determining social relations in the U.S. [9]. Indeed, many people habitually view their environment through the prism of their racial identity and religious belief [10,11]. Rational Choice Theory marks a significant theoretical departure from the conventional views on these relationships [12].

Finally, with respect to the category of religion, our sociological definition of religion (as distinguished from psychological notion of faith) originates in Emile Durkheim's clas-



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sical statement: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” [13].

There is a sizable racial gap between Blacks’ and Whites’ views concerning the criminal justice system in general and capital punishment in particular [14,15]. A majority of African Americans oppose capital punishment, but a majority of Whites support it [4,16]. The important question is whether race and religion impact such attitudes independently or whether the two are inter-related and intertwined. Several studies have investigated the association of race and religion with attitudes toward the death penalty [16–18]. However, the existing studies have two major limitations. First, they consider religion as a race-neutral phenomenon. This means that they investigate the effect of religion on death penalty attitudes, oblivious to the ways in which individuals’ race may affect their religious beliefs. Second, they focus on one or two aspects of religion at the expense of others [18], thus reducing religion from a multidimensional phenomenon to a monolithic factor and failing to take into consideration exactly which dimensions of religion affects people’s interpretations and views of the death penalty. This study focuses on both race and religion to understand how people’s attitudes toward capital punishment vary across racial groups.

The present study also underlines the necessity of considering both racial and religious differences in legal or collective action concerning capital punishment. This means that the findings of this study can be helpful for policy-making purposes as well as for anti-death penalty movements.

1.1. Race and Capital Punishment

Race is an important determinant of attitudes concerning the death penalty in the United States. Historically, White Americans’ support for the death penalty has been about 60%, but African Americans’ support has remained lower than 40% [4]. It has been shown that this difference is rooted in divergent conceptualizations of capital punishment [18,19] Whites seem to subscribe to the “criminals vs. environment” assumption, while Blacks focus on inequalities inherent in the criminal justice system [20,21].

Racial disparity in support for the death penalty may also be related to different groups’ perceived interests [17,22]. Hence, Whites’ greater support for capital punishment is due to their perception of other racial groups as a social threat [18]. On the other hand, the racial injustice perception among Blacks predisposes them to oppose punitive measurements like the death penalty [14,21]. This greater perception of injustice among Blacks is due to their lack of legal and political power and their limited ability to prevent policies which tend to criminalize them [23]. Discrimination against Blacks by the criminal justice system has a long history in the U.S. and continues to our time. It is a verifiable fact that African Americans usually receive harsher penalties compared to other racial groups [18]. This awareness of discrimination within the criminal justice system leads African Americans to oppose harsh punitive measures such as capital punishment. Therefore, Blacks’ collective experience of “criminal justice injustices” shapes their interpretations and influences their attitudes toward capital punishment [21,24,25].

1.2. Race, Religion, and Capital Punishment

Religious beliefs make up an important portion of racial identity in American society [26,27]. This is especially so in the case of Black Christianity vs. White Christianity. Religion has always constituted a salient aspect of African Americans’ life and pattern of socialization [11,28]. According to the Pew Research report in 2018, 80% of African Americans consider religion an important component of their lives. This is 10% above Whites. This report also shows that, measured by several factors, Blacks are more religious compared to other racial groups in the U.S. [29]. Thus, religious identity is a distinguishing characteristic of African American life in the U.S. [30,31].

Cone [32] refers to the concept of “Black Liberation Theology” as an illustration of the modus operandi of the African American resistance against the racist constraints in

American society. The major goal of “Black Liberation Theology” is to emancipate Blacks, as an oppressed group, from various kinds of sociopolitical discrimination [33]. This ideology advocates an image of a supportive and protective divinity. Belief in a loving and forgiving God clearly contrasts with the vengeful reproving view of God. It is through this theological appeal to redemption rather than vengeance, that Blacks’ attitudes toward the death penalty have come to contrast with the Whites’ approach [32,33]. Cone demonstrates that Black churches have always opposed capital punishment as the harshest form of punishment that is used in a discriminatory fashion against African Americans in the U.S. criminal justice system.

Based on the above discussion, religion is not a race-neutral phenomenon, especially in the case of American society. Thus, it is necessary to consider the implications of religious beliefs when we investigate the relationship between religion and attitudes toward capital punishment. Many studies demonstrate that believing in a judgmental God is associated with supporting harsh punishments [34], while belief in a forgiving God discourages such measures [35]. The religious view that wrongdoers deserve punishment is more likely to find the death penalty a legitimate punishment for murderers, while a redemptive image of the God undermines its legitimacy. To sum up, the same religion may be invoked to advocate or resist capital punishment: a redemptive God disapproves of it while a vengeful God approves of it.

