

Research & Politics

December 12, 2022

Dear Editor and Reviewers,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise our manuscript, “Vigilantism and Institutions: Understanding Attitudes toward Lynching in Brazil” (Ms. No. RAP-22-0164). We have made several changes to the article based on the feedback from the editor and reviewers, and we believe the manuscript has improved significantly as a result.

In particular, we have focused on addressing the scope and methodology of our study, as highlighted by Reviewers 1 and 2. We have edited the Introduction and added a new paragraph to the Conclusion to better explain the scope of our work. We have also included more details about our methodology in section two and in the Supplementary Materials. In response to Reviewer 2’s suggestion, we have removed the significance tests from the manuscript. We have also added a footnote to the Supplementary Materials indicating that we randomized the order of the experiments to reduce the risk of carryover effects.

Furthermore, we have added a discussion of how our findings compare with those of other studies, as suggested by Reviewer 1. We have also included the results of our subgroup analyses in the Supplementary Materials, again following Reviewer 1’s recommendation. Additionally, we have included all references suggested by Reviewers 1 and 2 in the main body of the manuscript.

Overall, we believe that the manuscript is now stronger and more appealing to a broader audience. We discuss the changes in more detail below. We are grateful for the feedback and suggestions provided by the editor and reviewers, and we hope that we have addressed all of their concerns. Thank you again for the opportunity to revise our manuscript.

Sincerely Yours,

The Authors

Editor Comments and Responses

1) The editor writes: “I agree with R2 that the framing of the study could be improved. You currently cite a number of interesting figures and basic facts about lynching in Brazil in the start of the conclusion. I think this would fit better in the introduction. R2 also argues that the reference to the Blair et al study on greater costs of local violence is imprecise. I am guessing you mean something along the lines of likely to affect a greater number directly than terrorism or civil war, which I think is reasonable but could be said more directly.”

Response:

We have moved the facts about lynchings in Brazil to the Introduction and the section now provides more context for our experiments. The second paragraph of the Introduction now reads as follows (page 02): *“One of the most serious forms of extrajudicial violence is lynching. Lynching can be defined as “incidents of physical violence committed by large numbers of private citizens against one or more individuals accused of having committed a “criminal” offense, whether or not this violence resulted in the death of the victim(s)” (Godoy 2004, 645). Although lynchings occur in more than one hundred countries in all regions of the world (Jung and Cohen 2020; Smith 2019), Latin America has been particularly affected by a sharp increase in vigilante violence. Lynching episodes have been reported in Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and other countries in the region (Barbara 2015; Cruz and Kloppe-Santamaría 2019; Godoy 2004). From 2011 to 2015, Brazil registered about 2,500 lynching episodes, and 173 people were killed by angry mobs in 2015 alone—nearly one execution every two days (Barbara 2015; Oliveira 2016). According to José de Souza Martins (2015), who has studied lynchings in Brazil for more than thirty years, these figures are not only the highest in the country’s history, but among the highest in the world. The people who participate in lynchings are typically young men, but they also sometimes include teenage women and girls, elderly women, and even members of the local police (Moura 2017).”*

We have also changed the last sentence in the first paragraph to make our claims more precise. It now reads (page 02): *“This omission is significant not only because vigilantism can deepen group enmities and lead to cycles of violence, but also because it undermines the*

legitimacy of the state and the rule of law, which are essential for economic development and democratic stability (Jung and Cohen 2020; Tankebe 2009)."

2) The editor writes: "The manuscript is focused primarily on the empirical approach, but I agree with R1 that you could say a bit more about the rationale for the covariates considered, perhaps drawing out why more "novel" features such as family or type of crime is likely to be important."

