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**Racial-Ethnic Differences in Punitiveness Among American Adults**

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SOC 4800H: Capstone

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### **Abstract**

It is believed that the punitive values of the United States have had a direct positive correlation with the mass incarceration rates experienced in the United States. Many studies have attempted to understand variation in punitiveness across social groups, and have found that there are consistent racial differences that exist. Past research mostly focused on differences between Black and White individuals, but none has included the analysis of those of Hispanic origin. Using pooled data from the 2014, 2016, and 2018 General Social Survey (N = 7,753), the current project examines racial/ethnic differences in punitiveness for White, Black, and Hispanic individuals controlling for highest level of education level and their gender, which has been measured by biological sex. Punitiveness has been measured by opinion on use of the death penalty and harshness of courts. It has been found that overall White individuals are more likely than Black and Hispanic individuals to be punitive, and these racial differences exist when controlling for education and gender. One exception is that Hispanic individuals with higher education are more likely to be punitive than their White counterparts. These results warrant further research into the effect higher education has on Hispanic individuals.

## **Introduction**

Within the criminal justice system, the topic of punishment tends to be controversial among the American public. Opinions on the way criminals should be handled vary from region to region, as well as based on individual characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, education, gender, and individual attitudes, such as political party affiliation. This is especially true when it comes to capital punishment, as many people in countries with the advanced economy increasingly see this sentence as the court's being too harsh. However, the majority of Americans appear to support the use of capital punishment. According to a 2016 Gallop poll, 60% of respondents supported and 37% opposed capital punishment (Trahan et al., 2019). However, the media makes it very clear that there are advocacy groups that do not hold the same beliefs and feel that the criminal justice system is too harsh on perpetrators of crimes. These groups are often people of minority groups, including people of color. This makes sense in part because the punitive views of the American public have heavily influenced the mass incarceration in the United States (Brown & Socia, 2017), and mass incarceration and harsh punishment have disproportionately affected individuals of color (Irizarry et al., 2016).

The United States is an extremely diverse place in many ways. This diversity can be seen in the racial/ethnic groups, education level, gender, as well as in other identities. Each individual has their own unique combination of characteristics and statuses that shape their identity differently, and impacts the way they view the world. A person's worldview in turn effects the way they believe the world should be run, influencing their opinion on political and legal issues, including the way the criminal justice system and courts within that system handle the punishment of criminals. It is important to understand the ways in which an individual's

worldview may be impacted by demographic factors in order to put laws and procedures into place that reflect the opinions of the citizens within the community.

This research paper examines these differences in opinion on punishment held by the American public, and how demographic characteristics may influence these differences, with the main focus being on differences between races/ethnicities. The goal of this research paper is to answer three main questions, using data from the 2014, 2016, and 2018 General Social Survey:

1. Are White American adults more likely to agree with the use of the death penalty than individuals of color?
2. Are White American adults more likely to believe the court systems are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals than individuals of color?
3. Do these associations continue to appear when controlling for highest level of education completed or gender?

## **Background**

Punitiveness is considered to be the holding of harsher and stricter views when it comes to the treatment and punishment of crime and criminals (Neill, Yusuf, & Morris, 2015). Previous studies have examined the effect punitive views held by American citizens has on mass incarceration rates in the United States. According to a 2014 study, “the public’s preferences for being tough on crime steadily increased between the 1960s and 1990s” (Enns, 2014). This increase occurred around the same time as America sees a push by elected officials to be harsher in the treatment and punishment of crime. This can be seen through movements such as the War on Drugs, which started in 1971 during the Nixon administration and was carried on by many administrations following, and a push for a “get tough on crime” mindset (Applegate & Sanborn,

2011). Public officers tend to place their focus on the things their constituents identify as being important in order to gain support of the public and remain in their position (Enns, 2014). This has led to an increase in penalties and criminalization for many offenses, ultimately leading to the possibility of higher rates of individuals being incarcerated for crimes that would have once not been punished (Neill et al., 2015). This may be due to fear of crime. Studies have found that Americans' perceptions of crime rates have increased, even when the actual crime rates have not been risen (Brown & Socia, 2017). This fear or anxiety about crime has been able to predict punitiveness (Costelloe et al., 2009). When individuals are afraid of crime or feel threatened by those they believe may commit crime, they tend to support harsher punishments for individuals who commit crime in order to feel a sense of safety. Punitive opinions may also come from a lack of trust in law enforcement (the courts in particular) to be able to handle crime in a way that they feel is adequate. This especially is seen in a 2017 study by Brown & Socia, in which having less trust in the Supreme Court was associated with holding more punitive views.

There are two important factors to consider when assessing opinions on the use of the death penalty and an individual's punitiveness. The first being how much access an individual has to information about the death penalty. A study done in 2011 was aimed at examining the impact having knowledge about the death penalty, and factors that are related to the death penalty, had on an individual's support (Lambert et al.). Studies have shown that the support for the death penalty by United States citizens has varied over time (Lambert et al., 2011). This variation may be accounted for when examining the political and criminal climate during different periods in time. In their study, Lambert et al. surveyed an individual's support of the death penalty before and after being informed of issues such as those being wrongly convicted and the possibility of having an innocent person on death row. They found that almost 40% of

individuals who had been presented with this data had at least a one-unit decrease in their support of the death penalty (Lambert et al., 2011). This is important to note when examining differences in punitiveness, as individuals may have been exposed to different information based on their education level or other characteristics.

