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Preventive and punitive criminal justice policy support in Trinidad: The media's role

Ray Surette¹, Derek Chadee², Linda Heath³ and Jason R. Young⁴

Abstract

An unresolved research question regarding crime and justice policy is the relationship between an individual's media consumption and their support for punitive and preventive criminal justice policies. The relationship between media, crime, and justice is under-examined in countries other than the United States and Britain and the relationship between media and criminal justice policy support remains less than fully understood in all locales. In response, an examination of a media–policy relationship in a Western democracy not previously studied was conducted. Based on data from an October 2005 national telephone survey of Trinidad and Tobago residents, this study measured support for punitive and preventive criminal justice policies in association with crime and justice media consumption and worldviews. Multivariate analysis showed that, for Trinidadians, support for punitive policies was significantly related to perceiving television crime dramas as realistic and crime news as accurate. For preventive policy support, the same media factors plus the level of exposure to crime dramas on television were significant. Overall, media were found to play similar but not especially strong roles in support levels for both punitive and preventive criminal justice policies.

Keywords

crime prevention, media influence, public attitudes, punitivism, Trinidad

Interest in the role played by media in the level of support for punitive or preventive criminal justice policies is longstanding. Fueling current interest, a number of countries including the United States have seen their criminal justice policies become increasingly punitive since the 1980s. In the United States, the early 1990s saw policy innovations such as truth-in-sentencing and three-strikes laws, boot camps and juvenile court transfers (Williams, 2003, p. 401). Recent US crime policies have concentrated on becoming more austere by abolishing probation and parole, lengthening prison sentences, dismantling correctional programs and other steps rooted in punitive retribution. Along

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with these policy changes the public has also been bombarded with crime images from the media, and the media has been forwarded as a force in shaping public attitudes about crime and criminality (see for example Barrille, 1984; Dowler, 2003; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995; Reith, 1999; Sotirovic, 2001, 2003; Surette, 1992). Much past research on media and criminal justice policy support has hypothesized that media effects trigger support for punitive policies and this relationship has been examined by a number of researchers with mixed results (see Claussen, 2004; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Kappeler, Blumberg & Potter, 2000; Kioussis, 2001; Proctor, Badzinski & Johnson, 2002). Despite research interest, the 'media consumption–criminal justice policy support' relationship has not been examined extensively outside of the United States and Britain (Doyle, 2006, p. 873). Addressing both deficiencies, the rationale for this study was to further explore the media–criminal justice policy relationship in a unique setting. A study of Trinidad and Tobago residents based on a national survey in 2005 offered this opportunity.

Trinidad and Tobago

The country of Trinidad and Tobago, commonly referred to as Trinidad, lies in the Caribbean Sea near Venezuela. The country has been a democracy since 1962 and enjoyed a high living standard due to oil and gas revenue and a substantial trade surplus. Reflecting its developed status, at the time of this study the island's literacy rate was 99 percent.¹ Ninety-five percent of the Trinidad population spoke English and media tastes and preferences were greatly influenced by American culture (Chadee & Ditton, 2005). The country's criminal justice policy history was tied to historical tensions between ethnic East Indian and Afro-Trinidadians which underlay much of the country's political life. In 1970, the country suffered riots and an army mutiny. These events prompted a two-year 'state of emergency' declaration and the passing of emergency measures that gave the Trinidadian police extraordinary investigative and enforcement powers (Mahabir, 1985). Impelled by turmoil, criminal justice policy support and practice pursued a punitive course, but as in the United States maintained elements of treatment and prevention (Bennett, 1991; Chadee, 2007; Ghany, 1998). More recently, concern with drug trafficking further enhanced punitive policy support (Thompson-Ahye, 1999). Counterbalancing support for punitive policies, the mid-1990s also saw the introduction of prevention-based policies as alternatives to incarceration and to provide treatment and rehabilitation for juvenile offenders (Deosaran & Chadee, 1997; Simmons, 1998). Hence, as in other counties, punitive and preventive criminal justice practices coexisted in Trinidad and Tobago, with the pendulum drifting toward punishment at the time of survey administration. Reflecting this punitive trend, policing efforts concentrated on crime control, particularly in the country's urban Afro-Trinidadian enclaves.

The media available in Trinidad was similar to other developed Western countries. There were three major daily newspapers, two tabloid sized and one a broadsheet. A content analysis of these three undertaken by Chadee and Ditton (2007) found that crimes against persons were overreported and crimes against property were underreported. Similar to US media, the overall picture painted by the newspapers was more violent than that reflected in Trinidadian police statistics. There was, however, a real-world increase in homicides. From 2000 to 2005, there was a 221 percent increase in homicides with the concentration of murders in the 'east-west corridor' (an urban area where approximately 45 percent of the population lived). The country's high crime areas were located in the 'east-west corridor' and over 60 percent of all serious crimes occurred

there (Trinidad Central Statistical Office, 1999, 2003). In addition to the print media, there were two major local television stations operating in the islands and Trinidadians had access to cable and satellite television. Most commercial available television programming (about 90 percent), cable programming (about 99 percent) and movies were American and British products.