Response:

We have followed Reviewer 1's suggestion and have extended section two ("When Is Lynching Perceived as More Justified?") to provide further information about our choice of covariates. The third paragraph of that section now reads (page 04): *"In addition to our knowledge of the Brazilian case, we also chose our attributes based partly on existing work on crime, vigilantism, and extrajudicial violence. From the prison violence literature, we know that the relative age differences and the genders of perpetrators and victims affect how it is perceived (Fleisher and Krienert 2009). We likewise know that certain offenses are seen as especially reprehensible (Skarbek 2014), so we included such offenses, like molestation, alongside less serious offenses. We include race because, in the United States, violent lynchings have often been wielded for racist reasons (Dray 2003). Likewise, we include residency because extrajudicial violence is often used against people "who don't belong" or are "outsiders" in some respect. Finally, in honor cultures that value retaliatory violence, people believe that victims and the family of victims have a special right (and often an obligation) to enact retribution (Weiner 2013).*

As we show in the next section, we have also included a new paragraph in the Conclusion to discuss the relationship between our findings and the existing literature on extralegal violence. By doing this, we aim to provide a more comprehensive overview of our work and its significance within the broader field.

3) The editor writes: "On the presentation of the results, I agree with R2 that the discussion of the results does not need to re-report all the significance tests, and the full tables could be included in the text or appendix."

Response:

We have deleted the statistical details from the main text to improve the readability of the manuscript. All significance tests are now reported only in the Supplementary Materials.

4) The editor writes: “It would be useful to add a bit more discussion of Brazil in comparative perspective. I wonder if the results for Brazil are likely to be more general and that the US could be an outlier, for example.”

Response:

We have made the requested changes and significantly expanded the Conclusion section based on the feedback from the editor and Reviewer 1. We are grateful for this suggestion, as it has allowed us to better connect our article to the broader literature on vigilantism.

The third paragraph of the Conclusion, now the longest in the section, is exclusively dedicated to discussing the scope conditions of our research. We have linked our findings to important works in the literature and have also discussed how a culture of honor may help to explain some of our main findings. This new paragraph provides valuable insight and enhances the broader significance of our study. Overall, we believe that the revised Conclusion section is stronger and more useful to readers interested in this topic.

The paragraph reads (page 11): *“These findings have implications that extend well beyond Brazil. In particular, our experiments indicate that lynchings have a crucial gendered aspect, which has also been documented in other contexts. Using data from 18 Latin American countries, Nivette (2016) also finds that respondents are most likely to support lynchings when the criminal raped a child, and studies about lynchings in the American South point out that several episodes resulted from accusations of sexual assault (Jacquet 2013; Smångs 2020). We believe that a culture of honor may explain these results. Individuals in honor societies view crime as an attack on their personal reputation and, in turn, are more likely to take revenge to defend their status and that of people perceived as deserving protection, such as women and children (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). A culture of honor may also explain why Brazilians see lynchings carried out by the family of the victim as more justified, as well*

as refraining from using extralegal violence if it can trigger vendettas. We expect similar results in societies which share those cultural norms. Lastly, the fact that race does not appear to be a major motivation behind lynchings also reflects the experience of places like Haiti or Southern Africa, where popular violence was mainly driven by other social factors (Berg and Wendt 2011; Jung and Cohen 2020). Even in the American South, Whites and Blacks also lynched people of their own race (Beck and Tolnay 1997). In this respect, our paper also highlights that lynchings in the Global South may be more strongly connected with the idea of “popular justice” than with racial animus (Martins 2015).”

5) The editor writes: “Finally, in order to ensure any delays on a decision on the resubmission I would encourage you to make sure that the final manuscript follows the journal guidelines, <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/rap>. For example, the sections should not be numbered, and the references should have first initial only rather than full names and books should have location before publisher (please ensure that all references are complete – Grimm looks incomplete to me, for example).”

Response:

The sections are now unnumbered and we have completed the references according to Research & Politics’ guidelines.

We would like to thank the editor Kristian Skrede Gleditsch for his very helpful comments and suggestions.

Reviewer 1 Comments and Responses

1) Reviewer 1 writes: “The empirical approach is presented as offering many benefits—I would also acknowledge the drawbacks. And many of these results do not seem to square with other parts of the world (which is a feature and I would ask the authors for a little bit of speculation as to why!) but I would suggest the authors think about the scope conditions imposed by the setting and how well they seem to extend (the gendered aspect, yes, the race aspect, perhaps there are some conditions). The finding I think is most interesting to draw out is the family of rape/murder victims, this is—I think—a facet not typically focused on and strikes me as the “newest” finding and one I

would encourage the authors to pull forward and (in the context of a strict word limit) emphasize and do a bit of theoretical speculation for others to build upon!”

