

Attitudes towards Terrorist Rehabilitation Programs

Attitudes towards Terrorist Rehabilitation Programs: Psychological

Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms

Rehabilitation programs for terrorists have gained notoriety. Some issues still require thorough investigation, such as the social support they receive. The present research aims to examine the attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorist offenders and the mediating and moderating mechanisms underlying these attitudes. To this end, two studies were conducted: the first study evaluated the mediating mechanisms (negative feelings and threats; $N = 407$) and the second study analyzed the moderating mechanisms (social dominance orientation, system justification, and political orientation; $N = 444$). In both cases, the type of offender was manipulated (criminal vs. nationalist terrorist vs. Islamist terrorist offenders) and different attitudes were assessed (general support, incapacitation, treatment effectiveness, and mandated treatment). The results showed less support for rehabilitation programs for Islamist terrorists than for other offenders. Moreover, Islamist terrorists pose a more significant terrorist threat while criminals pose a greater realistic threat, which led to less favorable attitudes towards rehabilitation programs. Finally, individuals with more conservative ideologies had stronger negative attitudes towards programs for Islamist terrorists. We discuss these findings within the framework of integrated threat and system justification theories.

Keywords: rehabilitation programs; terrorism; attitudes; integrated threat theory; system justification theory

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Prison sentences for terrorism-related offenses have remained relatively stable over the past few years in European Union Member States. While 513 convictions were made in 2015, the annual number of convictions increased to 653 in 2018; subsequently, the number of convictions decreased to 520 in 2019, 422 in 2020, and 423 in 2021 (Europol, 2018, 2020, 2022). Overall, since 2015, more than 3,600 individuals have been convicted in EU Member States for terrorism-related offenses without taking into account the convictions made in the United Kingdom since it left the EU. In addition to this growing trend, two other factors aggravate the problem regarding the treatment of this type of prisoners (Basra & Neumann, 2020). Firstly, their backgrounds are increasingly diverse (Basra et al., 2016). Secondly, the sentences imposed vary widely in time range, with short-term custodial sentences being most prevalent; between 2020 and 2021, the average prison sentence dropped from eight to six years (Europol, 2022). Consequently, a bulk of terrorist offenders will be released in the coming years in European nations (Vidino & Clifford, 2019).

In response to this situation, the European Commission recommends increasing efforts in tertiary prevention. This strategy would include disengagement or deradicalization programs and bolstering reintegration (Council of the European Union, 2014). Although these recommendations have been somewhat taken into account, and despite the increasing number of outbound programs, some aspects related to their effectiveness remain controversial (e.g., Cherney, 2018; Clubb et al., 2019; Horgan, 2014; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). One of these aspects, probably the most neglected one, is public support for this type of programs (Clubb & O'Connor, 2019; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; Thornton & Bouhana, 2019). Public support is an essential element, as successful reintegration depends on community acceptance (Barrelle, 2015; Schmid, 2013). Thus, the present research intends to delve into attitudes towards rehabilitation

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programs for terrorist offenders and the underlying psychological mechanisms that could determine these attitudes. In particular, we intend to explore whether various psychological mechanisms mediate and moderate attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorists, which, to our knowledge, have not been investigated. Moreover, we aim to test the role of these mechanisms in other attitudes towards rehabilitation programs related to incapacitation, treatment effectiveness, and mandatory treatment.

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Public support matters. Both the support for these programs and the support offered to reintegrated prisoners can be determinants of the effectiveness of reintegration. On the one hand, according to Altier (2021), the lack of government transparency regarding rehabilitation programs for terrorists generates mistrust and misinformation (Clubb & O'Connor, 2019; Thornton & Bouhana, 2019). In addition, budget allocations for such programs depend, to some extent, on constituents' preferences. Security measures might be implemented using funds allocated to these programs (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018). On the other hand, the main challenges and problems that former extremists encounter in reintegrating include stigmatization within the community (Ferguson, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2015). Therefore, public support for terrorist rehabilitation programs is a significant factor in ensuring their existence and the effectiveness of reintegration (Annan et al., 2011; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018).

In the case of criminal offenders, research in criminology has shown that public support for re-entry programs is relatively high (e.g., Garland et al., 2013; Vuk et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this support seems to depend on different factors, such as the type of crime or the extent of harm inflicted on victims, with violent, sexual, and repeat offenders having the least support (Reynolds et al., 2009; Vuk et al., 2020). In this case,

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support for terrorist offenders is not as high. Therefore, our goal is to investigate how terrorist offenders are different from “ordinary” criminal offenders. Altier (2021) highlights three points. Firstly, terrorists are committed to an ideological cause that extends beyond individual benefit. Due to such ideological motivation, they may be perceived as less amenable to change or irredeemable. Secondly, terrorism, although not always, involves the commission of spectacular attacks designed to invoke fear and maximize publicity through the media. Therefore, the public may be more fearful of being a victim of terrorism than of crime. Thirdly, in similar terms, terrorists also threaten public order, which they seek to overthrow; therefore, terrorism is perceived as a threat to the social order and the system. Providing empirical evidence for these arguments, in a study conducted in Spanish prisons, Gómez et al. (2022) found that Islamist terrorists differed from other violent offenders and criminals in that terrorists had a greater and more enduring commitment to their values, and perceived more unjust and hostile treatment by society and the state. These differences were related to their willingness to make costly sacrifices.