News media consumption on the islands was a regular habit and similar to amounts found in the United States. Chadee and Ditton (2005) found that in Trinidad the mean number of days-per-week people viewed prime-time news was 5.5 days and the mean number of hours of television viewing per week was 23 hours. On average, newspaper reading occurred on 2.2 days per week and over 70 percent of Trinidadians listened to the radio. The major source of crime news was television, followed by newspapers, radio, and finally friends and neighbors. Like other Western democracies, the media served as a central source of news and entertainment for the typical Trinidadian and much of the entertainment content represented a shared common denominator with US, Britain, and other English-speaking countries.

Literature Review

The notion that the media sensationalize crime is not new. In a 1922 content analysis of Cleveland newspapers, Felix Frankfurter and Roscoe Pound reported that the press unduly alarmed the public by overreporting crime. It has also been frequently reported that portrayals in entertainment and news media prominently depict sensational crimes, most often framed as violent acts perpetrated by strangers (Surette, 2007). This presentation was thought to result in the belief by media consumers that crime was constantly increasing and that the criminal justice system was incapable of stemming its flow (Dowler, 2003; Sotirovic, 2001; Surette 2007; Young, 2003). Such conclusions resulted in the media's crime and justice content being identified as a cause of public shifts in crime and justice policy support (Dubois, 2002; Kappeler et al., 2000; Kemshall, 1997; Lynch, Stretesky & Hammond, 2000; O'Connell, 1999; Roomer, Jamieson & Aday, 2003). Social constructionism provides a theoretical basis for understanding a media role in policy support levels. Under the social construction perspective, the public is seen to construct their crime and justice reality largely from media-provided content that does not explicitly address policies but instead influences policy support by portraying the world of crime and justice in a particular manner, for example, as safe or crime-ridden (Surette, 2007). This socially constructed reality, or world portrait, leads indirectly to support or opposition for specific criminal justice policies such as punishment or prevention. In this theory, people see the world in a way significantly determined by the content of the media they consume and come to support particular criminal justice policies because of the way they see the world (Surette, 2007).

The Media–Criminal Justice Policy Relationship

Initial research concentrated on defining the relationship between the media and criminal justice policy support, usually looking at the United States. For example, Fishman's (1978) study of a New York City media-constructed crime wave against the elderly detailed how a few incidents were covered extensively in the media, followed by changes in citizens' perceptions about crimes against the elderly, and strong public policy responses involving a special elderly investigation unit and new legislation. The majority of research in this tradition looked at the media as generators

of fear of crime, with many studies showing relationships between the amount of exposure to crime news and entertainment programming and consumers' heightened fear of victimization. For example, Young (2003) reported that as the perceived fearfulness of crime stories increased so did their perceived 'newsworthiness'. Prior research has also examined the relationship between media news content and moral panics. Media-generated moral panics have been reported for youth gang violence by Cohen (2002), crimes against the elderly by Fishman (1978), illegal drug use by Jenkins (1998) and Chermak (1998), and school shootings by Kraska and DeMichele (2001) and Lawrence and Mueller (2003). Despite this body of research, evidence of a consistent relationship between the media and fear of crime remained elusive (Chadee & Ditton, 2005; Heath & Gilbert, 1996) and the impact of the mass media on attitudes toward criminal justice policies remained unclear.

Most of the relevant research has examined a media content–punitive policy link and evidence that crime news increased public pressure for more aggressive policing (Garofalo, 1981) and more punitive responses to crime have been reported (Barille, 1984). In addition, Reith (1999) reported that television crime show viewing was related to support for law enforcement and aggressive actions toward offenders.² Collectively, this body of research forwarded the argument that sensational media images of crime fostered a narrowed punitive view of criminal justice policy due to the public accepting a media-constructed hyper-violent crime portrait, perceiving the criminal justice system as soft, and accepting crime control as the best course of action (Beckett & Sasson, 2000; Claussen, 2004; Dowler, 2003; Kappeler et al., 2000; Kiouisis, 2001).

Additional recent research aimed to better specify the relationship between media use and policy support. Sotirovic (2001) expanded the media–criminal justice policy support model to include qualitative media variables. Based on a survey of Madison, Wisconsin, residents, she reported that qualitative features of media exposure related to differing criminal justice policy support levels. Specifically, respondents who consumed 'infotainment' media expressed higher fear of crime and greater support for punitive criminal justice policies, while respondents who preferred 'hard' news were more likely to perceive crime as a complex issue and to express greater support for preventive criminal justice policies. Sotirovic concluded that infotainment media consumption was related to holding simple thoughts about crime and a 'quick fix' perspective that led to support for punitive policies. Conversely, exposure to hard news and thematic formatted media were related to complexity in one's conception of crime and a long-range perspective that, in turn, led to support for preventive criminal justice policies.