The second factor to consider is the wording chosen when assessing opinions of an individual. This is an issue that is often emphasized in survey research, and is no less important in the context of punitiveness research. A 2011 study examined the effects the wording of the General Social Survey (GSS) item measuring the opinions of American adults on the harshness of courts in their area (which will be used in this study) and found that the wording of the question and response choices effected the way participants reported their answers. For example, when asking about the harshness of courts, the respondents who chose a punitive answer was 12 percentage points higher than when asking in terms of leniency (Applegate & Sanborn, 2011). A similar issue had existed in the GSS when asking about an individual's support of the use of the death penalty at its release in 1972, but was changed in 1974 to the current wording (Trahan et al., 2019). It is important to consider how the wording of these questions may affect the way an individual responds to a question, as it can change the perceived meaning of the statement. People tend to answer questions in ways that they believe portrays them as a good person, and will therefore answer accordingly. Thus, in this project, I use two indicators of punitiveness in my analyses.

The mass incarceration rates in the United States has led to a push in research to identify the factors that may contribute to or increase punitiveness. A study conducted by Neill et al.(2015) was aimed at identifying factors that cause a state to lean in a more punitive way in its legislation. The study found that voter turnout had an influence on the punitiveness of a state, as

states with lower voter turnout tended to be more punitive than those with higher voter turnout. This may be due to levels of education held by citizens. It has been found that there is a connection between higher education and higher rates of voter turnout (Neill et al., 2015). This study also found that higher voter turnout also tends to be associated with higher levels of education, suggesting that higher education may be associated with less punitive perceptions among citizens.

The majority of research that has been conducted surrounding punitive views and opinions on the use of the death penalty has focused on the racial divide that exists. Most studies have found that individuals who support the use of the death penalty are more likely to be White males who are protestant, politically conservative, and having received a high school education or less, with race and gender being the two strongest predictors of opinion on capital punishment (Trahan et al., 2019). In addition, the Brown & Socia (2017) study found that having negative feelings towards individuals of color and opposing programs that support the poor (i.e. welfare) tended to predict a belief that courts were not harsh enough among White individuals.

However, the majority of these factors have been assessed separately instead of examining how the relationship between these demographic factors effect opinion on the use of the death penalty. While it is important to understand these demographic factors on their own, this is not a sufficient way to measure overall public opinion. This is because of the way these characteristics and identities effect a person on a day-to-day basis. At no point in time does an individual only experience the impact of a single identity that they possess. For example, an African American woman is not only a person of color, and she is not only a woman, she is a woman of color. While there may be some situations where a certain part of an individual's



identity may seem to be the focus of discrimination or privilege, it is still being influenced by the other identities or characteristics held by that individual.

A 2019 study by Trahan et al. addressed this issue by combining race, gender, and education in their opinions on the use of the death penalty for a person convicted for murder. In this case, as is the case in many studies that factor in education, the education level of an individual was used as a measure of social class. This assumes that an individual with a higher education level falls into a higher social class than someone who has less education. For the most part this may be the case, as those with a college degree tend to be able to obtain higher paying jobs, it is important to remember that this is not always the case as a person's field of study can highly influence the rate of pay that jobs in their field receive. In addition, individuals may also opt to work for organizations that do not pay highly because of they are passionate about the work an organization does, as is the case in non-profit organizations much of the time.

The study controlled for factors such as marital status, religion, political ideology, religious salience (measured by how often an individual attended religious services), and court harshness. They found that White men and women who attended some college or more tended to be more likely to oppose the use of death penalty compared to their undereducated counterparts (Trahan et al., 2019). A more liberal political ideology was also associated with having a higher level of education, which would be expected as a more liberal political ideology tends to be associated with opposing the use of the death penalty. However, the opposite was found for Black men and women with some level of higher education, as they were less likely to oppose the use of the death penalty. This outcome was less expected, as it disrupts the pattern that had been previously seen in other studies (Trahan et al., 2019).

These differences when accounting for other identities are important to note, as the Trahan et al. study was one of the first to examine the way the relationship of many different facets of an individual's identity may influence their punitiveness. However this study, like most others, only examined the differences between Black and White individuals and did not account for other races. The reasoning for this may be because the most stark differences between races are most often seen between Black and White individuals. However, the United States are extremely diverse and have a large percentage of other races as well, one of which being the percentage of Hispanic individuals. While it is not plausible to be able to account for every single race in a single study alone, it is important to expand the scope of the research available beyond Black and White races/ethnicities. In my search for literature, there was very little data available regarding the punitive perceptions of Hispanic individuals. Of the research available that did happen to mention individuals of Hispanic origin, the main focus was on the perceptions White people hold regarding the likelihood of a Hispanic person to commit a crime. With the constant expansion of the Hispanic population in the United States, it is important to understand where they stand when it comes to opinions on issues such as the death penalty and court harshness, as they are also disproportionately affected by mass incarceration. For this reason, I have included Hispanic individuals as their own category in my study.

## **Hypotheses**

My research project focused on whether or not people of color would have differing opinions on punitiveness (measured by opinion on the harshness of courts when dealing with criminals) and the use of capital punishment, and whether or not this would be influenced by the sex of the respondent and their level of education. I tested three hypotheses:

1. White adults are more likely to agree with the use of the death penalty than Black adults, Hispanic adults, or adults of other races.
2. White adults are more likely than Black adults, Hispanic adults, and adults of other races to believe the courts are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals.
3. These racial differences will remain consistent when controlling for both highest level of education completed and gender.