Along these lines, Altier (2021) found that a representative sample of the U.S. public were less favorable towards rehabilitation programs for terrorists than for convicted criminals. However, most respondents showed positive support for programs for terrorist offenders. In turn, this support was reduced by the ideology of the terrorist offenders. These programs received less support for Islamist offenders than for white nationalists. In another study with university students in Kuwait, Msall (2017) found that attitudes toward radicals and extremists were similar to those toward convicted criminals and former offenders. However, the attitudes were divided based on whether a religious extremist should be deradicalized. Clubb et al. (2019) and Clubb and O’Connor (2019) analyzed the use of the term *deradicalization*. On the one hand, they

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found that this term was related to more support (vs. disengagement or resistance), although it was also associated with lower effectiveness. On the other hand, the term deradicalization was presented in media as natural, logical, and desirable, associated with attitudes that are more favorable. Lastly, Godefroidt and Langer (2021) explored some of the heuristics that drive attitudes towards rehabilitation. Focusing on the characteristics of terrorists, they found that attitudes were more favorable towards those terrorists forced to join the group, who had intentionally fled out of regret or disappointment with their ideology, and who had performed conciliatory acts.

Based on this research, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, programs for terrorist offenders have less support than programs for ordinary criminal offenders, and this support is higher for terrorism of nationalist ideology than of Islamist ideology. Notwithstanding these results, the reviewed literature has subordinated public attitudes to the aspects related to the characteristics of the rehabilitation programs (e.g., Clubb et al., 2019; Clubb & O'Connor, 2019) and to the characteristics and context of the terrorist offenders (e.g., Altier, 2021; Godefroidt & Langer, 2021; Msall, 2017). Without downplaying these factors, research has neglected one of the main determinants of attitudes: the carriers themselves. Except for the relationship with some sociodemographic characteristics, Altier (2021) found that support for these programs was higher among men, younger individuals, those with higher levels of education, and liberals; further research is required on other psychological characteristics such as personality traits, ideologies, feelings, and other psychological mechanisms. Consequently, in the following sections, we explore some psychological mechanisms that could play a role in the settling of attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorist offenders.

Attitude-Mediating Mechanisms

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As has been reported in previous research (e.g., Duckitt, 2006), some psychological mechanisms mediate attitudes. In other words, these mechanisms explain how attitudes are different for different groups. Concerning rehabilitation programs, we believe that potential mediating mechanisms are related to the generation of negative feelings towards the offenders and their perception as a greater threat. Therefore, we propose that the following mechanisms will mediate by generating less support for rehabilitation programs for terrorists: negative feelings towards the offender and perceived threat of the offender. This selection of mechanisms was guided by the authors' knowledge and experience in the field of the psychology of terrorism and related phenomena. Therefore, the selection of variables did not come from a literature review, which allowed other non-selected variables to have significant effects, as will be described in the discussion.

Feelings towards Offenders

Intergroup feelings are a key component of attitudes that shapes our understanding of outgroup members and contributes to fuel intergroup processes (Dovidio et al., 2010). In this vein, previous research identifies that people hold stronger negative feelings towards several types of offenders, such as sexual (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Shackley et al., 2014) or terrorist offenders (Kteily et al., 2016). Specifically, the former authors found that negative feelings about the terrorist group ISIS were significantly associated with punitiveness towards the Charlie Hebdo attackers. Furthermore, research has also shown that intergroup feelings usually mediate attitudes formed after reading news with a violent context (Lobato et al., 2018). Thus, we propose that stronger negative feelings will emerge from terrorists' perceptions, reducing support for rehabilitation programs.

Threat Perception

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The integrated threat theory (Stephan et al., 2009; Stephan & Renfro, 2002) proposes that the greater the perception of individuals towards certain social groups as threatening, the more likely they are to have a prejudice against these groups. The most prominent types of threat are realistic (threats to social welfare systems, jobs, political power) and symbolic (threats to values, norms, and culture) (Riek et al., 2006). However, further research suggests differentiating between realistic and safety threats (threats to physical safety and well-being; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Crawford, 2014). In this case, the most relevant safety threat is the terrorist threat (Doosje et al., 2009), given that it is more strongly related to fear than realistic or symbolic threats. Uenal (2016) found relationships among realistic, symbolic, and terroristic threats and prejudice towards Muslims. Each of these threats explained the rise of prejudice in a different way. In this line, Altier (2021) suggests that one possible explanation for the reduced support for terrorist rehabilitation programs is the exaggerated fear associated with terrorism. Thus, we understand that the perceived threat from terrorists will be more significant, causing less support for such programs.

Attitude-Moderating Mechanisms

Some psychological mechanisms exert a moderating effect. That is, they change the strength or direction of the effects. For example, concerning rehabilitation programs, mechanisms that legitimize the system are related to a more vigorous rejection of terrorism (Echebarría-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006). Consequently, we propose that the following mechanisms modulate support for terrorist rehabilitation programs by developing stronger negative attitudes towards them: social dominance, system justification, and political orientation. Again, the selection of mechanisms was guided by the authors' knowledge and experience, which allowed other non-selected variables to have significant effects, as will be described in the discussion.

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Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance refers to the support or preference for social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Accordingly, social dominance theory proposes that individuals with a social dominance orientation (SDO) strongly prefer hierarchy within any social system and control over lower-status groups. Research has demonstrated that SDO correlates with positive attitudes towards painful executions and to belief in retributions (Pratto et al., 1994), beliefs implicating that it is right to harm others (Wilson, 2003), and support for abusive and torture-like behaviors (Larsson et al., 2021). Likewise, SDO predicts support for excessive use of force (Gerber & Jackson, 2017) and anti-Islamic sentiments (Uenal, 2016). Therefore, we understand that individuals with higher social dominance orientation would be less supportive of rehabilitation programs.