In a subsequent analysis of the same data, Sotirovic (2003) studied the type of media used by residents. She reported that television versus newspaper usage was significantly related to the type of explanation for crime that consumers held. She found that television usage was related to shallow knowledge of crime causation and correlated with individualistic explanations and punitive policy support, while newspaper usage was related to holding more complex knowledge and explanations of crime and was correlated with preventive policy support. Along similar lines, Roomer and colleagues (2003) found strong support for a television-exposure effect on perceived crime risk among US urban residents. They analyzed five years of archival data (1990 through 1994) from the *General Social Survey*, as well as data from a random telephone survey of 2,300 Philadelphia residents to test competing theories explaining high levels of fear of crime. They concluded that there was strong support for cultivation—that individuals with higher levels of television viewing were more likely to perceive greater crime risk.

When different types of media were compared, results were mixed. For example, where Sotirovic had found a significant difference between two types of media, television and newspapers, Gillespie and McLaughlin (2003) found no viewer differences between tabloid newspapers and soap opera television consumption on criminal justice policy support. In a study based on focus groups in Great Britain, Gillespie and McLaughlin (2003) reported that tabloid newspapers and soap opera television both related to consumer criminal justice policy views. They also found no important differences in punitive support between viewers who preferred factual compared to those who preferred fictional television crime programs. In contrast, Holbert, Shah and Kwak (2004) found that viewing television crime dramas positively related to support for the specific punitive policy of capital punishment.

A study that runs counter to the pattern of largely positive research results supportive of a media-policy link by Proctor and colleagues (2002) reported that media exposure was not related to public support levels for Megan's law.³ They attributed this finding to pre-existing high levels of public support for the law, leaving little variance for the media to influence. Similarly, Dowler (2003) examined random telephone survey data from the 1995 National Opinion Survey on Crime and Justice to explore the media's relationship to punitive attitudes. Dowler found that none of the media consumption variables related to punitive attitudes. A source of this disparity may lie in Dowler's policy support scale measuring only support for punitive attitudes. Additionally, his operationalization of punitive support was based on dichotomous (yes/no) response items asking respondents if they favored or disfavored a set of eleven punitive policy choices such as the death penalty and stiffer sentences for juveniles. Limited to archival data, Dowler's media variables were constrained to three factors: frequency of viewing television crime shows, hours of television watched per week, and primary source of news. Based on this improvised assemblage of the secondary data items, Dowler's media measures and his measure of criminal justice policy support may not have been sensitive or specific enough to tap the full media usage-criminal justice policy support relationship.

With Proctor and his colleagues (2002) and Dowler (2003) standing as exceptions, there exists a common acceptance of a media-punitive policy support relationship. Within the literature, punitive and preventive criminal justice policy support are not viewed as mutually exclusive. Logically, one can support aspects of preventive and punitive criminal justice policies concurrently (Mackey, Courtright & Packard, 2006). Research on sentencing and the death penalty, for example, has successfully challenged the notion that the public always prefers more punitive policies (Gottfredson & Taylor, 1984; Gottfredson, Warner & Taylor, 1988; Johnson & Huff, 1987; Riley & Rose, 1980) and criminal justice policy-makers have regularly overestimated the extent of public support for punishment (Sims & Johnston, 2004). Instead, studies demonstrated public endorsement of a nuanced response to crime and public endorsement of preventive policies while simultaneously viewing punitive policies as necessary (see Applegate 1997, Brown & Elrod 1995, Flanagan & Caulfield 1984, Gottfredson & Taylor 1984; Gottfredson et al., 1988; Mackey et al., 2006; Reichel & Gauthier, 1990; Senese, 1992; Williams, 1961).

With these findings in mind, the conceptualization of criminal justice policy support is best conceived as a set of co-existing attitudes: support for one does not necessarily denote opposition to the other (Cullen, Skovron, Scott & Burton, 1990; Kramer & Michalowski, 1995; Sotirovic, 2001). Punitive policy supporters are thought to see one goal of the criminal justice system, the separation of offenders from the public and dealing with known offenders, as an important task.

Supporters of preventive policies see another goal of the system as preserving the social fabric and assisting potential offenders from developing into actual offenders. They hold long-term and proactive views toward crime and see social determinants as more important than free-will and social conditions preceding an offense as crucial (Sotirovic, 2001). Neither policy position requires rejection of the other.

In sum, prior research mostly affirmed the idea that media factors were related to criminal justice policy support but left the nature of the relationship undetermined (Applegate, 1997; Applegate, Cullen, Turner & Sundt, 1996; Cumberland & Zambie, 1992; Dowler, 2003). One deficiency was the focus on punitive policy support. It is not clear whether different media relate to punitive versus preventive policy or what role demographic and worldview perceptions play. Additionally, little research has looked at the media and criminal justice policy relationship outside the United States and Britain.

The Current Study

The research questions pursued herein were to explore punitive and preventive criminal justice policy support and to further parse out the role of media in support levels in a non-US setting. Utilizing a random telephone survey of 570 residents of Trinidad and Tobago, this research looked to examine if the prior findings could be generalized to a non-US non-British population.