## **Methods**

The data I used came from the General Social Survey. The General Social Survey is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (Smith et al., 2019). It was administered biannually from 1972 to 1994. The survey is now administered every two years to a representative sample of English or Spanish speaking adults aged 18 and older who live in non-institutionalized households in the continental United States (Smith et al., 2019). In order to increase the number of cases I analyzed, I used data from the 2014 (N= 2,538), 2016 (N= 2,867), and 2018 (N= 2,348) samples. This was done because while the basic demographic questions are asked to every respondent, the sample is randomly split into three groups that are given different specific topic questions, resulting in the sample size for specific research topics being smaller than the total sample. By using data collected from three separate samples, I increase the amount of data I have to analyze, hopefully resulting in a more representative dataset.

My study has two dependent variables. The first variable deals with the use of the death penalty in the American penal system. Respondents were asked if they favored or opposed the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. Respondents either chose the option of favor

(=1), oppose (=2), don't know (=8), opt not to answer (=9), or choose that the question was not applicable for them to answer (=0). The second variable examines the opinions American adults hold regarding how harsh they believe their local courts are when dealing with criminals. The question asked respondents whether they thought courts in their area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals. Response categories offered were as follows: too harsh (=1), not harsh enough (=2), about right (=3), don't know (=8), no answer (=9), or not applicable (=0).

My independent variable in this study is the race and Hispanic origin of the respondent. The original survey asked respondents to choose whether they were White (=1), Black (=2), or other (=3). However, I believe it is likely that individuals who identify as Hispanic may have a differing opinion that will be worth investigating. Because of this, I recoded the variable to include a Hispanic category. This left the categories being White (=1), Black (=2), Hispanic (=3), and other (=4). By widening the scope of racial/ethnic groups being examined, I am able to examine the unique group differences that exist among racial/ethnic groups in the United States more accurately. I acknowledge that there is a wider scope of racial/ethnic differences that exist than are examined in this study, however I have chosen to include the three most prominent racial/ethnic groups present in the samples—White, Black, and Hispanic—and including another group to encompass those that are not represented by those categories.

My study includes two control variables: gender and education level of the respondents. For the context of this study, gender is measured by the biological sex of the participant. The respondents were asked to report whether their biological sex was male (=1) or female (=2). Men and women experience the world differently, shaping their worldview differently. The treatment and expectations of men and women also vary among racial/ethnic groups. For these reasons, I think it is important to examine whether the differences or

similarities found between racial/ethnic groups remain when accounting for gender differences as well.

Respondents were also asked to report their highest level of education. The original data asked them how many years of education they had acquired. The response choices were as follows: zero years (=0), 1 year (=1), two years (=2), three years (=3), four years (=4), five years (=5), six years (=6), seven years (=7), eight years (=8), nine years (=9), ten years (=10), eleven years (=11), twelve years (=12), thirteen years (=13), fourteen years (=14), fifteen years (=15), sixteen years (=16), seventeen years (=17), eighteen years (=18), nineteen years (=19), twenty years (=20), don't know (=98), or no response (=99). However, I do not feel that there would be significant results between single years of education, and that the most significant difference would occur between adults who have some college education or higher, and those who had high school education or less. For this reason, I chose to recode the variable, so the categories were either high school level education or less (=1) and some college education or higher (=2). When receiving a higher education, students are often exposed to knowledge, experiences, and opinions that they may not have been exposed to in high school or in their hometowns. These things shape an individual's world view, and may impact the way they think about the legal system and penal code. The experiences an individual has when receiving a higher education may also be impacted by the race/ethnicity of the individual. I think it is important to examine the impact has on the racial/ethnic differences in opinions and punitiveness of American adults.

In order to test my hypotheses, I performed a crosstabulation analyses and Chi-square tests. I did this in order to more accurately examine the group differences or similarities that occurred when also controlling for gender and education level.

## Results

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution for the sample of participants who favor or oppose the use of the death penalty for murder. In the combined 2014, 2016, and 2018 data, 62.5% of respondents favored the use of the death penalty and 37.5% of respondents opposed capital punishment (also shown in Figure 1a). Table 1 shows the frequencies of the perceived harshness of courts dealing with criminals. About one-fifth (19.3%) of respondents believed courts were too harsh, 61.9% believed the courts were not harsh enough, and 18.8% of individuals believed that the courts were using the appropriate level of harshness (Figure 1b).

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the participants race. The majority of respondents (65.3%) were White, while only 15.7% of respondents were Black and 14.3% were Hispanic (also shown in Figure 2).

The frequency distribution of the gender of respondents is displayed in Table 1. Of the participants, slightly over half (55.3%) were female and slightly less than half (44.7%) were male (also in Figure 3a). Table 1 displays the frequency distribution for the education level of the participants. Slightly over two-fifths (41.8%) received a high school education or less, with the majority of the participants (58.2%) receiving some college education or more (also in Figure 3b).

I ran multiple crosstabulations and Chi-square tests to examine many differences including: Racial differences in opinion on the death penalty among various education levels, racial differences in opinion on the death penalty among males and females, racial differences in opinion on harshness of courts among various education levels, and racial differences in opinion on harshness of courts among males and females. The results are as follows:

*Attitudes toward the use of capital punishment*

First, I ran tests to examine differences in opinion on the use of capital punishment by race/ethnicity (Table 2). For the total sample (N= 7,258), 68.6% of White respondents, 44.3% of Black respondents, 54.5% of Hispanic respondents, and 62.1% of respondents of other races favor the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at  $p < .001$  ( $\chi^2 = 259.730$ ,  $df = 3$ ).