System Justification

Ideologies, i.e., sets of belief systems that provide a reference framework for interpreting a context (Jost et al., 2009), represent a form of social cognition by which people fulfill psychological needs (Jost et al., 2003). System justification theory argues that individuals are motivated to justify the status quo, even at the expense of personal and group interest, and use ideologies to reduce uncertainty, avoid anxiety triggered by potential threats, and create a shared reality (Jost et al., 2009; Jost et al., 2015). In this vein, research has shown that threats, particularly terrorism salience, increase conservatism and system justification motives (Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007), while validating the institutions (Jost et al., 2004; Osborne et al., 2019). Moreover, powerless participants perceived the disproportionate incarceration rates of African Americans as more legitimate, i.e., they further justified the system (van der Toorn et al., 2015). Therefore, to avoid negative emotions related to terrorism and maintain the status quo,

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individuals who support such ideologies will largely reject terrorist rehabilitation programs.

Political Orientation

Research has shown that there are substantial differences depending on the political orientation of individuals (Jost, 2006). Conservatives or those who identify with the right-wing usually share a desire to punish perpetrators more harshly (Hofmann et al., 2018) and greater rejection towards the release of prisoners (Lopes et al., 2021). For example, Echebarría-Echabe and Fernández-Guede (2006) found that terrorist attacks usually exhibit higher levels of political conservatism. Likewise, Altier (2021) found that conservatives were less supportive of rehabilitation programs for terrorists.

Therefore, we propose that people with greater right-wing political orientation will show stronger negative attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorists.

The Present Research

Based on the previous literature review, we aim to replicate previous results: H1a) support for prisoner rehabilitation programs will be lower for terrorists than for ordinary criminal offenders, and H1b) support for these programs will be higher for nationalist terrorist offenders than for Islamist terrorists (Altier, 2021). Furthermore, we also propose novel hypotheses that indicate that different psychological constructs will mediate H2a) negative feelings and H2b) threats, and moderate H3a) social dominance orientation, H3b) system justification, and H3c) political orientation. To test these hypotheses, we conducted two studies. While both studies tested hypotheses H1a and H1b, Study 1 tested the hypotheses related to mediational effects (H2ab) and Study 2 tested hypotheses related to moderating effects (H3abc). Preregistrations, data, and supplementary materials of both studies can be found online:

https://osf.io/tf3cu/?view_only=76ec03d4adc440fba72ec42766300bf9.

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Study 1

This study aimed to replicate the finding reported by Altier (2021) on whether rehabilitation programs for terrorists have less support than for criminals (H1a) and even less so when the terrorists' ideology is Islamist compared to nationalist/separatist (H1b). Furthermore, we aimed to test the indirect effect that certain variables, such as negative feelings about offenders (H2a) and symbolic, realistic, and terroristic threats (H2b), have on the relationship between the type of offender and the support for rehabilitation programs.¹

Method

Participants

An on-line survey was distributed through snowball sampling and a university mailing list. In addition, a raffle was held for a voucher worth 100€ to encourage participation. A total of 597 individuals participated in the study; however, 190 were excluded because they did not meet any of the preregistered conditions: complete all questions, be over 18 years old, reside in Spain and have Spanish nationality, be native Spanish speakers, dedicate at least 20 seconds to reading the manipulation, and answer the manipulation checks correctly.² The final sample comprised 407 participants (279 women, 125 men, and three participants who did not specify their sex, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.12$, $SD = 8.32$) after excluding those who did not meet the study criteria. The participants were randomly distributed into the possible experimental conditions: criminal offenders (121 women, 58 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 23.54$, $SD = 8.15$), nationalist terrorist offenders (103 women, 38 men, and one unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.38$, $SD = 8.61$), and

¹ We considered a third hypothesis involving dehumanization as a mediating variable in the preregistration. Since the results were not significant and given the length of the article, the hypothesis, measure and results are presented in the Supplementary Material - SM1.

² Given the large number of excluded participants, the analyses were repeated without excluding participants. These analyses showed similar results.

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Islamist terrorist offenders (55 women, 29 men, and two unspecified, $M_{age} = 24.88$, $SD = 8.18$). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis was computed using the G*Power function for MANOVA (global effects) (Faul et al., 2007). Considering the sample size ($N = 407$), $\alpha = .05$ and $V = .08$, the power reached was .99. This implies that our sample was large enough to detect small effect sizes.

Procedure and Manipulation

Once the participants agreed to participate in an opinion survey about rehabilitation programs within the Spanish penitentiary system, they were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions. In each condition, the participants read a fictitious newspaper article about how the government aimed to create mandatory rehabilitation programs based on the vignettes used by Altier (2021) (see Supplementary Materials - SM2-3 for a full disclosure of the manipulation). In the manipulation news, the participants read about a new initiative that will increase public resources, such as educational programs, unemployment benefits, or other social support for criminal offenders. In each condition, the participants read that these public resources will be designated for criminal offenders (i.e., individuals who belong to organized crime), nationalist/separatist terrorist offenders (i.e., individuals who belong to a Spanish terroristic group, ETA), or Islamist terrorist offenders (i.e., individuals affiliated with ISIS). Once the participants had read the text, they were asked whom these mandatory rehabilitation programs were directed to, with three response options: violent criminals, nationalist terrorists, or Islamist terrorists. We then excluded those participants who did not respond correctly.