Response:

Reviewer 1 raises an important issue. We agree that we had not adequately explained the scope conditions of our research and have therefore added a new paragraph to the Conclusion to provide additional context. In that paragraph, we compare our results with studies on vigilantism in other Latin American countries and the United States, and we also discuss the role of social norms, particularly those related to a culture of honor, in shaping attitudes towards lynching in Brazil. Additionally, we speculate on why race does not seem to influence individual preferences for lynchings in Brazil.

The paragraph reads (page 11): *“These findings have implications that extend well beyond Brazil. In particular, our experiments indicate that lynchings have a crucial gendered aspect, which has also been documented in other contexts. Using data from 18 Latin American countries, Nivette (2016) also finds that respondents are most likely to support lynchings when the criminal raped a child, and studies about lynchings in the American South point out that several episodes resulted from accusations of sexual assault (Jacquet 2013; Smångs 2020). We believe that a culture of honor may explain these results. Individuals in honor societies view crime as an attack on their personal reputation and, in turn, are more likely to take revenge to defend their status and that of people perceived as deserving protection, such as women and children (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). A culture of honor may also explain why Brazilians see lynchings carried out by the family of the victim as more justified, as well as refraining from using extralegal violence if it can trigger vendettas. We expect similar results in societies which share those cultural norms. Lastly, the fact that race does not appear to be a major motivation behind lynchings also reflects the experience of places like Haiti or Southern Africa, where popular violence was mainly driven by other social factors (Berg and Wendt 2011; Jung and Cohen 2020). Even in the American South, Whites and Blacks also lynched people of their own race (Beck and Tolnay 1997). In this respect, our paper also highlights that lynchings in the Global South may be more strongly connected with the idea of “popular justice” than with racial animus (Martins 2015).”*

We have added three sentences on pages 6 and 7 to offer readers more context about our covariates. They read (pages 6–7): *“Taken together, the results provide experimental evidence that support for lynchings in Brazil does not resemble the typical racial patterns scholars have observed in the United States (Dray 2003; Obert and Mattiacci 2018; Seguin and Rigby 2019). These findings are consistent with recent research on vigilantism in Haiti (Jung and Cohen 2020) and with journalistic observations. They further suggest that the US experience with lynchings might be distinct from vigilantism in other places and times (Oliveira 2016).”*

Finally, we have added two sentences on page 8 to discuss how cultural norms are relevant to our results. They read (page 8): *“In sum, respondents did not believe that lynchings should be carried out by the state but did believe they should be used as a tool for individual or family retribution. These results are consistent with norms of an honor culture in which offenses are seen to tarnish the victim’s status and the only way to remove the stigma is through self-help efforts in the form of retaliatory violence (Nisbett and Cohen 1996).”*

2) Reviewer 1 writes: “With respect to experiment two—I would be very clear about the control group (in my reading) having been “treated” by the conjoint. In terms of estimation this is fine, but in terms of baseline attitudes that we might use to benchmark in future studies, I do worry a bit. I would also encourage a bit more description of the subgroup analyses on experiment 2 since I think they are likely interesting/important for future work.”

Response:

We agree that our explanations regarding the experimental design were inadequate. We actually randomized the order of the experiments to avoid carryover effects, but we did not mention this explicitly in the text. We have therefore added a footnote to the Supplementary Material to clarify this point. The footnote, which can be found on page 83 of the SM, reads: *“To prevent potential carryover effects caused by the conjoint, we randomized the order of the conjoint and the information provision experiments (Perreault 1975).”* We believe that this procedure ensures that our estimates are unbiased.