Research Methods

Data

The telephone survey of Trinidad residents was conducted in October 2005, using random digit dialing to select respondents. The survey was conducted by the ANSA McAL Psychological Research Centre, part of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad. One respondent from each household was randomly selected for a 20-minute interview. Only persons 18 years and over were interviewed, with the person who last celebrated his or her birthday selected. If that person was not at home the next person to have celebrated their birthday was chosen. The response rate was 68 percent with an achieved sample representative of the Trinidadian population comparing favorably with the 2000 Trinidad census. The sample's distribution reflects a stratification which is proportional to the population of Trinidad. St George County, where 37 percent of the sample respondents resided, also was the county with the largest proportion of the Trinidad population and included all of the country's high crime areas. The survey sample was distributed among 212 Afro-Trinidadians (37.3 percent; census value 37.5 percent), 238 Indo-Trinidadians (41.9 percent; census 40.0 percent), 110 Mixed Persons (an official ethnic category in Trinidad, 19.4 percent; census 20.5 percent), with the remaining ten respondents being White or members of other ethnic groups (1.4 percent; census 2.0 percent). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 86 with an average age of 47 and a median age of 45. Fifty-seven percent of the sample was female, a slight overrepresentation compared with the 2000 Trinidad census that reported 49.9 percent female. There was good variation across income groups and employment and the sample's country distribution mirrored the islands' demographics. About half of the respondents had experienced a property crime and about one-fifth a violent crime. Table 1 provides a summary of the sample demographics.

Table 1. Sample demographics

Gender		Employment	
Male	57.7%	Employed	58.9%
Female	42.8%	Retired	15.4%
		Housewife	11.2%
Income		Unemployed	8.0%
< \$10,000	23.9%	Student	6.6%
10–25,000	23.9%	County residence	
25–50,000	24.6%	St George	37.4%
50–100,000	23.6%	Victoria	18.6%
> 100,000	3.9%	Caroni	14.2%
Ethnicity		St Patrick	11.8%
East Indian	41.9%	St Andrew/St David	5.6%
African	37.3%	Port of Spain	4.4%
Mixed	19.4%	Nariva/Mayaro	3.3%
White and Other	1.4%	San Fernando	2.3%
Marital status		Arima	2.5%
Married	54.4%	Crime victim (self or someone close)	
Single	31.8%	Property loss > \$250	50.4%
Other	13.7%	Injured	21.4%

In order to empirically explore the relationship between media and criminal justice policy support, measures were created reflecting three conceptual areas: crime and justice media consumption and perceptions, crime and justice worldviews, and two dependent variables, criminal justice punitive support and preventive policy support. Media consumption and perceptions were operationalized via five media indexes that measured respondents' print crime news and television crime news consumption, perceptions of crime and justice news as accurate, perceptions of television crime dramas as realistic, and attraction to television crime dramas. Crime and justice worldviews were operationalized via four measures: respondent perceptions of crime risk to other Trinidadians, personal fear of crime, perceptions of how safe distant areas in Trinidad were, and perceptions of local neighborhood safety.

Measuring Criminal Justice Policy Support

Similar in approach to that employed by Mackey (Mackey et al., 2006) and based on standard items drawn from the reviewed extant literature (see Applegate, 1997; Dowler, 2003; US Department of Justice, 2007), criminal justice policy support was operationalized along two dimensions. Respondents were asked eight five-point Likert items (response ranged from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') dealing with support for punitive and preventive criminal justice policy (see Table 2). There were four pro-punishment items (1 through 4 in Table 2) and four pro-treatment items (5 through 8). Following a component factor analysis with varimax rotation, examination of resulting scree and rotated component plots⁴ and factor loadings revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Factor 1 denoted support for prevention, component 2 denoted support for punishment. Regression-based factor scores for each component were calculated for each respondent and provide the two dependent variables for this study. Component 1

Table 2. Principal component factor analysis rotated component matrix

		Factor Preventive
1	Punishing criminals is the best way to stop them from committing more crime in the future	-.016
2	The courts, police and jails that make up the criminal justice system are more effective at reducing crime than education, job training and treatment programs	-.236
3	Crime is too serious a problem to wait for education, job training and treatment programs to work	-.237
4	The best way to reduce crime is to put criminals in jail	-.094
5	Sending people convicted of crimes to education, job training and treatment programs will reduce crime more than sending them to jail	.653
6	The best way to reduce crime is by preventing it through education, job training and treatment programs	.704
7	Education, work and treatment programs in crime-ridden neighborhoods will reduce crime more than law enforcement efforts	.748
8	To reduce crime you have to wait for education, job training and treatment programs to work	.556

was labeled 'preventive support', component 2 termed 'punitive support'. Factor scores on treatment support were normally distributed; scores on punishment support were slightly skewed with more Trinidadians supporting punitive policies (see Table 3). As expected, factor score distribution indicated that support levels were greater for punitive policies but there was substantial simultaneous support for both approaches. A similar approach of component factor analysis and utilization of resulting factor scores as variables was applied for the media consumption and worldview variables.