The choice of the terrorist groups ETA and ISIS responds to the situation in Spain. ISIS has perpetrated several attacks in recent years and several cells have been dismantled, thereby becoming one of the main threats (Igualada, 2021). For its part, the

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terrorist group ETA declared the cessation of violence in 2018 after sixty years of activity, although the last attack dates back to 2010 (Soldevilla, 2021). This is a limitation, as will be seen in the discussion, but there are currently no other terrorist groups of relevance outside the jihadist spectrum, thus choosing another minority group would not be credible.

Measures

All participants completed an on-line questionnaire (with the questions presented in the following paragraph, in presentation order). The only difference was that, depending on the manipulation, the participants responded to the items with a different target in mind when needed. These target categories were criminal offenders, nationalist terrorists, and Islamist terrorists. In all the proposed measures, except for those in which another scale was specified, a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree) was used (see Supplementary Materials – SM4).

Subsequently, the participants responded to different scales to assess the dependent variable “attitudes towards rehabilitation programs”, evaluated with two measures. Firstly, we included an indicator of general support similar to the one included by Altier (2021): “To what extent do you support rehabilitation programs such as the one described in the news item?” Moreover, we included an adaptation of the scale “attitudes towards the treatment of sex offenders” (Wnuk et al., 2016). The authors’ adaptation had 14 items organized in three dimensions. There were seven items about *incapacitation* (“Whatever is done with them, the [target] will strike again when they get out of prison;” $\alpha = .94$), four items concerning *treatment effectiveness* (“Reintegration programs with [target] are effective;” $\alpha = .84$), and three items regarding *mandated treatment* (“It is important that all [targets] undergo treatment

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before leaving prison;" $\alpha = .84$). Higher scores indicated more favorable attitudes towards incapacitation, treatment effectiveness and mandatory treatment.

Finally, the participants responded to different scales assessing the mediating variables. The strength of *negative feelings* was measured with the feeling thermometer (Haddock et al., 1993), which consists of an indicator with a slider ranging from 0 (very favorable feelings) to 100 (very unfavorable feelings). We also measured *symbolic* ("I am concerned that Spanish norms and values are being threatened by [target];" $\alpha = .90$), *realistic* ("The welfare system in Spain is increasingly weighed down by the presence of [target];" $\alpha = .84$), and *terroristic* ("I am concerned that peace is being threatened by groups of [target] in Spain;" $\alpha = .78$) threats using three items in each selected from Uenal's (2016) scales. Higher scores indicated an increased threat perception.

Results

Firstly, descriptive statistics and Pearson's bivariate correlations were calculated for all variables (Table 1). We present the correlations for each group according to the manipulation in the Supplementary Material (SM5).

[Insert Table 1]

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A MANOVA was conducted using the manipulation (criminal offenders vs. nationalist terrorists vs. Islamist terrorists) as the independent variable, and general support, incapacitation, treatment effectiveness, and mandated treatment as dependent variables. Using Pillai's trace, there was a significant effect of the manipulation on the dependent variables, $V = 0.08$, $F_{(8,804)} = 4.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. Particularly, we found a significant effect of the manipulation for general support ($F_{(2,404)} = 5.24$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2_p = .03$), incapacitation ($F_{(2,404)} = 6.31$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .03$), treatment effectiveness ($F_{(2,404)} = 4.83$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), and mandated treatment ($F_{(2,404)} = 9.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$).

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Subsequently, Bonferroni corrected comparisons were performed to examine the specific differences between the different handling conditions (figures are included in the Supplementary Material - SM6).³

In the case of general support, rehabilitation programs received more support for criminal offenders ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.12$) than for Islamist ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.60$, $p = .007$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.51$, $p = .094$), although the differences with the latter condition were marginal. We did not find significant differences between nationalist and Islamist terrorists ($p = .749$). In the case of attitudes towards incapacitation, these were more negative for criminal offenders ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.11$, $p = .008$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.23$, $p = .002$) than for Islamist terrorists ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.48$), while no significant differences were found between criminals and nationalist terrorists ($p = .999$). In the case of attitudes towards treatment effectiveness, rehabilitation programs were rated as more effective for criminals ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.91$, $p = .011$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.16$, $p = .022$) than for Islamist terrorists ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.09$), while no significant differences were found between criminals and nationalist terrorists ($p = .999$). In the case of attitudes towards mandated treatment, mandatory programs received more support for criminals ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 0.95$) than for nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.38$, $p < .001$), while no significant differences were found between Islamist terrorists ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.12$) and the other conditions ($ps > .192$).

Mediating Effects

To test possible indirect effects of the proposed variables on the observed differences, we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; model 4) with 95% confidence intervals

³ The MANOVA was repeated including gender as an independent variable. The results showed non-significant results for the gender variable ($V = 0.01$, $F_{(4,395)} = 0.90$, $p = .461$) and for the interaction between the manipulation and gender ($V = 0.03$, $F_{(8,792)} = 1.27$, $p = .256$).

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and 10,000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The independent variable was the manipulation of the object of the rehabilitation programs. We used Hayes and Preacher's (2014) method for analyzing multicategorical variables. Firstly, this variable was recoded, creating two dummy variables with two levels each. However, as the attitudes towards rehabilitation programs differed depending on the dependent variable, we created two different recodings based on results found in the previous analyses. Thus, for general support, attitudes towards incapacitation, and attitudes towards treatment effectiveness, the two dummy independent variables were: D1) the comparison between criminal and Islamist terrorists (criminal offenders = -1, nationalist terrorists = 0, Islamist terrorists = 1), and D2) the comparison between nationalist and Islamist terrorists (criminal offenders = 0, nationalist terrorists = -1, Islamist terrorists = 1). However, for attitudes towards mandated treatment, the two dummy independent variables with two levels were: D1) the comparison between criminal and nationalist terrorists (criminal offenders = -1, nationalist terrorists = 1, Islamist terrorists = 0), and D2) the comparison between criminal and Islamist terrorists (criminal offenders = -1, nationalist terrorists = 0, Islamist terrorists = 1) (figures are included in the Supplementary Material - SM7).