1.3. Dimensions of Religion

Based on the above discussion, we argue that religion is a complex construct several dimensions of which may have conflicting effects on people’s views toward the death penalty [36]. Each of the above dimensions may exert an independent impact on people’s punitive vs. redemptive tendencies and, consequently, their attitudes toward the death penalty. We operationalize religion through dividing it into four major dimensions: religiosity, spirituality, afterlife beliefs, and denomination.

Religiosity is an aspect of religion that influences peoples’ mindsets by linking them to a shared sacred identity [37]. It concerns believers’ practices, religious activities and self-identification. Participating in religious activities, whether individually (like praying) or collectively (like church attendance), affects peoples’ understanding of capital punishment. Due to the opposition of many religious organizations and religious leaders to capital punishment [38], we expect that higher religiosity would be associated with lower support for the death penalty. This negative association is expected to be greater among African Americans because of the “environmental” approach of Black churches toward crime, rendering them supportive of victims’ right in an unequal criminal justice system [30,31].

Spirituality is defined as an emotional connection with God or a supernatural power. During recent decades, a growing number of people have been identifying as spiritual rather than religious [39–41]. For the purpose of this paper, spirituality refers to any individual who identifies themselves as spiritual regardless of their belief or opposition to traditional forms of religiosity. Scholars have coined the phrase: “the rise of the ‘Nones’ to refer to the decline of denominational identification” [42]. Spirituals tend to cultivate a loving forgiving image of God, which would not approve draconian measures against criminals. Thus, we expect that spirituality will have a negative effect on support for capital punishment. Other studies have found that African Americans, also, have a loving image of God who works as a psychological succor that helps them overcome harassments of mainstream society [31]. This loving God is less likely to approve of harsh punishment of criminals. Thus, we expect higher spirituality to be associated with lower support for the death penalty among African Americans.

Another important dimension of religion that may shape attitudes toward capital punishment is “afterlife beliefs.” These beliefs imply that death cannot be the end of one’s life because life is not limited to this world. Afterlife concepts such as belief in heaven and hell play important roles in giving meaning to individuals’ lives and their conceptualizations of death. The concept of heaven refers to an eternal life in which an

individual can live in a state of permanent comfort and bliss. This concept leads individuals to believe in God as a source of redemption and reward. Those who hold such beliefs are less likely to approve harsh punishments such as the death penalty. This negative relationship between belief in heaven and support for the death penalty is expected to be stronger among African Americans as their conceptualization of afterlife is closer to the notion of heaven and boundless bliss provided by a forgiving God [43]. On the other hand, belief in hell is more congenial with a vengeful God who intervenes in the world and has prepared a divine system of punishment in the afterlife. We expect this concept to be positively associated with support for the death penalty. Other scholars have shown that African Americans are less likely than others to believe in hell because this concept is in contrast with their image of God [43]. Moreover, even those African Americans who believe in hell do not consider it as a place of torture and revenge against sinners and wrongdoers [33]. Thus, we expect higher belief in hell in this case to be unassociated with support for the death penalty.

Finally, in discussing the relationship between religion and attitudes toward the death penalty, it is also important to consider the role of religious denomination. Being affiliated with a specific religious denomination plays a key role in conjuring specific images of God and his attributes in the minds of the individuals. Such images can bolster punitive or redemptive aspect of religion and, consequently, one's approval or disapproval of capital punishment. Other studies have found that those who identify with a religious denomination are, on average, more likely than unaffiliated people to support the death penalty [38]. Several studies have demonstrated that Catholics are less supportive of capital punishment compared to other Christian groups [44,45]. Grasmick, Davenport, Chamlin and Bursik [46] show that mainline Protestants are less punitive in their attitudes of divinity than Evangelicals and other sects of Protestantism that are commonly known as literalists and fundamentalists. Moreover, African American churches usually hold a negative attitude toward capital punishment. Black churches have always played an important role in many aspects of African Americans' lives within by responding to their needs and providing them with a variety of social and individual support services. Although, during recent decades, the importance of affiliation has decreased among Evangelical and mainstream churches, this is not true of Black churches [47].

In addition to our focus on race and religion, we included controls for respondents' demographic characteristics of age, gender, education, and political view. Prior research suggests that age, gender, and education are important factors in studying opinions toward the death penalty [17,48]. Additionally, it is important to control for respondents' political views, given that research has found that Conservatives tend to be more in favor of capital punishment than Liberals [15].

Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that race increases the negative association of religiosity and support for capital punishment, race increases the negative association of spirituality and support for capital punishment, race increases the negative association of belief in heaven and support for capital punishment, and race decreases the positive association of belief in hell and support for capital punishment.

The goal of this research was to obtain an understanding of these interrelationships, using nationally representative data. That is why a quantitative approach was deemed as appropriate.

2. Methods & Materials

2.1. Participants

The present study uses data from the 2018 edition of the General Social Survey [49], a nationally representative attitudinal survey conducted every two years. The GSS data is collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Data are collected through face-to-face interviews, using computer-assisted data collection, with a nationally representative sample of adults ages 18 or older in American households. The GSS uses a system of rotating samples and questions. Every round involves a new sample,

which produces variety in the questions asked of the respondents. Furthermore, within a round, not all respondents receive the same questions. Although the original GSS sample size was 2348, this study restricted the sample to those who responded to the questions related to religious dimensions. We used listwise deletion to remove cases for variables with missing values. Therefore, the sample size of this study is 1054. Approximately 55% of the participants are female, and approximately 72% are white.

2.2. Measures

Support for the death penalty, the dependent variable, is based on asking respondents this question: "Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?" (1) Yes, (2) No. We transformed this variable into a dummy variable with support for the death penalty as the focal category. The mean for this variable was 0.59 with a standard deviation of 0.49. This means that 59% of our sample support using the death penalty and 41% oppose it.

Race, a nominal variable, consisted of three categories: White, Black, and Other races. The category of "other races" in the United States may include Asians, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders. We transformed it into three dummy variables with White as the reference category. Seventy-two percent of the sample was White. Blacks constituted 15% of the sample and "Others" comprised 11%.

Religiosity was three questions: self-assessed religious, religious activity, and attending religious services. Self-assessed religious was this: "Do you consider yourself a religious person?" The response choices are (1) Very religious, (2) Moderately religious, (3) Slightly religious, and (4) Not religious at all. This variable is reverse coded so that a higher score represents greater self-assessed religiosity. Attending religious services was this: "How often do you attend religious services?" This variable is measured by nine categories: (1) Never, (2) Less than once a year, (3) Once a year, (4) Several times a year, (5) Once a month, (6) 2–3 times a month, (7) Nearly every week, (8) Once a week, (9) More than once a week. *Religious activity* asked respondents "how often do you take part in the activities and organizations of a church or place of worship other than attending services?" We measured this variable by 9 categories from (1) Never, (2) Less than once a year, (3) About once or twice a year, (4) Several times a year, (5) About once a month, (6) 2–3 times a month, (7) Nearly every week, (8) Every week, (9) Several times a week. The religiosity index represents higher religiosity for respondents who have a higher score. The mean for this variable was 8.56 with a standard deviation of 4.18. The reliability coefficient was 0.796 which is a good level of reliability.

We measured spirituality using a variable that asked respondents: "To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? The responses are (1) Very spiritual, (2) Moderately spiritual, (3) Slightly spiritual, and (4) Not spiritual at all. This variable is reverse coded so that a higher score represents higher spirituality. The mean for this variable was 2.85 with a standard deviation of 0.98.

Three different variables measured respondents' afterlife beliefs. These variables come from questions that ask respondents the extent to which they believed in heaven and hell. All variables consisted of four categories: (1) Yes, definitely, (2) Yes, probably, (3) No, probably not, and (4) No, definitely not. They were reverse coded so that a higher score represents higher belief in heaven and hell. The mean for belief in heaven was 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.98. Moreover, the mean for belief in hell was 3.08 with a standard deviation of 1.11.

We included religious tradition to tap into the shared culture of denomination. Though not available in the standard GSS download, we used the adjusted, constructed RELTRAD variable. Unlike RELIG, RELTRAD breaks Protestants down into Evangelical, mainline Protestants, and Black Protestant to convey a more accurate description of faith. We used code provided by the University of Indiana, as recommended by Stetzer and Burge [50], to construct the variable. The religious tradition breakdown was as follows: mainline Protestants constituted 17% of the sample, Evangelicals 24%, Black Protestants 7%, Catholics

22%, Jewish 2%, Other faiths 8%, and Nonaffiliated 20%. We transformed this variable into seven dummy variables with mainline Protestants as the reference category.

Gender, Education, and Political View are used as control variables. We transformed Gender into a dummy variable with females as the focal category. Fifty-five percent of the sample was female. Education was a variable ranging from 0 years to more than 20 years. The mean for this variable was 13.73 with a standard deviation of 2.97. Finally, Political Views was a variable containing seven categories including extremely Liberal, Liberal, slightly Liberal, moderate middle of the road, slightly Conservative, Conservative, and extremely Conservative. This study combined the first three categories to create a dummy variable for Liberal. The dummy variable for Liberal was created because we wanted to compare two major political views with regard to their attitudes toward capital punishment. In our sample, 45% of the respondents identified themselves as Liberal. Descriptive statistics for all variables are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables (N = 1054).

