The Jury on Trial: Assessing the Impact of Courtroom Design and Juror Ideology on Defendant Guilt Perception

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Abstract

Objectives: This study investigated how courtroom design and jurors' ideological attitudes influence guilt perceptions and sentencing decisions, addressing a gap in research on their combined impact. Hypotheses: We predicted higher guilt likelihood and harsher sentencing for defendants in secure docks versus those at the bar table. We also expected higher ideological attitude scores to increase guilt likelihood and explored the interaction between ideological attitudes and dock conditions. Method: In a between-subjects design, 556 participants were randomly assigned to secure dock or no dock conditions. Online questionnaires measured ideological attitudes. Participants reviewed courtroom sketches and case summaries, then assessed guilt likelihood and suggested sentences. Results: Secure dock conditions resulted in higher guilt likelihood. Ideological attitudes partially influenced guilt likelihood. Dock condition significantly moderated the relationship between guilt likelihood and ideological attitudes, with a significant relationship only in the no dock condition. Conclusions: Findings highlight the complexity of juror decision-making and advocate for interventions to mitigate biases in legal proceedings. This research informs policy on courtroom design and addresses ideological attitudes' impact on juror perceptions, promoting fair legal outcomes. Further research is needed to understand the interplay between biases, courtroom dynamics, and legal decision-making.

Keywords: courtroom design, defendant guilt perception, jury decision-making, juror ideology, secure dock

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Jurors, as legal laypersons, are entrusted with the responsibility of assessing evidence, gauging its credibility and reliability, and ultimately rendering a verdict in an equitable and impartial manner, free from prejudiced influences (Clarke, 2018). While juries are responsible for determining the outcomes in less than 1% of all criminal cases in England and Wales, it is noteworthy that defendants in these instances are accused of the most severe criminal offences and confront the most substantial potential deprivation of their freedom (Thomas, 2010). Defendants have the right to a just trial, and any form of bias jeopardises the integrity of the jury process (Curley et al., 2022). Despite this, a multitude of biases exist that sway jurors in their verdicts (Devine et al., 2001; Ross, 2023) and the consequences of partial and unjust decision-making by jurors often lead to miscarriages of justice (Curley et al., 2022). Post-trial deoxyribonucleic acid analysis has revealed instances of erroneous judgments rendered by juries, even in cases where the death penalty was imposed (Spencer, 2007). Nevertheless, the feasibility of conducting comprehensive assessments of accuracy remains limited, primarily since the correct verdict is ascertainable only in exceptional cases, making it challenging to extrapolate findings from such cases to the more common scenarios where the correct verdict remains inherently unknowable. Thus, the question should not be whether the verdict is objectively correct, but instead should focus on whether the jury arrives at a verdict that can be considered reasonable (Bornstein & Greene, 2011). This lack of clarity in the existing literature has sparked investigation into the factors that influence jury decision-making. This paper aims to explore these factors and their subsequent effects on juror verdicts (JVs).

Effect of Ideological Attitudes on JVs

Understanding the influence of ideological attitudes (IAs) on JVs is crucial for ensuring fair trials and impartial juries; examining factors such as right-wing authoritarianism

(RWA), social dominance orientation (SDO), and belief in a just world (BJW) provides insight into how jurors' perspectives may shape legal outcomes.

RWA

RWA is characterised by a strong deference to authority, aggression towards societal norms' defiance, and adherence to prevailing social ideals (Altemeyer, 1981). High RWA individuals show deference to authority and harbour prejudices against non-conformists (Ho et al., 2020), while low RWA individuals challenge established hierarchies (Costello et al., 2021). RWA perspectives are rooted in fear, uncertainty, and a desire for social structure (Fasce & Avendaño, 2020; Jost et al., 2003), predicting prejudice towards those with differing views (McFarland, 2010). Considering the cross-cultural variation in RWA (Roets et al., 2015), the results of these studies should be interpreted with caution. Understanding authoritarian traits is vital for ensuring fair trials and impartial juries, as RWA individuals tend to endorse corporal punishment (Stack, 2003) and are more likely to find defendants guilty (Bray & Noble, 1978; Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2020). Although, these studies are online simulations and lack direct measures of participant engagement, reducing statistical power and introducing bias (Wong et al., 2021).