When I examined the association between race and support of the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder for those with high school education or less and some college education or more separately, there still appeared to be racial difference at both education levels. These differences are as follows and can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 4:

Among individuals who received a high school education or less (N= 3,032), 77.3% of White respondents favored the use of the death penalty, compared to only 48.4% of Black respondents, 51.6% of Hispanic respondents, and 67.7% of respondents of other races. Chi-square tests suggest that these differences are significant at  $p < .001$  ( $\chi^2 = 231.505$ ,  $df = 3$ ).

Among those who had received some college education or more (N= 4,226), there still appeared to be racial differences, however they were less severe than among those with less education. 63.2% of White respondents, 41.0% of Black respondents, 58.8% of Hispanic respondents, and 59.9% of respondents of other races favored the use of the death penalty. Chi-square tests suggest that these differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 103.518$ ,  $df = 3$ ).

It appears that regardless of education levels, racial differences in people's support of the use of the death penalty on individuals convicted of murder exists. Black and Hispanic respondents, especially Black respondents, are less likely than White respondents to support the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder.

I also examined the association between race and support of the use of capital punishment among female and male participants. When controlling for the difference in gender, there still appeared to be racial differences. The results are as follows and can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 5:

Among male respondents (N= 3,319), 72.1% of White respondents, 48.7% of Black respondents, 62.5% of Hispanic respondents, and 63.6% of respondents of other races favored the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 100.475$ ,  $df = 3$ ).

Among female respondents (N= 3,948), 65.4% of White respondents, 41.2% of Black respondents, 47.8% of Hispanic respondents, and 61.0% of respondents of other races favored the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 158.683$ ,  $df = 3$ ).

It appears that racial differences in people's support of the use of the death penalty for individuals convicted of the death penalty exists among both male and female respondents: Black and Hispanic respondents are less likely than White respondents to support the use of the death penalty, and the same is true for Black and Hispanic men when being compared to White men.

#### *Opinion on the harshness of courts*

Next, I ran tests to examine the differences in opinion on the harshness of courts (Table 4). For the total sample (N= 6,911), 64.9% of White respondents, 51.7% of Black respondents, 60.1% of Hispanic respondents, and 59.7% of respondents of other races reported that they believed the courts were not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 247.724$ ,  $df = 6$ ). White



respondents are more likely than their Black and Hispanic counterparts to think that the courts in their area are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals.

When I examined the association between race and respondent's opinion on the harshness of courts for those with a high school education or less and those with some college education or more separately, the results also suggest that racial differences exist for both education levels. These differences are as follows and can be seen in Table 4 and Figure 6:

Among those who received a high school education or less (N= 2,969), 73.9% of White respondents, 56.3% of Black respondents, 59.4% of Hispanic respondents, and 68.9% of respondents of other races believed that the courts are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 140.396$ ,  $df = 6$ ).

Among respondents who had received some college education or higher (N= 3,942), 61.3% of Hispanic respondents believe that the courts were not harsh enough when dealing with criminals, while only 59.1% of White respondents, 47.8% of Black respondents, and 55.8% of respondents of other races shared this opinion. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 144.919$ ,  $df = 6$ ).

It appears that racial differences in individual's opinions on the harshness of courts exists among respondents who had received a high school education or lower, as well as among respondents who had received some college education or higher. However, the differences that exist vary by group. In both the lower education and higher education groups, Black respondents were less harsh than White respondents when it came to their analysis of their court systems. In contrast to those with a lower level of education, Hispanic respondents who had received a

college education or higher were as harsh as White respondents, while Hispanic respondents who received a high school education or less were less harsh than their White counterparts.

My last examination is the association between race and opinions on the harshness of courts when dealing with criminals among female and male participants. When controlling for the difference in gender, there still appeared to be racial differences. The results are as follows and can be seen in Table 5 and Figure 7:

Among male respondents (N= 3,156), 61.2% of White participants, 47.9% of Black participants, 56.8% of Hispanic respondents, and 55.1% of respondents of other races believe that courts are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 75.248$ ,  $df = 6$ ).

Among female respondents (N= 3,762), 68.2% of White respondents, 54.4% of Black respondents, 63.1% of Hispanic respondents, and 63.2% of respondents of other races believe that courts are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Chi-square tests suggest that these racial differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level ( $\chi^2 = 188.848$ ,  $df = 6$ ).

It appears that racial differences in people's opinions about the harshness of courts when dealing with criminals exists among respondents whose gender is male and respondents whose gender is female. Regardless of gender, Black respondents were less likely than White or Hispanic respondents to think the courts are not harsh enough. Both White men and women were most likely to believe that the court systems were not harsh enough. While both Hispanic men and women were more likely than Black respondents to believe the courts were not harsh enough, they were still less harsh than their White counterparts.

## **Discussion**

This study found that many racial differences exist in punitiveness among American adults. Overall, a majority of Americans (62%) support the use of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder and feel that the courts in their area are not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Across genders and education levels, White participants responded in more punitive ways than Black and Hispanic respondents regardless of education and gender, with one exception. Among individuals with higher levels of education, a larger percentage of Hispanic participants than that of White participants felt that courts were not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. Across the board, Black respondents were less punitive than White or Hispanic respondents regardless of education level or gender. In addition, female participants across all races were more likely than their male counterparts to believe that the courts in their area were not harsh enough when dealing with criminals. This gender difference may be due to the societal teaching of women to be fearful of crime and those who may commit crime against them, causing them to indicate that they feel that courts need to respond more harshly towards crime.