Media Consumption Measures

Ten media-related items were examined with five factors extracted based on eigenvalues greater than 1 and examination of scree and rotated component plots. As with the two dependent variables, factors scores were calculated and subsequently utilized in an OLS regression model. The media items were adapted from the works of Dowler (2003), Oliver and Armstrong (1995), Sotirovic (2001, 2003) and a 2005 survey of Florida Hispanics conducted by Prange and O'Hearn (2004). The first two factors measured crime news consumption, one of television and one of print.⁵ The third factor measured respondents' perceptions of the accuracy of crime reports found in local television news reports and local newspapers.⁶ The fourth factor measured how much respondents thought media crime dramas realistically reflected crime in Trinidad.⁷ A final media-related factor was extracted to measure respondents' attraction to televised crime shows.⁸ Lower factor scores reflected higher print and television news consumption, belief that the news media were accurate regarding crime, belief that television crime dramas were realistic, and more attraction to television crime dramas.

Table 3. Factor score variable summaries

Variable	X	M	SD	Positive score interpretation
Media				
TV crime news	.02	-.11	.98	Low consumption of TV news
Prime crime news	.02	-.01	1.01	Low consumption of print news
Crime news accurate	.01	.36	1.01	Crime news inaccurate
TV crime drama realistic	.02	-.11	1.02	Crime dramas unrealistic
Attraction TV crime dramas	-.01	.14	1.02	Low attraction to crime drama
Worldview				
Crime risk for others	-.02	.16	.98	High crime risk for others
Fear of crime	-.01	-.11	1.00	Low fear of crime
Distant areas safe	.03	.28	.97	Distant areas unsafe
Neighborhood safe	-.03	-.01	.97	Neighborhood safe
Dependent variables				
Preventive policy support	.02	-.04	.98	Low support for prevention
Punitive policy support	-.04	-.20	.97	Low support for punishment

Crime and Justice Worldview Measures

A second set of four factors related to crime and justice worldviews were extracted from fifteen items culled from the *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (US Department of Justice, 2007) and derived from the standard globals for fear of crime adapted for a Trinidadian population (see Chadee & Ditton, 2005). The first factor measured a respondent's perceived risk of crime for other Trinidad citizens.⁹ Factor 2 provided a measure of respondents' personal fear of crime level.¹⁰ Factor 3 was related to respondents' perception of how safe distant areas in Trinidad were.¹¹ Factor 4 measured perceptions of local neighborhood safety.¹² Low factor scores signified a lower perception of general crime risk to Trinidadian citizens, higher fear of crime for respondents, perceptions of distant Trinidadian areas as safe, and perceptions of the local neighborhood area as safe.

As reflected in Table 3, the crime and justice media and worldview measures provided good variability for subsequent analysis. Regarding the media factors, in general the surveyed Trinidadians were regular consumers of media crime news, with consumption of television crime news slightly greater than print crime news. A slight majority of Trinidadians believed that the news they obtained from the media was more inaccurate than accurate. In addition, slightly more Trinidadians saw crime dramas as unrealistic as opposed to realistic, and Trinidadians generally saw themselves as not strongly attracted to crime dramas. Concerning the worldview measures, the typical respondent saw the risk of victimization for other Trinidadians as more likely than unlikely, but their personal fear of being a crime victim as low. Somewhat more pronounced, Trinidadians generally saw distant areas of Trinidad as unsafe but felt safe in their own neighborhoods. Irrespective of these tendencies, the crime and justice media consumption and worldview factor scores provided distributions with good score variability and adequate numbers of respondents falling along the full conceptual ranges for utilization in regression models.

In addition, a set of demographic variables were selected for inclusion. The four demographic variables of age, gender, ethnicity (East Indian or African) and residing in a high crime area were

included. High crime areas were determined by a review of reported crime rates which naturally dichotomized the country into two regions of high and low crime (Trinidad Central Statistical Office, 1999, 2003). Counties in the high crime area (coded 1) included Port of Spain, San Fernando, Arima, Point Fortin, and St George; counties in the low crime area (coded 0) were Caroni, Nariva/Mayaro, St Andrews/St David, Victoria, and St Patrick. The high crime area included the two major cities of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Data from the *modus operandi* section of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service show that 84 percent of all serious crimes occurring in 2005 occurred in the area, herein labeled as high crime.

Findings

Utilizing the two *Criminal Justice Policy Support* measures as dependent variables, the present study analyzed the relationship between criminal justice policy support, media consumption and perceptions, and demographics within regression models. Ordinary least square regressions were run on each dependent variable, applying a set of fourteen independent variables: five media consumption, four worldview, and five demographic measures.¹³ Tables 4 and 5 summarize the regression analysis results.