SDO

SDO, a measure of the desire for hierarchical intergroup relations (Sidanius et al., 2017), significantly correlates with RWA (r = .38; Roccato & Ricolfi, 2005). Duckitt's (2001) dual-process model posits that RWA and SDO, while distinct, jointly influence attitudes toward social groups, informing ingroup favouritism and outgroup hostility; jurors typically perceive themselves as the 'in-group', contrasting with defendants as the 'out-group' (Stanley et al., 2019). As outlined in social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), societies organise into hierarchies, maintaining power and resource exclusivity by limiting out-group access (Schwartz, 1994), potentially depriving defendants of their rights and privileges. Contrastingly, Fischer et al. (2012) proposed that high SDO individuals might prioritise group cooperation (e.g., unanimous juries) over intergroup competition, fostering more inclusive attitudes towards outgroups (e.g., defendants).

BJW

Globally, there is a prevalent belief in the fairness of treatment (Stroebe et al., 2015), encapsulated by BJW which suggests stability, lawfulness, and security (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Rooted in just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), high BJW individuals prefer a world where actions have corresponding consequences (Wenzel et al., 2017). In courtroom settings, just-world jurors may distance themselves from injustice to maintain their belief in fairness, potentially influencing verdicts (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017). Although, researchers have challenged this assumption that high BJW individuals are always motivated to maintain fairness and justice, suggesting individuals may selectively apply just-world beliefs to rationalise existing social inequalities or unfair outcomes (Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). This raises questions about the impact of BJW on juror decision-making. While IAs predict prejudice (Asbrock et al., 2011), their direct impacts on juror decision-making remain underexplored.

Effect of Courtroom Design on JVs

While courtroom design's impact on JVs has received extensive attention, the specific influence of dock type remains understudied (Crighton & Towl, 2021). Secure docks (SDs), enclosing defendants within glass or metal cages, are increasingly common globally (Rossner et al., 2017). Defendants often criticise SDs for detaching them from trials, yet they remain standard practice (Rossner et al., 2017). Given the prevalence of wrongful convictions, questioning the role of SDs is pertinent, especially amid courtroom digitisation and re-evaluation (Spencer, 2007). Individuals often judge personality based on environmental cues, potentially influenced by courtroom layout (Gosling et al., 2002; Lassiter, 2002). In particular, glass dock confinement may intensify defendants' anxiety, potentially misinterpreted by jurors as guilt or dangerousness (e.g., Fisher & Nasar, 1992; Gray et al., 2008; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004; Langworthy & Whitehead, 1986; Sorby & Kehn, 2021). Ultimately, SDs may contradict the presumption of innocence, a cornerstone of fair trials (Rosen, 1966; Stumer, 2010). If jurors convict based solely on dock presence, it undermines this presumption (Tait, 2011). Although, the scarcity of extensive, high-quality

research exploring the effects of courtroom design on culturally diverse populations outside of Australia constrains its applicability beyond particular demographic groups (Rossner et al., 2017).

Effect of Courtroom Design on the Relationship Between IAs in Jurors and JVs

The interplay between jurors' IAs and courtroom dock type on verdicts is intricate. Although direct research on this link is scarce, aforementioned theoretical frameworks shed light on potential influences. RWA individuals favour authority, conformity, and tradition (Altemeyer, 1981). Thus, high RWA jurors may perceive defendants in SDs as non-conformists, possibly justifying guilty verdicts as a security measure (Ho et al., 2020). SDO, emphasising group hierarchy, may exacerbate in-group/out-group biases (Stanley et al., 2019). SDs' distinct design reinforces social inequality, potentially swaying SDO-driven jurors toward guilt (Davis, 1984). BJW individuals may attribute guilt to maintain belief in a just world (Wenzel et al., 2017). As such, SDs may be perceived as security measures, aligning with BJW and increasing guilt attributions. Despite these study findings, given the sparse literature supporting this idea, it is essential to approach it with caution and conduct additional research to enhance the existing body of knowledge.