Because of the results that Hispanic individuals were the most likely group to believe that the courts were not harsh enough among individuals with a higher education, my hypothesis that White individuals would be most likely to believe courts were not harsh enough over other racial/ethnic groups and that these differences would remain consistent when controlling for education level was not supported for this category. However, these differences did remain constant for all other racial groups when controlling for both education and gender, supporting my hypotheses.

Across all education levels and genders, White participants were most likely to support the use of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder. This supported my hypothesis that White individuals would be most likely to support the use of the death penalty, and is consistent

with prior research by Brown & Socia (2017). Unlike Trahan et al., (2019), the findings of my project suggest that Black men and women with higher levels of education were less punitive than their counterparts with lower levels of education. Across all races, female participants were less likely than their male counterparts to favor the use of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder, which contrasts the punitive views that females hold in regards to harshness of courts. While they were still less likely than White individuals to favor the use of the death penalty, Hispanic individuals with a higher education were more likely than their less educated counterparts to favor the use of the death penalty. This combined with their opinion on the harshness of courts suggests that a college education may lead to higher levels of punitiveness in Hispanic individuals.

The findings that Hispanic individuals with a higher level of education were more likely than Whites of the same education status to believe the courts were not harsh enough, as well as their increased favoring of the death penalty when receiving an advanced education, were unexpected. Because Hispanic individuals tend to be similarly effected by mass incarceration as Black individuals, I would have expected the results to more similarly mirror Black participants, who saw a decrease of about 11 percentage points in believing the courts were not harsh enough when respondents had a higher level of education. Reasons for this difference may be due to information available to individuals of Hispanic origin based on their education level, similarly to what was proposed in the Lambert et al.'s (2011) study concerning available information about the death penalty. However, the only way this will be known is through survey research of participants where they indicate the level of knowledge they have surrounding the death penalty. Further investigation is required to fully understand the cause in this shift of punitive values among Hispanic individuals.

A pattern also occurred in which individuals who had received a higher education (some college or above) tended to be less punitive than those who had received a high school education or less. This pattern was seen across races along with racial differences in each category. These findings are consistent with the majority of research that has been done in the past regarding punitive values in American adults. The findings regarding the difference in favoring the use of the death penalty for Black individuals, however, did differ from the results found in Trahan et al.'s (2019) study. Trahan et al. found that Black individuals were less likely to oppose the death penalty when they had received a higher education, while I have found that the opposite is the case. My results show that 48.4% of Black respondents favored the use of the death penalty when they had received a high school education or less, while only 41.0% of Black respondents who had received a college education favored the use of the death penalty. This variation may be caused by the cohort used, as Trahan et al. examined and compared data from 1974 to 2016, while I focused on the data collected in 2014, 2016, and 2018.

One limitation of this study is that I only controlled for two demographic characteristics: education level and gender. However, as was previously mentioned, there are many more demographic characteristics that should be considered when assessing the punitive views an individual holds. These may include, but are not limited to, political affiliation, geographic location, and age. Future studies should consider examining these factors and the influence they have on punitive values.

Studies should be completed that focus more heavily on the punitive perceptions of Hispanic individuals. As can be seen in this study, there were many unexpected patterns exhibited by the Hispanic groups, especially when considering highest level of education achieved. The specific impact education has on these individuals should be examined more

closely to reveal what cultural, social, and political impact a higher education may have on Hispanic individuals that is not present for Black or White individuals. There is also a large proportion of Hispanic individuals living in the United States who are immigrants. A future study may compare the punitive views of Hispanic adults living in the United States who are immigrants versus those who were born in the United States. This study emphasizes the importance of examining racial/ethnic differences among not only Black and White individuals, as has been done in the past, but also among Hispanic individuals, as they clearly have a unique voice that has not been heavily reported on.

This study also emphasizes the importance of considering multiple identities when assessing opinions of punitiveness. Clearly education and gender have an effect on the participants in this study regardless of race. Further investigation of the relationship between these identities is warranted to better understand the punitive nature of the United States. By bettering this understanding, policies can be created that better reflect the opinions of social groups and communities. This can also be done through the creation of events that allow for more positive interactions between the criminal justice system and citizens of various communities, as well as by increasing the opportunities available to underrepresented groups to raise their concerns regarding the criminal justice system.

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## Tables and Figures

Table 1. Percentage Distribution for Variables in the Analysis.

Favor or Oppose the Use of the Death Penalty	%
Favor	62.5
Oppose	37.5
Total	100.0
Harshness of Courts Dealing with Criminals	%
Too Harsh	19.3
Not Harsh Enough	61.9
About Right	18.8
Total	100.0
Respondent's Race	%
White	65.3
Black	15.7
Hispanic	14.3
Other	4.7
Total	100.0
Respondent's Sex	%
Male	44.7
Female	55.3
Total	100.0
Highest Level of Education Completed	%
High School or Less	41.8
Some College or More	58.1
Total	100.0





Figure 1a. Percentage Distribution for Opinion on Use of Capital Punishment for Murder.