Punitive Policy Support

Diagnostics of the model's residuals and associated scatterplots and the collinearity statistics for tolerance (all values > .9) and variance inflation (all values close to 1.0) revealed no violations of the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity and normality. Examination of partial correlations and collinearity statistics further revealed no multicollinearity issues. As shown in Table 4, although statistically significant the model did not strongly predict criminal justice policy support, with nearly 90 percent of support determined by non-model factors. Similar to Reith's (1999) and Dowler's (2003) findings regarding race and policy support, in this study ethnicity was significantly related to punitive policy support when examined at the bivariate level: East Indian respondents were significantly more supportive of punitive policies and African Trinidadians were significantly more supportive of preventive policies. However, ethnicity was not significant in the multivariate analysis.¹⁴ As found in prior research on media and punitive policy support, no demographic variables were significant in a multivariate examination. A significant factor was that higher fear-of-crime levels were related to more support for punitive policies. Regarding the media's impact, two variables were significant. Those who saw the news media as accurate and television crime dramas as realistic were more supportive of punitive criminal justice policies. Beta values suggest roughly equal contributions from the three significant variables (italic in Table 4).

Preventive Policy Support

As found with the punitive support regression, diagnostics of the preventive policy support model's residuals and associated scatterplots and statistics revealed no violations of the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality, and multicollinearity. Also similar, the preventive model did not strongly predict criminal justice policy support. While no individual-level demographic variables were significant, residing in a high crime area was related to greater support for preventive policies. In this population, support for preventive policies was stronger among residents who

Table 4. Punitive policy support regression results ($n = 420$)

Variables in the model	B	SEM	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	.163	.168		.975	.330
African ethnicity	-.051	.128	-.026	-.401	.689
East Indian ethnicity	-.235	.130	-.120	-1.800	.073
Age	.001	.003	-.017	-.342	.733
Gender	-.107	.098	-.055	-1.101	.271
Reside in high crime area	.003	.109	-.001	.026	.979
Neighborhood safe	.007	.053	.007	.132	.895
Distant areas safe	-.089	.050	-.089	-1.768	.078
<i>Fear of crime</i>	.158	.052	.164	3.053	.002*
Crime risk	.065	.052	.066	1.253	.211
<i>News media accurate</i>	.100	.048	.105	2.084	.038*
Print crime news	.068	.056	.089	1.542	.124
TV crime drama	-.030	.047	-.032	-.645	.520
<i>TV crime dramas realistic</i>	.107	.046	.113	2.309	.021*
TV crime news	.013	.056	.013	.227	.821

Model summary statistics: $F = 3.694$ ($p = .000$); $R = .336$; $R^2 = .113$

Table 5. Preventive policy support regression results ($n = 420$)

Variables in the model	B	SEM	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	.218	.172		1.268	.206
African ethnicity	-.009	.131	-.005	-.070	.944
East Indian ethnicity	-.122	.133	-.061	-.913	.362
Age	-.001	.003	-.015	-.303	.762
Gender	.004	.100	.002	.044	.965
<i>Reside in high crime area</i>	-.259	.112	-.131	-2.315	.021*
Neighborhood safe	-.006	.054	-.006	-.119	.906
Distant areas safe	.087	.052	.085	1.679	.094
Fear of crime	-.031	.053	-.031	-.577	.564
<i>Crime risk typical</i>	-.134	.053	-.133	-2.522	.012*
<i>News media accurate</i>	.101	.049	.103	2.041	.042*
Print crime news	.054	.058	.055	.941	.347
TV crime drama	-.029	.048	.030	.607	.544
<i>TV crime drama realistic</i>	.107	.048	-.111	2.247	.025*
<i>TV crime news exposure</i>	-.127	.058	-.126	-2.184	.030*

Model summary statistics: $F = 3.214$ ($p = .000$); $R = .316$; $R^2 = .100$

dealt more directly with crime. Crime risk for typical Trinidadians was also significantly related: as risk was perceived as higher, support for preventive policies increased.

Concerning the media's role in preventive policy support, print crime news was not significant but perception of the accuracy of news was. Respondents who saw news media as more accurate also tended to support preventive policies more. Television emerged as a distinct source of influence with respondent perceptions of how realistic television crime shows were and how much television crime news they watched both significant. Those who saw crime dramas as realistic were more supportive of preventive criminal justice policies and lower levels of television crime news exposure equated to higher support for preventive policies. As reported in Table 5, the Beta values for the five significant predictor variables (in italic) range from .11 to .13, indicating that they contribute equivalently to the model.

In sum, Trinidad respondents who live in a high crime area, see more crime risk for a typical Trinidadian, see the news in general as accurate, watch lesser amounts of television crime news, and see television crime dramas as realistic are significantly more likely to support preventive criminal justice policies. For these respondents, the media played a dual role. Perceiving the media as a credible source of crime information (seeing crime news as accurate and crime dramas as realistic) increased support for preventive policies. However, higher consumption levels of television crime news decreased support. Visual crime information did not translate into positive attitudes toward prevention but positive attitudes toward media content did.