The Present Study

Despite extensive forensic psychology literature, courtroom design remains understudied, with limited research lacking cultural diversity (McKimmie et al., 2016). Furthermore, individual IAs of jurors have been explored but require further investigation. Most concerningly, research has neglected how IAs influence verdicts, particularly in relation to courtroom design. This study aimed to address these gaps, specifically investigating the effects of jurors' IAs on decision-making, determined by courtroom dock type. The current study aimed to compare guilt likelihood (GL) and sentencing perceptions between jurors viewing defendants in SDs versus those at the bar table. Specifically, we hypothesised higher GL and harsher sentencing lengths in the SD condition, compared to the no dock (ND) condition, based on literature suggesting SDs undermine the presumption of defendants' innocence (Rosen, 1966; Stumer, 2010). The study also explored the impact of

jurors' IAs (RWA, SDO, and BJW) on defendant GL, anticipating higher GL among those with higher ideological scores, as supported by the literature (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study explored the impact of jurors' IAs on defendant GL, split by dock condition. We predicted that the relationship between GL and IA scores would differ between the SD and ND conditions, as supported by prior literature (Davis, 1984; Ho et al., 2020; Rossner et al., 2017; Wenzel et al., 2017).

Method

Participants

G*Power 3.1.9.4 software (Erdfelder et al., 1996) was utilised to estimate required sample size by performing an *a priori* calculation (Faul et al., 2007). With a power of (1-β) .95 and an α of .05, 119 participants were required to detect a medium effect (f^2 = .15) for multiple regression analyses (Cohen, 1988; Kang, 2021). A total of 769 responses were gathered from the survey; due to partially completed, inadequate responses or failure to pass attention checks, only 556 were deemed suitable for data analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the lead university's research ethics committee. Participants (N = 556) ranged from 18-81 years old (M = 30.3, SD = 14.9). See Table 1 below for further demographic characteristics.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Materials

A survey was created and distributed online via Qualtrics (2024), and participants were instructed to complete a series of standardised measures for RWA, SDO, and BJW, followed by a series of questions relating to courtroom case studies.

RWA

RWA was measured using the revised RWA scale (Altemeyer, 2006). Twenty items assessed levels of RWA. Responses were given on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from very strongly disagree (-4) to very strongly agree (+4). One example item is "What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true

path". New scores were computed for each item, where -4 equals 1, continuing up to +4 which equals 9. Items were summed to form a measure of RWA, with scores ranging from 20-180. Higher scores indicated a greater level of RWA. The scale was previously shown to have excellent internal reliability (α = .90; Altemeyer, 2006) and this was replicated within the present sample (α = .90). This revised scale is widely recognised as an effective measure of RWA, particularly in the general population, having evolved to accommodate changes in societal norms (Saunders & Ngo, 2017).

SDO

SDO was measured using the SDO_6 scale (Pratto et al., 1994). Sixteen items assessed levels of SDO. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (7). One example item is "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups". Items were summed to form a measure of SDO, with scores ranging from 16-112. Higher scores indicated a greater level of SDO. The scale is shown to have excellent internal reliability (α = .91; Pratto et al., 1994) and this was replicated within the present sample (α = .93). This revised scale stands as one of the most extensively utilised tools in the realms of social and personality psychology, demonstrating broad applicability and effectiveness in comprehending intergroup dynamics (Kteily et al., 2012).