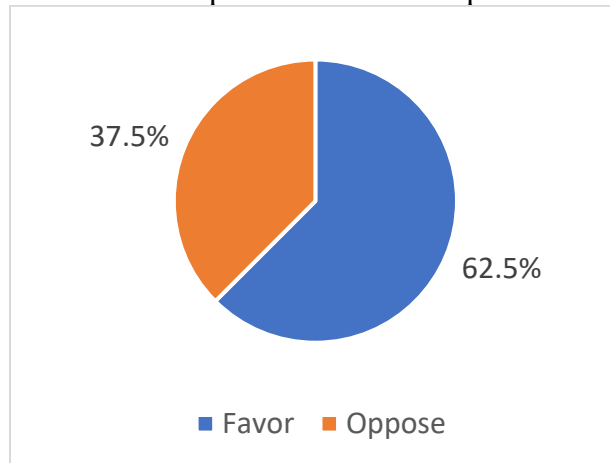


Figure 1b. Percentage Distribution for Opinion on Harshness of Courts When Dealing with Criminals.

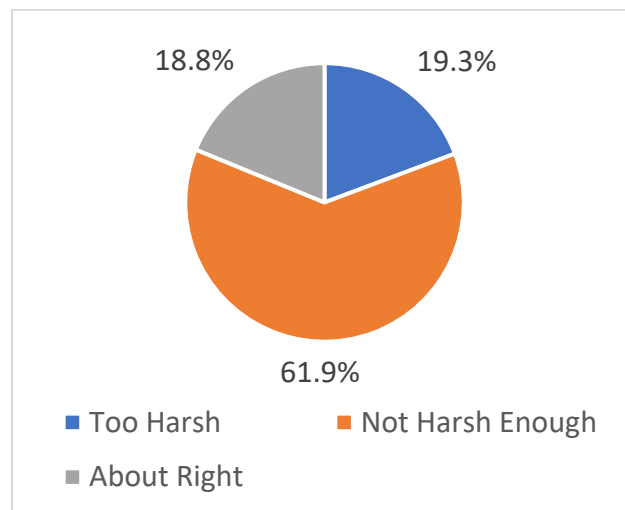


Figure 2. Percentage Distribution for Race and Ethnicity.

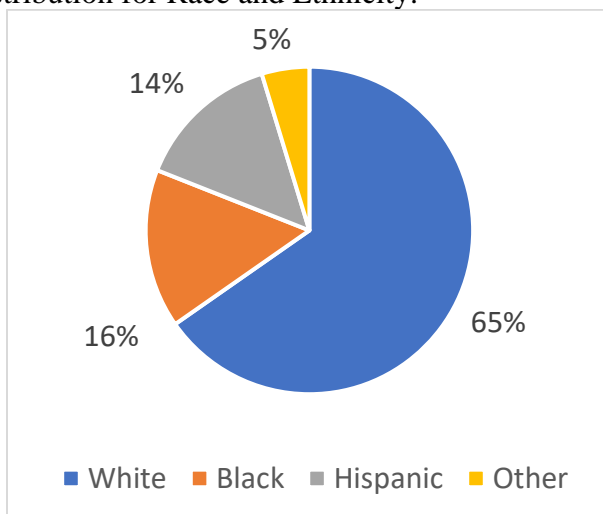


Figure 3a. Percentage Distribution for Highest Level of Education Completed.

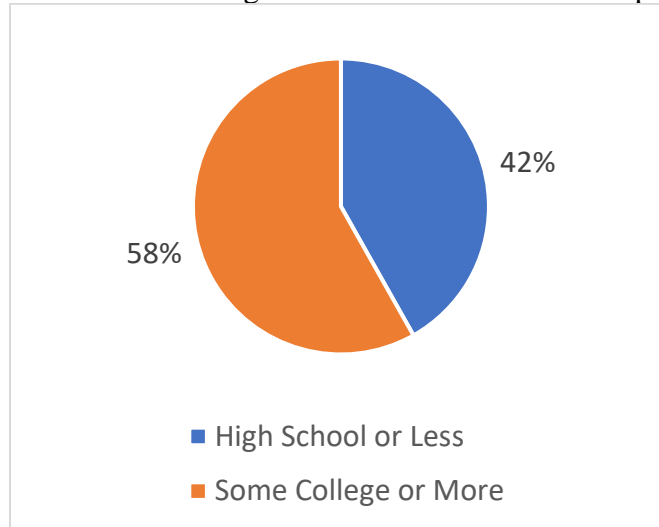


Figure 3b. Percentage Distribution for Gender Measured as Biological Sex.

