



# Fairness Concerns and Perceptions of Accused Terrorists

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## ABSTRACT

Past research regarding the justice and fairness suggests that judgments are motivated by concerns about preserving the core norms and values of a group's identity (Huo, 2002). Our study looked at the extent to which people apply various fairness considerations to accused criminals based on ethnicity of the terrorist and admission or non-admission of a crime. Participants reacted to various "newspaper" articles accusing women terrorists (American or foreign-born) of committing a heinous terrorist attack. Results suggest that the admittance or accused status of the suspect has a profound impact on people's perceptions of what constitutes fair treatment. The results help establish the boundary conditions associated with people's beliefs about defining fairness.

## METHOD

### Participants: *Characteristics of the sample:*

- **Number of Participants:** 146 students enrolled in Psychology 110 at UWSP, drawn from the subject pool
- **Gender and Age:** 58.9% female, 41.1% male; Ages 17 to 46 ( $M = 19.9$ )
- **Ethnic Background:** 92.5% Caucasian-American, 2.1% African-American, 2.7% Asian-American, and 1.4% other groups.

### Procedure:

- Participants read one of 4 versions of a fabricated newspaper article. These articles are intended to represent a 2 (admission versus accusation of guilt) x 2 (American or foreign-born woman) factorial design. The following is an example of the manipulations in the four different articles:

	Accused	Admits
Foreign-Born	"Zeba Gul, an Afghan native, maintained her innocence."	"Zeba Gul, an Afghan native, admitted to the heinous crime."
American	"Jessica Padloff, a Texas native, maintained her innocence."	"Jessica Padloff, a Texas native, admitted to the heinous crime."

- Participants then responded to questions (on a five-point scale) regarding importance of fairness. These questions were derived from five general justice factors (see Appendix).

## INTRODUCTION

*We sought to examine the extent to which ethnicity and admission (or non-admission) of terrorist acts plays a role in fairness concerns regarding legal proceedings.*

According to Alexander and Wendorf (2002) fairness concerns can be summarized in five factors:

- Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness represents all concerns about the importance of fair procedures used to make decisions.
- Decision-Maker Interactional Fairness represents all concerns about the importance of fair interactions between decision-makers and the people who are affected by their decisions.
- Participatory/Appeals Procedures represents all concerns about the importance of people's ability to participate in decision-making procedures and allocations.
- Equitable and Normative Concerns represents all concerns about the importance of determining allocations based on typical, traditional, or normative methods.
- Individual Concerns represents all concerns about the importance of taking individualized information into account in determining allocations.

We hypothesized that the three following factors would influence the importance of various justice concerns:

- the ethnicity of the terrorist,
- the participants' gender,
- the terrorists' admission (or lack of admission) of guilt.

## RESULTS: OVERALL ANALYSES

*To what extent did participants alter their perceptions of fair treatment of the accused terrorist?*

### Creation of Composite Fairness Measures:

- **Preliminary Analyses:** The five original overarching measures of the fairness categories were not sensitive to the factors being studied.
- **New Composite Variables:** New variables were created by taking the mean of the criteria that form that factor (see the Items for specific criteria for each factor).

### Tests of Differences Across Conditions:

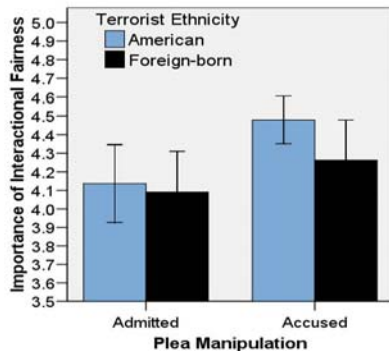
- **The Omnibus Analysis:** A 2 (Ethnicity) x 2 (Plea) x 2 (Participant Gender) MANOVA showed significant effects for only the plea manipulation,  $F(5,134) = 2.729, p = .022$ .
- **Univariate Analyses:** Furthermore, this finding appeared to be primarily due to effects of the plea manipulation on the importance of Interactional Fairness and on Individual Concerns (see Figures 1 and 2).