Variable	Range	Mean	S.D.
Dependent Variable			
Support for the Death Penalty	0–1	0.59	0.49
Religious Variables			
Religiosity	2–20	8.56	4.18
Spirituality	1–4	2.85	0.98
Heaven	1–4	3.33	0.98
Hell			
Religious Denomination	1–4	3.08	1.11
Mainline Protestant (Reference)	0–1	0.49	0.50
Evangelical			
Black Protestant			
Catholic	0–1	0.21	0.41
No Religion	0–1	0.23	0.42
Other Religion			
Demographic Variables	0–1	0.05	0.22
Female	0–1	0.55	0.50
Liberal	0–1	0.45	0.50
Education	0–20	13.73	2.97
Race			
White	0–1	0.72	0.45
Black	0–1	16.37	0.37
Other Race	0–1	0.11	0.32

2.3. Procedure

Because our dependent variable is a dichotomous variable, we used Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) for conducting this analysis. Based on the GSS instructions for one-sample studies, this study used sampling weights (WTSSNR) to account for potential errors caused by the sample design. Moreover, we tested the data for multicollinearity and examined model fit statistics to see how well the statistical model meshed with a theoretical model. The average VIF score was 2.88, which is below the 5.0 cut off point [51]. Moreover, the maximum tolerance values were satisfactory [52]. Hence, following standard decision rules, we conclude that multicollinearity is not present in the data.

Because this study will investigate multifarious religious as well as racial attributes, we will utilize two regression models. The first includes different dimensions of religion—without considering the race interaction—and their association with attitudes toward capital punishment. This model demonstrates how each dimension of religion has a different association with individuals' attitudes toward the death penalty. The second model considers

dimensions of religion along with the interaction of race. This model explores how the association of each dimension of religion with capital punishment may be moderated based on individuals' race. In order to study race in this connection, we will use interaction terms between Black and four religious variables: religiosity, spirituality, belief in heaven, and belief in hell.

3. Results

The results of the regression analyses are in Table 2. Several religious dimensions and demographic variables are significant. Religiosity, one of the religious dimensions, was associated with support for the death penalty. A one-unit increase in religiosity decreased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 6% (OR = 0.94, $p \leq 0.01$). As Model 2 shows, adding the interaction of Black, a one-unit increase in religiosity decreased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 9% (OR = 0.91, $p \leq 0.05$). In other words, adding the interaction of race slightly increased the negative association of religiosity with support for the death penalty. These findings support our first hypothesis about the negative association of religiosity with support for the death penalty and the moderating role of race in increasing this negative association.

Table 2. Results from binary logistic regression on support for the death penalty.

	Model 1	Model 2
Variable	OR	OR
Religious Variables		
Religiosity	0.95 **	0.94 **
Religiosity \times Black		0.91 *
Spirituality	0.78 **	0.78 **
Spirituality \times Black		0.73 *
Heaven	1.05	1.05
Heaven \times Black		1.09
Hell	1.27 *	1.27 *
Hell \times Black		1.09
Religious Tradition		
Evangelical	0.73 *	0.71 *
Black Protestant	0.51	0.53
Catholic	0.41 **	0.40 **
Jew	0.87	0.86
No Religion	1.02	0.99
Other Religion	0.86	0.83
Demographic Controls		
Gender-Female	0.70 *	0.70 *
Liberal	0.44 ***	0.42 ***
Education	1.01	1.00
Race		
Black	0.54 **	0.30
Other Race	0.99	0.97
Constant	4.17 **	4.31 **
N	1054	1054
Log Likelihood	654.58	-653.94

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

Spirituality, the other religion dimension, was associated with support for the death penalty. A one-unit increase in *Spirituality* decreased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 22% (OR = 0.78, $p \leq 0.01$). Moreover, adding the interaction of Black, a one-unit increase in spirituality decreased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 27% (OR = 0.73, $p \leq 0.05$). This means that adding the interaction of race slightly increased the negative association of spirituality with support for the death penalty. These findings support our second hypothesis about the negative association of spirituality with support for the death penalty and the moderating role of race in increasing this negative association.