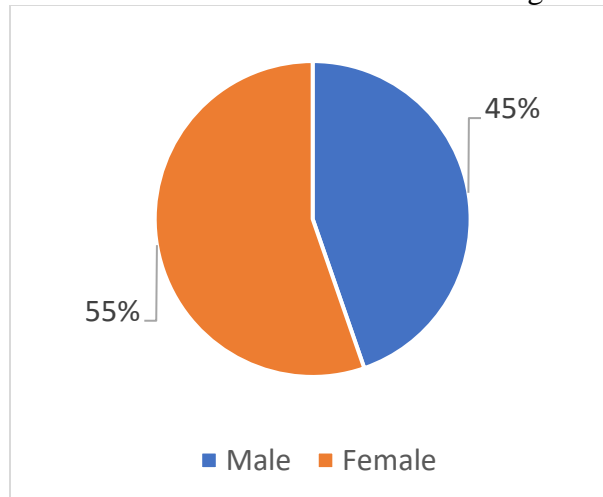
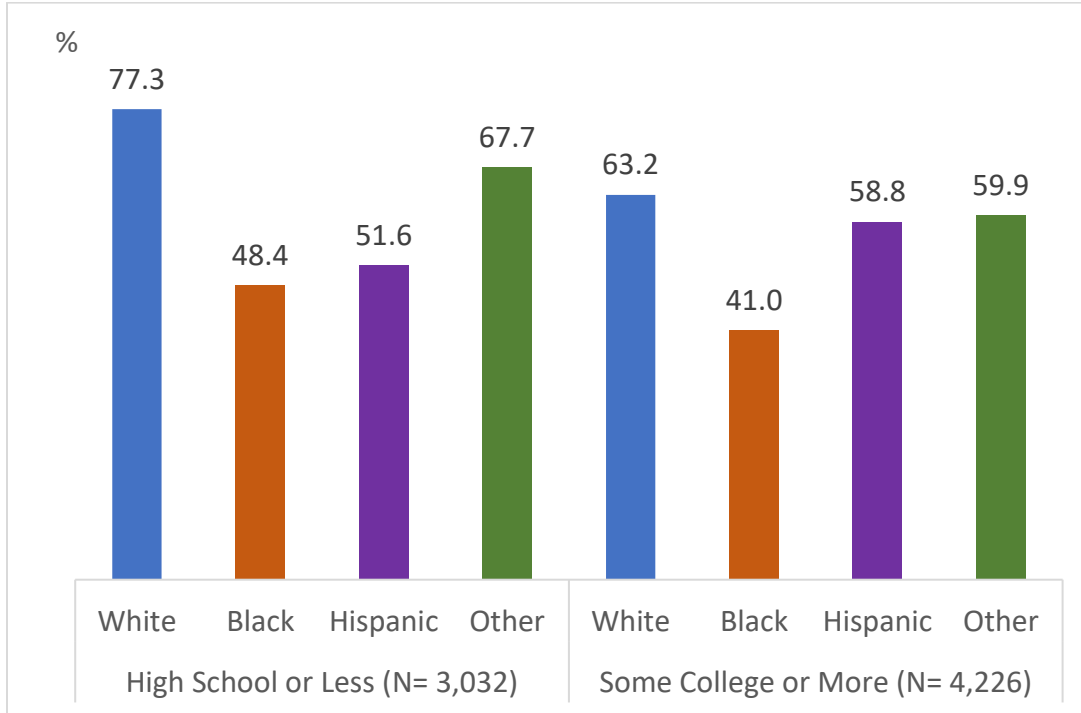
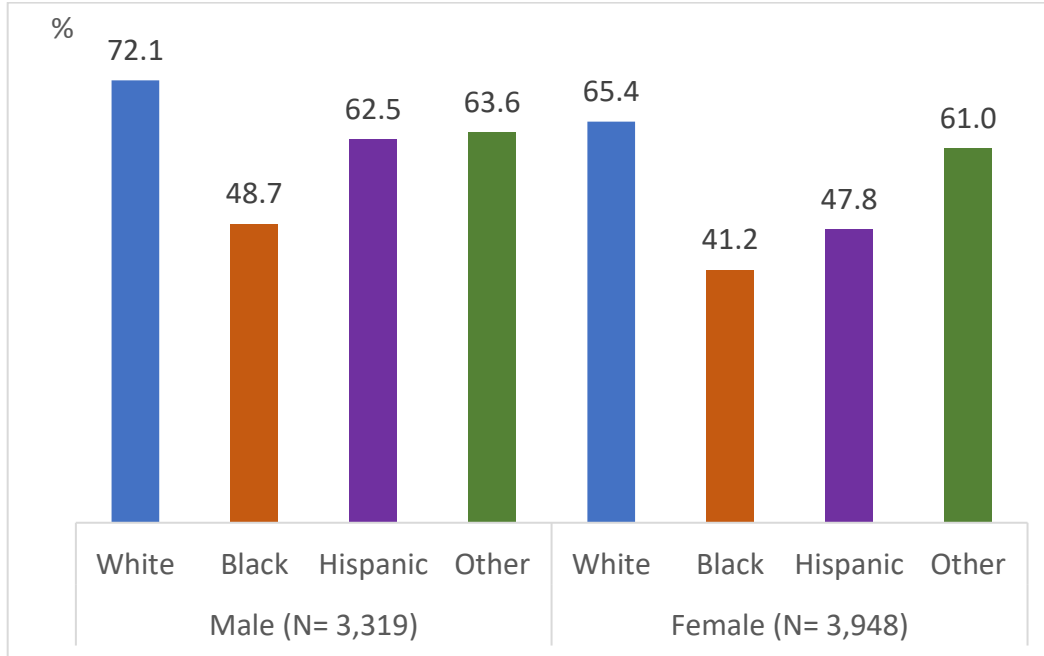


Figure 4. Percentage Favoring the Use of the Death Penalty for Murder by Race/Ethnicity and Education.



The Chi-Square test shows differences by race/ethnicity are significant at  $p < .001$  for both education groups.