In the case of general support, when comparing criminals and Islamist terrorists (D1), we found a significant indirect effect for realistic threat ($b = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .11]). Criminal offenders were perceived as a greater realistic threat (compared with Islamist terrorist), which in turn decreased the support for rehabilitation programs. When comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists (D2), we found significant indirect effects for negative feelings ($b = -.04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-.07, -.01]), and realistic ($b = -.06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.12, -.01]) and terroristic threats ($b = -.09$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.15, -.04]). This implies that Islamist terrorists aroused more negative feelings and were

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perceived as a greater realistic and terroristic threat (compared with nationalist terrorists), which in turn resulted in lower support for rehabilitation programs.

In the case of attitudes towards incapacitation, when comparing criminals and Islamist terrorists (D1), we found a significant indirect effect for realistic threat ($b = -.11$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [-.21, -.01]). Criminal offenders were perceived as a greater realistic threat (compared with Islamist terrorists), resulting in more support for incapacitation. When comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists (D2), we found significant indirect effects for negative feelings ($b = .09$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.02, .18]), and realistic ($b = .13$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.02, .23]) and terroristic threats ($b = .22$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.12, .32]). This result indicates that Islamist terrorists aroused more negative feelings and were perceived as a greater realistic and terroristic threat (compared with nationalist terrorists), resulting in higher support for incapacitation.

In the case of attitudes towards treatment effectiveness, when comparing criminals and Islamist terrorists (D1), we found significant indirect effects for realistic threat ($b = .07$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .13]). Criminal offenders were perceived as a greater realistic threat (compared with Islamist terrorists), leading to a lower perception of treatment effectiveness. When comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists (D2), we found significant indirect effects for negative feelings ($b = -.06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.12, -.01]), and realistic ($b = -.08$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.15, -.01]) and terroristic threat ($b = -.12$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.19, -.06]). This result suggests that Islamist terrorists aroused more negative feelings and were perceived as a greater realistic and terroristic threat (compared with nationalist terrorists), resulting in a lower perception of treatment effectiveness.

In the case of attitudes towards mandated treatment, when comparing criminals and nationalist terrorists (D1), we found significant indirect effects for negative feelings

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($b = -.07$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.14, -.01]), and realistic ($b = -.06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.12, -.01]) and terroristic threats ($b = -.12$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-.19, -.06]). Criminal offenders aroused more negative feelings and were perceived as a greater realistic and terroristic threat (compared with nationalist terrorists), leading to higher support for the mandatory nature of these programs. Moreover, when comparing criminals and Islamist terrorists (D2), we found significant indirect effects for negative feelings ($b = .09$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.03, .17]) and terroristic threats ($b = .09$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.03, .16]). This result indicates that Islamist terrorists aroused more negative feelings and were perceived as a greater terroristic threat (compared with criminal offenders), resulting in greater support for the mandatory nature of these programs.

Discussion

Overall, the results showed differences in support for rehabilitation programs, and their characteristics (i.e., incapacitation, effectiveness, and compulsoriness) are mainly found between criminals and Islamist terrorists. Concerning Islamist terrorists, support for rehabilitation programs, effectiveness, and compulsoriness are less robust, while support for incapacitation is higher. These findings are in line with H1a. However, in the case of nationalist terrorists, support for incapacitation and effectiveness was similar to that attributed for criminal offenders and to compulsoriness for Islamist terrorists. This result only partially supported the H1b hypothesis. Moreover, the mediating analyses partially supported hypotheses H2a and H2b. Criminals were perceived as a more significant realistic threat than Islamist and nationalist terrorists. This tendency was associated with lower levels of support for rehabilitation programs (more incapacitation, less effectiveness, and more compulsoriness). Likewise, Islamist terrorists were associated with more negative feelings. The participants perceived them as a more significant realistic (compared to nationalist terrorists) and terroristic threat

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than nationalist terrorists and criminals, which was associated with less support for rehabilitation programs (more incapacitation, less effectiveness, and more compulsoriness).

Study 2

As was found in Study 1, emotions and perceptions of threat appear to mediate the relationship between offender type and support for rehabilitation programs. However, we believe that there are also individual psychological characteristics that could also be affecting these attitudes towards rehabilitation programs. That is, some ideologies and personality traits may determine support for this type of program. Therefore, this second study aimed to replicate the results of Study 1, regarding H1a and H1b, and test the novel moderating effect that certain variables such as social dominance orientation (H3a), system justification (H3b), and political orientation (H3c) have in these relationships.⁴

Method

Participants

An on-line survey was distributed through snowball sampling and a university mailing list with the possibility to participate in a raffle for a voucher worth 100€. A total of 612 individuals participated in the study; however, 168 were excluded because they did not meet the same criteria as in Study 1.⁵ The final sample comprised 444 Spanish participants (313 women, 127 men, four unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.23$, $SD = 8.24$). The participants were randomly distributed among the possible experimental conditions: criminal offenders (130 women, 40 men, three unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.21$, $SD = 8.85$), nationalist/separatist terrorist offenders (98 women, 45 men, one unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} =$

⁴ Other hypotheses, including institutional trust and identity fusion as moderating variables, were considered in preregistration. Since the results were not significant, and given the length of the article, the hypotheses, measures and results are presented in the Supplementary Material - SM1.