We agree that the subgroup analyses may be of interest to scholars. In response to this feedback, we have added a short comment about each of our subgroup tests to the Supplementary Materials. These comments provide information about the statistical significance of the results and highlight any variations that we observed according to the covariates that we controlled for. For example, in Section C.4.1 of the Supplementary Materials, where we assess whether our results for the conjoint experiment differ between genders, we write the following (page 24): *“Results do not seem to vary according to the gender of the respondent. We focus here on the differences between males and females and exclude the 11 observations in which respondents preferred not to say their gender or marked “other” in our questionnaire. Across all conjoint experiment attributes, we see an overlap between the 95% confidence intervals for males and females.”* Similarly, in Section C.4.3, in which we test whether our results vary by race, we write (page 32): *“Below are our results when we disaggregate the data by race. We find that they are almost identical in all dimensions except for offense. Asian respondents are much less likely to select profiles that contain pickpocketing as a crime.”*

All analyses are also accompanied by their corresponding R code to facilitate the replication of our results.

3) Reviewer 1 writes: “Minor: 1) I recommend citing Nick Rush Smith and there is a new special issue out at Comparative Politics that looks to have several pieces that are relevant! 2) I would like to see the supplementary materials included!”

Response:

We have added a citation to Nick Rush Smith’s work on page 02 and a citation to the special issue in footnote 01 (page 02). The Supplementary Materials are now included in the submission as well.

We would like to thank Reviewer 1 for her/his helpful comments and suggestions.

Reviewer 2 Comments and Responses

Major issues:

1) Reviewer 2 writes: “Framing. The abstract is rather short, and I believe R&P abstracts can be up to 200 words. It would be good to make use of the space to highlight additional results that are especially counterintuitive or interesting.”

Response:

We agree that the abstract could be improved. We have added two sentences to the abstract and it now reads as follows: “*Why do people support extrajudicial violence? In two survey experiments with respondents in Brazil, we examine which characteristics of lynching scenarios garner greater support for lynching and whether providing different types of information about lynching reduces support for it. We find that people often do support community members to take vengeance. In particular, our analysis finds that people strongly support the use of extrajudicial violence by families of victims against men who sexually assault and murder women and children. We also find that criminal punishment and the threat of vendettas reduce support, but appeals to the human rights of victims have zero effect on support for lynchings. Unlike the U.S. experience with lynchings, race was not observed to play an important role in how respondents answered the survey.*”

2) Reviewer 2 writes: “The introduction motivates the study by noting that “local violence” can be more costly than war or terrorism violence. This raises questions about what is “local violence”, and I’m not sure the cited source after this statement clarifies the situation. The cited Blair at al piece indicates that local violence is “possibly” more costly than war or terrorism, but this seems imprecise to me. If there is more space to defend this statement more, that might be ok, but it is probably better just to cut it and motivate the study in other ways.”

Response:

Reviewer 2’s concern about the imprecision of our statement is valid. We have deleted the original sentence and replaced it with the following (page 02): “*This omission is significant not only because vigilantism can entrench group animosities and create vicious cycles of violence, but also because it severely undermines state legitimacy and the rule of law, two key pillars of democratic stability and economic development (Jung and Cohen 2020; Tankebe 2009).*”

3) Reviewer 2 writes: “Why is the scale of disagree to agree 0-100? Could the authors cite a source or sources on why this precise range was used, and briefly discuss some tradeoffs with such a scale? Why not a, for example, seven-point Likert scale?”

Response:

Reviewer 2 is correct that we did not explain why we used a 0-100 scale in our study. We chose this scale because it allows us to measure a wider range of responses and capture the nuances of our treatments more accurately. This scale is also easy to interpret and convert into discrete categories, which makes it useful for our analysis. Additionally, the 0-100 scale is the default range used by many survey platforms, such as [SurveyMonkey](#), [QuestionPro](#), and [Qualtrics](#), which was the firm we used to conduct our survey experiments. As such, our respondents are likely familiar with this scale.

We implemented the 0-100 scale following the recommendation of Carter et al. (2020), who used the same range in their research design. While we agree that a seven-point Likert scale would also be a good option, we believe that the 0-100 scale is appropriate for our purposes.