*While the admission of guilt by the terrorist produced less support for fair treatment of the terrorist, the ethnicity of the terrorist nor the gender of the participant had an effect.*

## RESULTS: INTERACTIONAL FAIRNESS

When the terrorist admitted to the crime, participants rated fair treatment (i.e., courteous and respectful actions) less important.

Figure 1: Importance of Interactional Fairness as a Function of Terrorist's Plea and Ethnicity

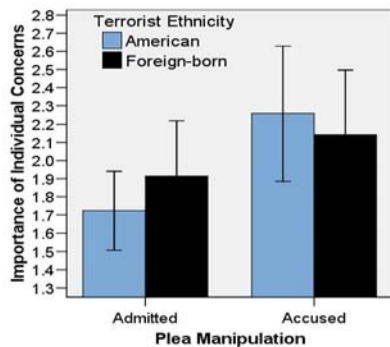


**Note:** Only the plea manipulation had a statistically significant effect on Individual Concerns,  $F(1,138) = 7.477, p = .007$ . Capped vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals for each of the group means.

## RESULTS: INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS

When the terrorist admitted to the crime, participants rated the consideration of personal characteristics less important.

Figure 2: Importance of Individual Concerns as a Function of Terrorist's Plea and Ethnicity



**Note:** Only the plea manipulation had a statistically significant effect on Individual Concerns,  $F(1,138) = 5.190, p = .024$ . Capped vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals for each of the group means.

## DISCUSSION

The boundary conditions established by this study suggest that fairness considerations are shaped by the plea rather than ethnicity or participant gender.

### Conclusions regarding plea and ethnicity of terrorist

- The significant findings regarding the plea manipulation imply that predetermined characteristics of the terrorist, such as ethnicity, are deemed less important when determining fair treatment outcomes.
- If a terrorist admits to a crime, participants valued fair treatment less than when the terrorist was simply accused.

### Conclusions regarding gender of participant

- According to Lerner et al (2003), men are more optimistic (less fearful, but more angry) than women (more fearful, less angry) in risk assessment towards the United States. Due to this optimism in men, there angry emotions may elicit more of a revengeful punishment in jury judgments, whereas women may enforce a more lenient punishment against accused individuals.
- Our study failed to correspond with Lerner et al perhaps because our questions were not sensitive to this gender issue. In our report, gender of the participant had no significant effect on whether or not the terrorist was given consideration for fair treatment.

## APPENDIX: JUSTICE CRITERIA

"In your personal opinion, how important is it that the government..."

### Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness

*Trust:* Be trusted to give the appropriate sentence?

*Ethicality:* Act responsibly and ethically when deciding suspect's fate?

*Consistency:* Consistently apply policies and rules to all suspects?

*Bias Suppression/Neutrality:* Be impartial and unbiased in dealing with suspects?

*Accuracy:* Use accurate information when deciding the suspect's fate?

*Equality (Opportunities):* Provide all suspects with an equal opportunity for a fair trial?

### Decision-Maker Interactional Fairness

*Timeliness/Promptness:* Act in a timely manner in conducting the trial?

*Honesty:* Deal with suspects in a truthful manner?

*Courteousness:* Treat all suspects in a courteous manner?

*Standing/Respect:* Treat all suspects with respect?

*Causal Accounts:* Provide an adequate explanation for any decisions made and procedures used?

### Participation and Appeals Procedures

*Correctability:* Give suspects an opportunity to appeal any decisions made?

*Representativeness:* Consider how the verdict will affect all people involved?

*Voice/Process Control:* Let the suspect voice her views about how the trial should be conducted?

*Decision Control:* Allow suspects to have a direct influence over the sentence given?

### Equitable and Normative Concerns

*Equity (Contributions):* Directly base the verdict on the severity of the crime?

*Equality (Arithmetic):* Make the same decision for anyone else suspected of the same crime?

### Individual Concerns

*Equity (Status/Tenure):* Consider a suspect's status in society when determining verdict?

*Equity (Ability):* Be influenced by the suspect's future ability to contribute to society?

*Need:* Be influenced by the suspect's needs?

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