⁵ The analyses were repeated with the total sample, without exclusions, which revealed similar results.

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24.44, $SD = 8.70$), and Islamist terrorist offenders (85 women, 42 men, $M_{age} = 24.02$, $SD = 6.80$). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis was computed using the G*Power function for MANOVA (global effects) (Faul et al., 2007). Considering the sample size ($N = 444$), $\alpha = .05$ and $V = .08$, the power reached was .99. This implies that our sample was large enough to detect small effect sizes.

Procedure and Manipulation

The procedure followed was the same as in Study 1 (see Supplementary Material - SM2-3). We randomly assigned participants to one of the three possible experimental conditions. They read a fictitious newspaper article about how the government aimed to create mandatory rehabilitation programs (i.e., criminal offenders, nationalist terrorist offenders, Islamist terrorist offenders) and responded to the manipulation check.

Measures

All participants completed an on-line questionnaire. As in the previous study, the participants responded with a different target in mind depending on the experimental condition. All proposed measures, except for those based on other scales, used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree).

We employed the same two measures used to assess the dependent variable in Study 1 with the aim of evaluating attitudes towards rehabilitation programs, the indicator, and the adaptation of the scale “attitudes towards the treatment of sex offenders”: incapacitation ($\alpha = .93$), treatment effectiveness ($\alpha = .82$), and mandated treatment ($\alpha = .83$).

The participants also responded to different scales assessing the moderating variables. Social dominance orientation was evaluated using the 8-item scale by Ho et al. (2015). This scale examines two subfactors, namely, *social dominance* (e.g., “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups of people;” $\alpha = .67$) and *anti-*

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egalitarianism (e.g., “Group equality should not be our ideal;” $\alpha = .74$). Higher scores indicated higher social dominance and anti-egalitarianism. *System justification* was assessed using the 7-item scale by Jost and van der Toorn (2012) adapted for Spanish speakers by Jaume et al. (2012) (e.g., “If people work hard, they almost always get what they deserve;” $\alpha = .84$). Again, higher scores indicated higher system justification. Participants also evaluated their *political orientation* by answering one indicator on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extreme left-wing) to 7 (extreme right-wing).

Results

Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s bivariate correlations for all variables were computed (Table 2 and Supplementary Materials - SM5). Correlations for each group according to manipulation are presented in the Supplementary Material.

[Insert Table 2]

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A MANOVA was conducted using the manipulation (criminal offenders vs. nationalist terrorists vs. Islamist terrorists) as the independent variable, and general support, incapacitation, treatment effectiveness, and mandated treatment as dependent variables. Using Pillai’s trace, there was a significant effect of the manipulation on the dependent variables, $V = 0.08$, $F_{(8,878)} = 4.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. Particularly, we found a significant effect of the manipulation for general support ($F_{(2,441)} = 8.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$), support for incapacitation ($F_{(2,441)} = 3.30$, $p = .038$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), support for treatment effectiveness ($F_{(2,441)} = 7.21$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$), and support for mandated treatment ($F_{(2,441)} = 8.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$). Subsequently, Bonferroni corrected comparisons were performed to examine specific differences between the different handling conditions (figures are included in the Supplementary Material - SM6).⁶

⁶ The MANOVA was repeated including gender as an independent variable. The results showed significant results for the gender variable ($V = 0.03$, $F_{(4,431)} = 2.75$, $p = .028$) but not for the interaction

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In the case of general support, rehabilitation programs received more support for criminal offenders ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.22$, $p < .001$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.27$, $p = .002$) than for Islamist terrorists ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.46$), while no significant differences were found between criminal offenders and nationalist terrorists ($p = .999$). In the case of attitudes towards incapacitation, these were more negative for criminal offenders ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.10$, $p = .067$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.29$, $p = .069$) than for Islamist terrorists ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.31$), although the differences were marginal. No significant differences were found between criminal offenders and nationalist terrorists ($p = .999$). In the case of attitudes towards treatment effectiveness, rehabilitation programs were rated as more effective for criminal offenders ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.89$, $p = .001$) and nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.07$, $p = .010$) than for Islamist terrorists ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.06$), while no significant differences were found between criminal offenders and nationalist terrorists ($p = .999$). In the case of attitudes towards mandated treatment, mandatory programs received more support for criminal offenders ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 0.96$) than for nationalist terrorists ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.29$, $p = .004$) and Islamist terrorists ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.29$, $p < .00$), and no significant differences were found between nationalist terrorists and Islamist terrorists ($p = .999$).

Moderating Effects

To test the possible interactions of the proposed variables with the differences previously found, we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; model 1) with 95% confidence intervals and 10,000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The

between the manipulation and gender ($V = 0.02$, $F_{(8,864)} = 1.22$, $p = .286$). Particularly, Bonferroni corrected comparisons showed that women presented more general support ($M_{\text{women}} = 4.70$, $SD = 1.25$; $M_{\text{men}} = 4.33$, $SD = 1.49$; $p = .007$), less support for incapacitation ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.39$, $SD = 1.16$; $M_{\text{men}} = 2.74$, $SD = 1.37$; $p = .007$), and more treatment effectiveness ($M_{\text{women}} = 4.02$, $SD = 0.96$; $M_{\text{men}} = 3.69$, $SD = 1.09$; $p = .001$) than men.