4) Reviewer 2 writes: “Related to the above, the wording of the instructions seem to suggest that respondents could select anywhere between 0 and 49 if they disagree; unless I am mistaken, the instructions do not indicate, for example, that 0 indicates fully disagree and 100 indicates fully agree. Were any more detailed instructions provided? Is there any evidence that people fully understood the instructions in this regard?”

Response:

Reviewer 2 raises a valid concern about the instruction for our second experiment. While we acknowledge that we could have worded the instructions better, we believe that respondents were able to understand them as intended. As we mentioned earlier, Qualtrics uses the 0-100 scale by default in its survey platform, so our respondents, who were recruited from Qualtrics’ online panel, are likely familiar with this scale. Additionally, we have plotted the distribution of responses for the second experiment and have found that the majority of respondents selected zero, which indicates that

they do not agree that lynchings are justified. This is consistent with the findings of our quantitative text analysis, which estimates a latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) model and finds that one of the most common topics in the text responses is “lynchings are not justified” (page 81 of the Supplementary Materials).

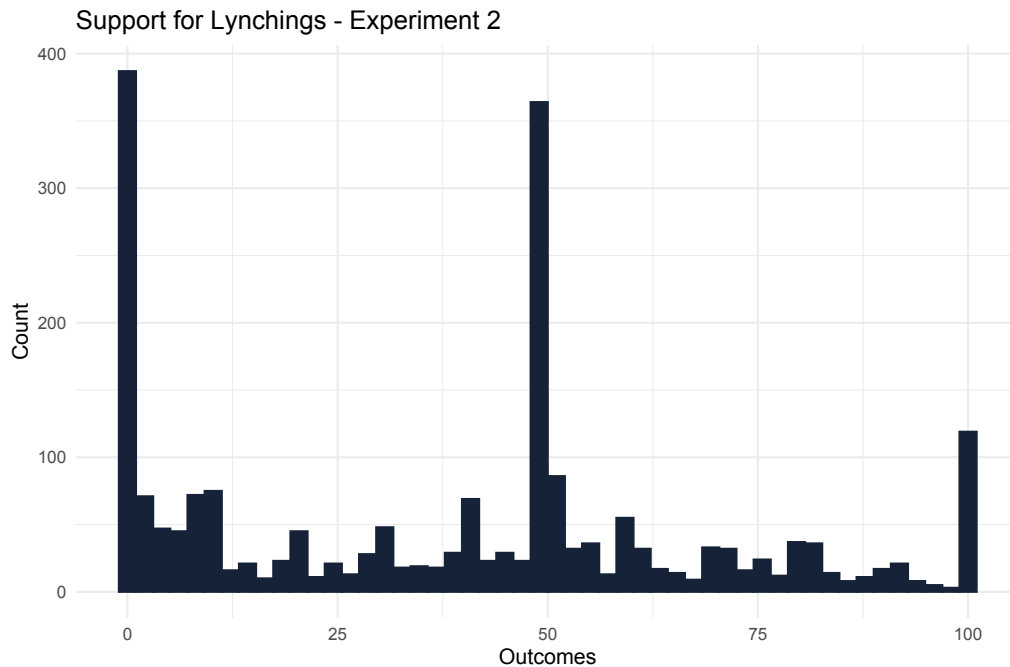


Figure 1: Support for Lynchings - Experiment 2

We then cross-checked the distribution of responses with the qualitative evidence we collected for the conjoint experiment, in which participants had to justify their choices. When we filter our data to only include respondents who selected zero on the 0-100 scale, we find the following justifications for their choices (Portuguese version in parentheses):

- *“It is not justified, but I am forced to express my opinion. We have a death here, but it is not justified.”* (“não se justifica, mas sou obrigado a opinar. temos uma morte. mas não se jutifica”)
- *“I only chose it because I had to select a case, as stated. But I do not agree with either of the lynchings and I believe that justice should cover the gap that people use as an excuse for such practice.”* (“escolhi somente pois deveria obrigatoriamente selecionar um caso, como enunciado. mas não concordo com nenhum dos dois linchamentos e acredito que a justiça deveria cobrir a lacuna que as pessoas utilizam como desculpa para tal prática”)