Regarding afterlife variables, this study found that belief in heaven did not have any significant association with support for the death penalty even after interacting with race. Thus, the third hypothesis cannot be supported. However, belief in hell had a positive association with support for the death penalty. A one-unit increase in belief in hell increased the likelihood of support for the death penalty by 27% (OR = 1.27, $p < 0.05$). Adding the interaction of black no association was found between belief in hell and the likelihood of support for the death penalty. This implies that the fourth hypothesis of this study is partially supported as belief in hell increases the likelihood of support for the death penalty, but race did not moderate this.

Among the denomination variables, the analysis found that the likelihood of support for the death penalty among mainline Protestants was different from Catholics and Evangelicals. As Table 2 shows, the likelihood of support for the death penalty among Catholics were lower than mainline Protestants (OR = 0.51, $p < 0.01$). However, the likelihood of support for the death penalty among Evangelicals was higher than mainline Protestants (OR = 0.73, $p < 0.05$). Finally, some control variables were associated with support for the death penalty. Females were on average 30% less likely than males to support the death penalty (OR = 0.70, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, compared to Conservatives, Liberals were on average 56% less likely to support the death penalty (OR = 0.44, $p < 0.001$). Finally, as our findings show, Blacks were on average 46% less likely than Whites to support for the death penalty (OR = 0.54, $p \leq 0.01$).

4. Conclusions

Despite numerous challenges by human right activists, a solid majority of Americans still support capital punishment [4]. Research shows that this support is based on mostly emotional rather than rational grounds [5,45]. This essay concentrates on two vital emotional wellsprings of Americans' attitudes toward capital punishment: race and religion. Using the data from the 2018 wave of the GSS, we conducted logistic regression analyses to test the above-mentioned hypotheses. As expected, higher religiosity was shown to be associated with lower support for the death penalty, if the religious organizations in question do not support capital punishment [50]. Additionally, African American churches, overall, convey more redemptive messages and are, consequently, less supportive of the death penalty.

Another aspect of religious mentality that has become important in the last few decades is spirituality. The distinctive characteristic of spirituality is its emphasis on a personal relationship with a loving and forgiving God. It should not be surprising, then, that we found a negative relationship between spirituality and the support for the death penalty. Moreover, when adding the interaction effect of the African American identity, the negative association of spirituality and the support for the death penalty is enhanced.

Remarkably, belief in heaven did not have an association with support for the death penalty. Belief in hell, on other hand, was associated with support for the death penalty. Moreover, adding the interaction of "Black" did not have any association with support for the death penalty in their case, which implies that African Americans are not affected by the punitive aspect of religion in their attitudes toward the death penalty. It is noteworthy that among all religious measures used in this study, belief in hell had the greatest association with the likelihood of support for the death penalty. One may reasonably conclude, then, that people's feelings toward a worldly punishment are intertwined with their view of divine punishment.

Finally, among religious tradition, Catholics, Evangelicals, and mainline Protestants had different levels of support toward the death penalty. The Evangelicals showed the greatest support. Catholics were less supportive, which could be attributed to opposition of the Catholic Church to this punishment. Mainline Protestants were least supportive.

The above results have several implications. First, religion may have a differential impact on death penalty attitudes for African Americans versus other racial groups. This implies that religion is not a race-neutral phenomenon, and in the case of attitudes toward

the death penalty, it is moderated by one's racial background [53]. Second, peoples' attitudes toward the death penalty are based on mostly emotional rather than rational states of mind. Third, dividing religion into four dimensions, we demonstrated that each dimension has an independent association with individuals' attitudes toward the death penalty. This underlines the importance of viewing religion as a complex and internally conflictual factor with divergent messages concerning a single conundrum such as the correctness of capital punishment. Fourth, the findings of this research have implications for policy making. Human rights activists and death penalty opponents have exerted sustained efforts to eliminate this punishment from the U.S. legal system to little avail. Our findings suggest that these activists would do well to recognize people's racial and religious sentiments in this regard.

Before concluding, we must admit the limitations of this study. First, due to the nature of the data, we were not able to study the attitudes of Latinx attitudes on capital punishment. Although they are categorized as an ethnicity, rather than a race, considering their mostly Catholic identification and their complaints concerning their treatment in the U.S. criminal justice system, they would be good candidates for consideration in this regard [43]. The second limitation of this study is the secondary nature of the data and the use of a simple measure in exploring attitudes toward the death penalty. Future studies can expand this topic by using different scenarios about death sentences. This strategy would provide a more nuanced understanding of public opinion toward the death penalty [54]. Finally, we did not have information on various denominations of Black churches. For example, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church is very different from more fundamentalist and charismatic churches. The GSS survey blurs the differences in this regard. Future studies on capital punishment can be designed to shed light on racial differences in attitudes toward capital punishment by showing how African Americans' experiences in different denominations affect their mindset toward this punishment.

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