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independent variable (i.e., the manipulation) was recoded by creating two dummy variables (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Since the differences between the different conditions were similar to those obtained in Study 1, the same two recodings were used. In addition, moderating variables were mean-centered when performing the analyses (regressions and figures are included in the Supplementary Material - SM8).

Regarding general support, when comparing criminal offenders and Islamist terrorists, no significant interaction was found, nor when comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists.

Regarding attitudes towards incapacitation, when comparing criminal offenders and Islamist terrorists, we found significant interactions for social dominance ($b = .23$, $SE = .08$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [.07, .38]), system justification ($b = .25$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.12, .39]), and political orientation ($b = .17$, $SE = .05$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.07, .27]). Particularly, participants who presented greater orientation towards social dominance ($b = .29$, $SE = .11$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [.08, .50]) and more system justification ($b = .41$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.22, .60]) showed more support for the incapacitation of Islamist terrorists than for criminal offenders. Moreover, participants with greater left-wing political orientation showed more support for the incapacitation of criminals than of Islamist terrorists ($b = -.26$, $SE = .11$, $p = .023$, 95% CI [-.49, -.04]), while participants with a more right-wing political orientation showed more support for the incapacitation of Islamist terrorists than of criminals ($b = .25$, $SE = .09$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [.07, .42]). When comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists, no significant interaction was found.

Regarding attitudes towards treatment effectiveness, when comparing criminal offenders and Islamist terrorists, we found significant interactions for social dominance ($b = -.16$, $SE = .06$, $p = .012$, 95% CI [-.28, -.04]), system justification ($b = -.19$, $SE =$

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.06, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-.31, -.07]), and political orientation ($b = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $p = .038$, 95% CI [-.17, -.01]). Participants with greater orientation towards social dominance ($b = -.29$, $SE = .09$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.46, -.12]), more system justification ($b = -.39$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.55, -.23]), and greater right-wing political orientation ($b = -.23$, $SE = .08$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-.37, -.08]) attributed less effectiveness to programs for Islamist terrorists than for criminals. When comparing nationalist and Islamist terrorists, we found a significant interaction for social dominance ($b = .14$, $SE = .06$, $p = .031$, 95% CI [.01, .26]). Particularly, the participants who presented a lesser orientation towards social dominance ($b = -.26$, $SE = .09$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-.44, -.08]) attributed less effectiveness to programs for Islamist than for nationalist terrorists.

Regarding attitudes towards mandated treatment, when comparing criminal offenders and nationalist terrorists, no significant interaction was found. When comparing criminal offenders and Islamist terrorists, we found a significant interaction for political orientation ($b = -.12$, $SE = .06$, $p = .036$, 95% CI [-.23, -.01]). Namely, participants with greater right-wing political orientation ($b = -.33$, $SE = .10$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.53, -.13]) showed stronger support towards mandatory programs for criminals than for Islamist terrorists.

Discussion

The results showed patterns similar to those in Study 1 regarding support for rehabilitation programs. However, again, support was lower for programs targeting Islamist terrorists, attributing greater incapacitation and less effectiveness and compulsoriness to them. Furthermore, moderation analyses provided support for hypotheses H3a-c. It showed that specific individual mechanisms, such as adherence to conservative ideologies (e.g., right-wing political orientation, social dominance, or system justification), modulate individuals' attitudes. These tendencies lead them to

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consider that Islamist terrorists are less able to re-educate themselves during rehabilitation programs. In addition, the effectiveness of these programs was perceived to be lower than that of programs designed for other types of offenders.

General Discussion

Both studies confirmed that attitudes are less favorable towards programs for Islamist terrorists. These results are similar to Altier's (2021) in the U.S. context. However, concerning nationalist terrorists, the results did not support our hypotheses, as attitudes towards programs aimed at this group were similar to those for criminal offenders.

These results also showed that attitudes towards rehabilitation programs are more complex. They integrate attitudes towards different components such as incapacitation, effectiveness, and compulsoriness. Stronger negative attitudes towards the programs were related to a stronger belief that the beneficiaries are not reinsertable and should be incapacitated. In contrast, attitudes that were more favorable were related to a more robust perception of the effectiveness of these programs and a greater predisposition to make them mandatory. However, the former factor related less to the others. It follows that programs for Islamist terrorists, in addition to being less supported than those for criminal offenders, were perceived as less effective, with more support for incapacitation and less for compulsoriness. However, for nationalist terrorists, there is less support for making them mandatory, although incapacitation and effectiveness were similar to those attributed to criminal offenders.

These unexpected results may be due to the historical and current development of the armed group ETA. Although a large proportion of those arrested for terrorism-related crimes belong to this group (Santos-Hermoso et al., 2021), ETA declared the cessation of armed activity in 2018 (Soldevilla, 2021). However, the applied governmental prisoner dispersal policies and the rehabilitation programs in which they

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have participated continue to generate controversy (Alonso & Bada, 2016; Marrero & Berdún-Carrión, 2021). This tendency may well have led them to be perceived as less dangerous, reducing support for their participation in rehabilitation programs.

Negative feelings and threat perceptions seem to be the primary triggers of negative attitudes regarding the mediating mechanisms. Criminals pose a greater realistic threat, while Islamist terrorists represent a more significant terroristic threat. Thus, in line with the predictions of Altier (2021), the association of terrorism with Islamist ideologies poses a greater threat, which is associated with support for more punitive measures. However, violent criminals pose a more significant realistic threat, indicating that crime is a major threat on a daily basis. Future studies should explore this relationship between the threat and support for different punitive measures. However, symbolic threats do not seem to be relevant in distinguishing attitudes towards criminals and terrorists.