- *“I don’t know... I selected one because I had to do so, but I am strongly against lynching. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.”* (“não sei bem... escolhi porque tinha que escolher, mas sou fortemente contra linchamento. olho por olho, dente por dente”)
- *“First of all, I want to make it clear that I do not condone either of the two cases. I think there should be no lynching, regardless of the crime. In this approach, I think case 2 is much more serious, because the victim is a child and the perpetrator is an adult, unlike in case 1.”* (“à princípio quero deixar claro que não compactuo com nenhum dos dois casos. acho que não deve haver linchamento, independente do crime. nessa abordagem, acho que o caso 2 é bem mais grave, pois a vítima se trata de uma criança e autor de adulto, diferentemente do caso 1”)
- *“Either of the answers is immoral. Never, under any circumstances, is vigilante justice justified.”* (“qualquer das respostas é imoral. nunca, em hipótese alguma a justiça pelas próprias mãos é justificada”)

There are several more such examples in the text. In contrast, when we include only individuals who selected 100 on the scale, these are some of the justifications mentioned in the first experiment:

- *“A killer deserves the death penalty.”* (“um assassino merece pena de morte.”)
- *“Because it is a murder: eye for an eye!”* (“por tratar-se de um assassinato: olho por olho !”)
- *“There must be some punishment.”* (“tem que haver punição.”)
- *“In both cases lynchings is appropriate.”* (“nos dois casos cabe o linchamento.”)
- *“Because Brazil’s Judiciary is s**t.”* (“porque a justiça do brasil é uma merda”)
- *“Even if the criminal is indigenous, they must pay, you do not mess with a child.”* (“mesmo que o criminoso seja indigena, tem que pagar, com criança não se mexe”)

All sentences above are included in the q13_text variable in our data. Although we cannot provide a statistical test to assess whether all participants understood the instructions correctly, the evidence above suggests that respondents did not find the scale confusing and that the quantitative responses largely mirror our qualitative evidence.

We appreciate Reviewer 2's feedback and are grateful for the opportunity to address this concern.

5) Reviewer 2 writes: "In the results section, it is probably not necessary to list the coefficient, SE, and p-value in the text for so many variables when the figures show the most important information, assuming the full tables are in the supplementary information."

Response:

We agree that it is not necessary to list the significance tests in the text. We have removed them from the manuscript as suggested.

6) Reviewer 2 writes: "There is other recent survey work on support for vigilantism that could be acknowledged, like Zizumbo-Colunga 2017. On Brazil, there is Schuberth and others. Beyond survey work, there is a growing line of work on vigilantes or autodefensas in other Latin American countries, such as Peru or Mexico, that could be briefly discussed. For example Kloppe-Santamaria on Puebla in JLAS or Trevizo on Mexico generally in LAPS. This work seems relevant in many ways."

Response:

The reviewer is correct that there is a growing literature on vigilantism in Latin American countries and the articles cited by the reviewer are indeed relevant. We have added some of them to footnote number 01 (page 02), which now reads: "*On vigilantism more generally, see Cohen et al. (2022), Schuberth (2013), Smith (2019), and Zizumbo-Colunga (2017).*"

Paragraphs three and four of the Conclusion (pages 11–12), in turn, now read: "*Even in the American South, Whites and Blacks also lynched people of their own race (Beck and Tolnay 1997). In this respect, our paper also highlights that lynchings in the Global South may be more strongly connected with the idea of "popular justice" than with racial animus (Kloppe-Santamaría 2019; Martins 2015). [...] Finally, lynchings have often been described as a response to low state capacity (Trevizo 2022), yet in some cases state agents actively incite or engage in vigilante violence themselves (Arias and Goldstein 2010).*"

7) Reviewer 2 writes: "Very minor note: on page 12, significantly effect should be significantly affect."

Response:

We have corrected this typo in the revised version of the paper.

We would like to thank Reviewer 2 for her/his helpful comments and suggestions.

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