Discussion

A strength of this study, the examination of a unique population, is also its greatest limitation. The generalizability of these results to other countries and ethnic groups is not known. In addition, factors found not to be associated with criminal justice policy support in this research that have been found to be significant in other studies should not be consigned to the conceptual scrap-pile (see for example Sims & Johnston, 2004). Even for the significant factors, one cannot know their relative priority, as their Beta's are all comparable, ranging from .10 to .13 in absolute values. Clearly, further research and model development is needed to tease out the subtle, likely interactive, roles that the media play in criminal justice policy support levels. For example, the inclusion of program preferences would strengthen future research efforts. To better understand the impact that imported media have on differing cultures, more studies of populations that consume imported media entertainment products intermixed with local news media, as in Trinidad, should be pursued. Such research is important because, overall, results from this research confirm that, as in prior studies (excepting Dowler, 2003 and Reith, 1999), traditional demographics were not found to explain criminal justice policy support.

Looking at the media's role, it is noteworthy that seeing news as accurate and television crime dramas as realistic were predictive for both punitive and preventive criminal justice policies. The idea that support for one policy approach is not mutually exclusive of support for the other is affirmed and the media are shown to be able to simultaneously enhance both policy positions. Trinidadians who felt that the news was generally accurate and who felt that television entertainment programming was a realistic depiction of crime were more likely to support both preventive and punitive policy approaches. Speculation is that seeing typical predatory media crime content as credible leads to seeing crime as such a threat that both approaches need to be pursued: belief

in credible media leading to support for preventing crime as much as possible but also to support for more harshly punishing those not deterred. It is hypothesized that increased media credibility contributes to a social construction of crime as a pressing problem and looming crisis in a cumulative process described by Altheide (2002). This worldview, in turn, leads to punitive policy support to address an immediate threat and preventive policy support to institute long-term solutions. As suggested by the bivariate relationship of fear of crime for punitive support and high crime area residence for preventive support (see note 13), this process would be influenced by individual experiences such as direct exposure to crime.

What role did the media play, then, in criminal justice policy support? The Trinidadian results support Roomer and colleagues (2003), Holbert and colleagues (2004), and Sotirovic (2001) in their findings that television exposure has a unique effect distinct from print media. These results further specify the relationship reported by Sotirovic (2003) by indicating that the perception of accuracy and reality is more important than the amount of media exposure. The amount of crime news consumed emerged as less important than the perception of the credibility of that news. It is possible that, for respondents consuming greater amounts of television crime news combined with residing in high crime areas, the impact of the media on crime and justice social construction was exacerbated, in turn influencing their crime and justice worldviews and subsequently encouraging more support for preventive policies. The contrary lack of high crime residency impact on punitive policy support is in accord with prior studies that found the media more important when direct experience was lacking (see Chiricos & Eschholz, 1997; Gunter, 1987; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). The Trinidadian results suggest that preventive policy support is apparently enhanced by a combination of real-world exposure to crime and believable crime-related media content; punitive support is enhanced by a personal fear of crime combined with believable media content.

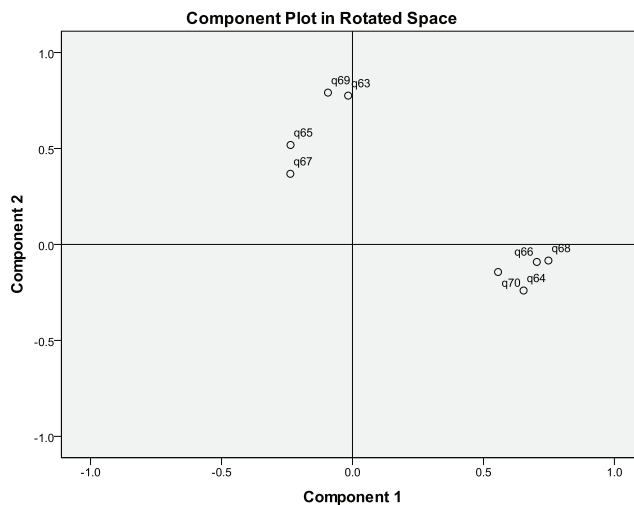
In conclusion, the media–criminal justice policy influence model was supported, with the media likely playing a small intermediary role between one’s background and real-world experiences and one’s crime and justice worldviews. Empirically the media may not have a huge influence, but influence likely compounds over time. Much of the differences in criminal justice policy support remained unexplained and the media remain one of many engines in criminal justice policy support formation. Criminal justice policy support ultimately is rooted in experiences and concerns that are independent of crime, victimization, and criminal justice experiences. As crime comes bundled with other social ills, criminal justice policy support is inextricably linked with experiences, general perceptions, values, and social forces independent of narrow concerns about crime and justice (Cullen et al., 1990). Further specification of the role of the media as intermediary in the formation of these broader perceptions awaits.