The results also showed that there are individual differences that, to some extent, determine attitudes towards rehabilitation programs. In general, support for the system and more conservative ideologies is associated with more negative attitudes towards rehabilitation programs aimed at terrorists. As is shown by the literature associating support for punitive measures with more conservative ideologies (Hofmann et al., 2018), these effects are similar in the case of rehabilitation programs for Islamist terrorists.

From a theoretical point of view, the results point to two theories that could help to clarify attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorists. Firstly, the perceived threat and negative feelings associated with terrorists may underlie lower support for the programs. These effects are explained by the integrated threat theory (Stephan et al., 2009; Stephan & Renfro, 2002). The more threatening certain groups are perceived to

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be, the more prejudice will be generated towards them. According to our results, people will also support more vigorous punitive measures. In addition, the results suggest that individuals with more conservative ideologies hold less favorable attitudes towards this type of terrorist rehabilitation program. This finding can be interpreted using system justification theory (Jost et al., 2004; Jost & van der Toorn., 2015), which proposes that some individuals are motivated to justify the system. Thus, one of the consequences would be to impose harsher sentences when prisoners pose a more significant threat at the expense of rehabilitation and reintegration.

In practical terms, our results show that the ideology of terrorist criminals is essential, implying that it is necessary to address negative attitudes and prejudices towards certain groups. Moreover, support for these programs is associated with perceived effectiveness; therefore, improving the latter would have an impact on support (Altier, 2021; Clubb et al., 2019). The first study also showed the importance of perceptions of threat. Therefore, presenting the terrorist threat as a realistic threat, or minimizing its threat, may have practical utility. The second study revealed some individual differences that determine stronger negative attitudes. These results indicate that it is necessary to segment the narratives by creating specific messages for people with more conservative ideologies to improve support for these programs.

Limitations

Notwithstanding the consistency of our studies, future research should address certain limitations. Firstly, the novelty of the subject only allowed us to establish hypotheses in an exploratory way regarding the mediating and moderating mechanisms. Therefore, these results constitute the first evidence to be confirmed in future studies. Secondly, the psychological mechanisms included in the studies are not the only ones that could modulate public attitudes. Other mechanisms could have similar effects. Nevertheless,

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the mechanisms presented in these studies offer a first approximation that can serve as a basis for future studies. Thirdly, in the design of Study 1, the mediating variables were evaluated at the end, that is, after the dependent variables. This means that responding to the items on attitudes could have had an effect on the responses to the items on feelings and threats. Therefore, future studies should randomize the order of the variables and manipulate the mediating variables to test for causality. Fourthly, we used a non-probabilistic sample with a majority of university students and women, thus, the generalization of the results could be limited by these characteristics of the sample. Future studies should test these effects with random representative samples to confirm them. Finally, the situation of terrorism and prisons is, to some extent, contextual. We conducted this research in the Spanish context, where Islamist terrorism is the main threat, while separatist nationalism was the primary threat in the past. These context specificities may limit how generalizable the results are to other contexts. However, comparing the situation in Spain with other countries such as France and the United Kingdom, which are countries severely afflicted by Islamist terrorism, we believe that attitudes could be similar or even more negative due to the larger number of jihadists (Marrero, 2020). These experiences could translate into a greater perception of threat and a lower perception of effectiveness of these programs, also affected by failed cases, such as Usman Khan's (Weeks, 2021). Future studies should examine attitudes in other countries and towards other groups to verify whether the psychological mechanisms present are similar.

Conclusion

The results of both studies highlight the importance of the ideology of terrorist groups as a determining factor in supporting rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, these results indicate that attitudes towards rehabilitation programs for terrorists are less supportive

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due to the fear of these groups, and that the different ideologies held by the public are also a determining factor. Therefore, public psychological mechanisms are also a factor to consider, in addition to the characteristics of the rehabilitation programs and the context of the terrorists, when determining attitudes towards these programs.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in Study 1.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. General support	4.57 (1.39)	-.48***	.52***	.20***	-.15**	-.21***	-.25***	-.21***
2. Support for incapacitation	2.42 (1.25)	-	-.71***	.18***	.40***	.58***	.61***	.59***
3. Support for treatment effectiveness	4.05 (1.05)		-	.04	-.32***	-.43***	-.44***	-.41***
4. Support for mandated treatment	4.95 (1.17)			-	.31***	.31***	.34***	.35***
5. Negative feelings	17.71 (18.65)				-	.40***	.43***	.44***
6. Symbolic threat	3.24 (1.59)					-	.80***	.67***
7. Realistic threat	2.95 (1.32)						-	.80***
8. Terroristic threat	3.23 (1.40)							-

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .010$; * $p < .050$.

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables included in Study 2.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. General support	4.61 (1.33)	-.56***	.60***	.18***	-.22***	-.32***	-.23***	-.28***
2. Support for incapacitation	2.49 (1.23)	-	-.75***	.04	.37***	.44***	.45***	.47***
3. Support for treatment effectiveness	3.94 (1.01)		-	.12**	-.39***	-.39***	-.35***	-.43***
4. Support for mandated treatment	4.95 (1.19)			-	.03	-.03	.11*	.01
5. Social dominance	2.03 (0.97)				-	.56***	.50***	.50***
6. Anti-egalitarianism	1.73 (0.88)					-	.43***	.45***
7. System justification	2.85 (1.02)						-	.58***
8. Political orientation	2.89 (1.44)							-

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .010$; * $p < .050$.