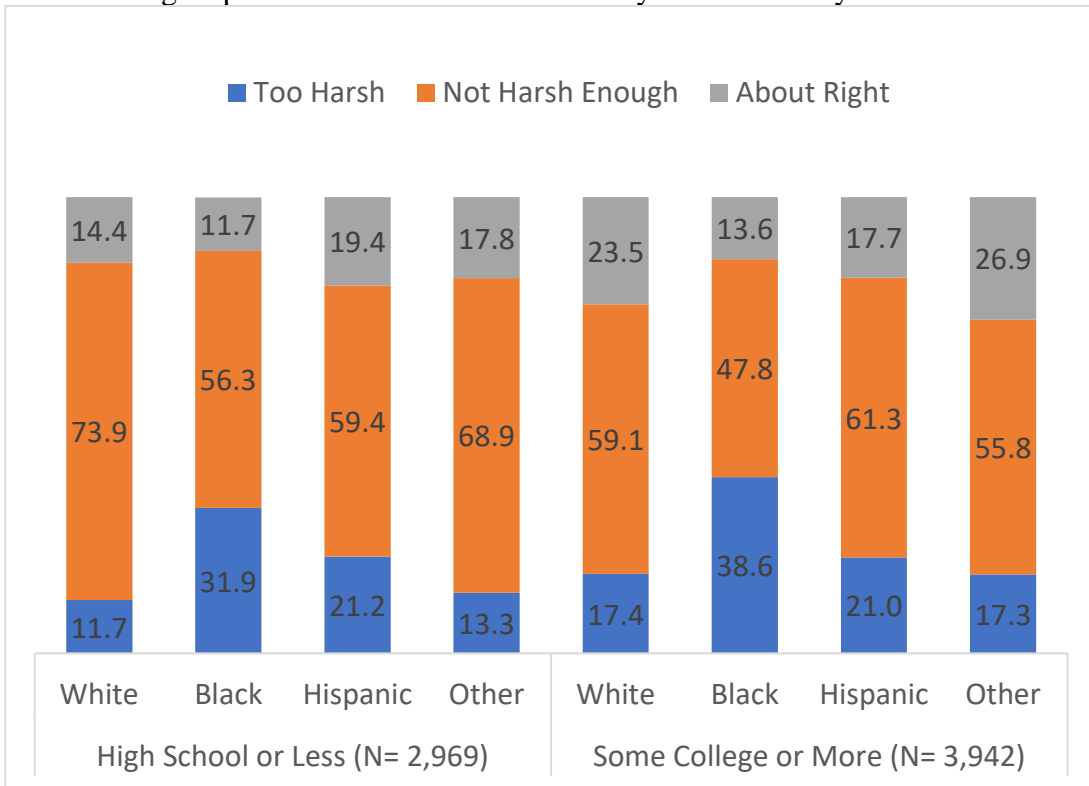
Figure 5. Percentage Favoring the Use of the Death Penalty for Murder by Race/Ethnicity and Gender.



The Chi-square test shows differences by race/ethnicity are significant at  $p < .001$  for both genders.

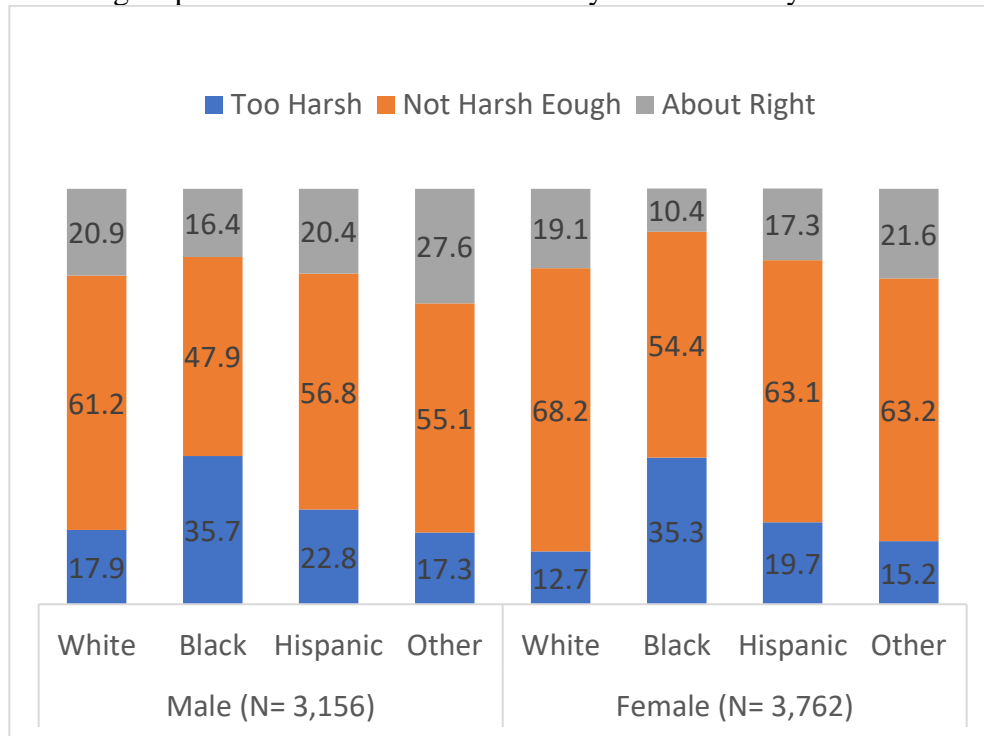


Figure 6. Percentage Opinion on Harshness of Courts by Race/Ethnicity and Education.



The Chi-Square test shows differences by race/ethnicity are significant at  $p < .001$  for both education groups.

Figure 7. Percentage Opinion on Harshness of Courts by Race/Ethnicity and Gender.



The Chi-square test shows differences by race/ethnicity are significant at  $p < .001$  for both genders.