Notes

- 1 Trinidad and Tobago was a British colony during its formative stages with partial self-government instituted in 1925. In 1962, it gained independence from Britain and in 1976 became a republic within the British Commonwealth (Williams, 1964). McCormack (1999) as well as Bennett and Lynch (1996) argue that the country’s colonial experience provided the basis for current criminal justice policy in Trinidad. Historically, Trinidad experienced two mass forced migrations—slavery and indentureship—and modern crime policies have developed within this context (Bennett & Lynch, 1996). With the abolition of the African slave trade in 1807, the British colony suffered a severe shortage of labor in the 1830s. To deal

with this problem, Trinidad imported indentured servants from the 1830s until 1917. As part of this program, in 1839 the British government began to recruit Indian laborers with indentureship formally instituted with India in 1845. Once established, this East Indian community steadily grew until it made up about 41 percent of the Trinidad population, African-Trinidadians comprising about 40 percent. Between 1832 (the end of slavery in Trinidad) to 1862, Spanish-based criminal laws in Trinidad were gradually integrated with those imported from England (Lambert-Peterson, 2007; Patchett, 1972). Following independence in 1962, Trinidad maintained formal criminal justice system links with Britain, most notably in its judicial appeals process and today still employs the Privy Council in Britain as its final judicial court of appeal.

- 2 One study by Oliver and Armstrong (1995) looked at the reverse pattern, examining whether punitive attitudes predict media viewing and enjoyment (as opposed to the more common focus on whether or not media exposure generates punitive attitudes) and reported that those persons holding more punitive attitudes showed a stronger preference for reality-based but not fictional crime shows.
- 3 One of a set of laws in the United States providing for registration of sex offenders and community notification, the exact requirements varying from state to state.
- 4 The clustering of the eight Likert items into two distinct components of punitive and preventive policy support is shown in the rotated component plot.



- 5 The first factor loaded heavily on the items: *How often do you watch television news reports of crimes in Trinidad?* and *In addition to TV programs about individual crimes, how often do you watch programs that focus on crime trends and criminal justice policies in Trinidad?*. For the print news consumption factor the items were: *How often do you read newspaper articles about crimes that have occurred in Trinidad?* and *In addition to newspaper or magazine articles about individual crimes, how often do you read articles that focus on crime trends and criminal justice policies in Trinidad?*.
- 6 This factor loaded on the Likert items: *Local television news programs almost always report crimes correctly* and *Local newspapers almost always report crimes correctly*. Perceptions of print and television news accuracy were examined separately but views of the accuracy of news did not factor differentiate between media source, and the combined items for print and television loaded heavily on a single factor.
- 7 This factor loaded on the questions: *Do you think crime dramas show crime as it really is in Trinidad?* and *How realistic do you think crime drama shows on television are at depicting crime in Trinidad?*
- 8 Factor loaded significantly on two items: *How much do you like watching crime dramas on television?* and *How often do you watch crime dramas on television, such as CSI or Law and Order?*

- 9 Factor 1 loaded most heavily on the four items: *During the past year, how likely would a typical person in Trinidad be the victim of... any violent crime (like assault or kidnapping)?; ... of a property crime (like burglary or theft)?; ... of kidnapping for ransom?; ... of armed robbery?*
- 10 Factor 2 loaded heavily on the items: *How fearful are you of being the victim ...of property crime (like burglary or theft)?;... of kidnapping for ransom)? and ... of armed robbery?*
- 11 Worldview factor 3 was created from standard items (see US Department of Justice, 2007): *How safe do you feel or would you feel walking alone elsewhere outside of your neighborhood at night?; How safe do you feel or would you feel walking alone elsewhere outside of your neighborhood during the daytime?; How safe do you feel or would you feel being alone inside an office building downtown at night? and How safe do you feel or would you feel being alone inside an office building downtown in the daytime?*
- 12 Worldview factor 4 was created from the following four standard items (see US Department of Justice, 2007): *How safe would you feel walking alone in your neighborhood at night; How safe would you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the daytime? How safe would you feel being alone inside your house at night? How safe would you feel being alone inside your house in the daytime?*
- 13 Data screening revealed two outlier cases whose residual analysis identified them as disproportionately influential. Both were married, employed females. One was a 65-year-old East Indian woman living in a high crime area who was strongly supportive of punitive policies and strongly opposed to preventive ones. The other outlier was a 52-year-old of unreported ethnicity living in a low crime area who was neutral towards preventive policies and strongly opposed to punitive ones. The substantive results of the regressions with and without the two outliers were similar. In order to maximize generalizability, the analysis reported was conducted with the two outlier cases omitted.
- 14 When the bivariate relationships were examined via Pearson correlations (reported below), the results for preventive policy support showed that the same five variables that were significant in the regression model were significantly related at the bivariate level. For punitive policy support, of the eight variables with significant Pearson correlations, three remained significant in the regression model with ethnicity, the perception of distant areas of Trinidad as safe, and news media consumption for both print and television no longer significant.

Pearson correlations: predictor variables with preventive and punitive policy support ($n = 420$)

	Preventive	Punitive
African	-.007	.123*
Indian	.018	-.165**
Age	-.010	-.037
Gender	-.003	-.054
High crime area	-.206**	.053
Neighborhood safe	-.081	-.073
Distant areas safe	.089	-.158**
Fear of crime	.015	.215**
Crime risk	.171**	-.009
News media accurate	.158**	.096*
TV crime dramas	.058	-.043
TV realistic	.112*	.165**
TV crime news	-.101*	.101*
Print crime news	.004	.137**

*Sig. at 0.05; **Sig. at 0.01

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