BJW

BJW was measured using the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991). Seven items assessed levels of BJW. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). One example item is "I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves". Items were summed to form a measure of BJW, with scores ranging from 7-49. Higher scores indicated a greater BJW. The scale is shown to have good internal reliability (α = .81; Hellman et al., 2008) and this was replicated within the present sample (α = .88). This scale is frequently employed to gauge BJW and continues to serve as a potent measure, surpassing alternative instruments in efficacy (Hellman et al., 2008).

Type of Courtroom Dock

Participants were presented with four short case summaries and courtroom sketches, which were created for the purpose of this study; the courtroom sketches varied dependent on the experimental condition they were randomly allocated to (see Supplemental File: https://osf.io/jbsd5/?view_only=a99bcedeb2b146a0978863647334d3cf). Sketches in the SD condition depicted the defendants placed in a secure glass dock guarded by a prison officer, while the sketches in the ND condition depicted the defendants sat at the bar table with their lawyer.

Study Design and Procedure

The survey underwent pilot testing to verify question suitability, survey functionality, and estimate completion time. A between-subjects experimental design was utilised. Participants were recruited online using convenience sampling through the lead university's research participation scheme or via snowball sampling, with an advertisement poster containing both a link and QR code distributed across various social media platforms. Students recruited through the lead university's research participation scheme received credit for their involvement. Before participation, participants received an information sheet detailing study objectives and ethical principles. Fully informed consent was obtained, followed by completion of a brief demographic questionnaire. Additional questions served to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria; individuals under 18 years old and those who did not provide consent were excluded from the study.

Participants meeting inclusion criteria were randomly allocated to one of two experimental conditions: with or without secure glass dock courtroom sketches. Online questionnaires measured ideological attitude variables, including RWA, SDO, and BJW. A short distractor questionnaire unrelated to the current study was included to prevent participants' ideological attitudes becoming reinforced and biasing their responses to the GL questions. Participants examined courtroom sketches and read short case summaries with inconclusive evidence to mitigate confirmation bias. Each case summary focused on a different crime (domestic abuse, armed robbery, assault on a homosexual, mugging) with a different defendant, although all had similar characteristics and facial expressions to reduce

further bias. JVs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from highly unlikely (1) to highly likely (5), with participants being asked to rate the likelihood that each of the four defendants were guilty. Participants were also required to provide both the sentence length they would expect the defendant to receive if they were indeed guilty and the sentence length that they would recommend, measured in years and months. Data collection took approximately 20 minutes per participant. An attention check item was integrated within the aforementioned scales. Participants who failed to pass the attention check were subsequently excluded from the analysis, mitigating any increase in noise or bias stemming from this lack of attention (Siritzky et al., 2023). After completing the survey, a short debrief form outlining the full study aims and contact details for researchers was displayed to the participants. The study was open for participation from 30/11/2023 to 18/03/2024.

Statistical Data Analysis

Data was exported from Qualtrics (2024), and subsequent statistical analyses were completed in IBM SPSS Statistics [Version 28.0] (IBM Corp., 2021) and JASP [Version 0.18.3] (JASP Team, 2024). Items 2,4,6,7,9,11,13,16,18, and 19 of the RWA scale and items 9-16 of the SDO scale were reverse-coded and scale scores were totalled across all measures. To test whether those in the SD condition had a significantly higher likelihood of reaching a guilty verdict and a significantly harsher perception of sentencing compared to those in the ND condition, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted. Furthermore, to test whether those who scored highly on the IAs had a significantly higher perception of GL and a significantly harsher perception of sentencing compared to those who scored lower, correlations and a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. All analyses were considered statistically significant with a *p*-value of less than .05 (Grabowski, 2016).

Results

Data were screened to ensure assumptions were met prior to analysis. Normality was met, evaluated through skewness and kurtosis z-scores within the +/- 1.96 range as

well as the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$). Visual examinations of histograms, boxplots, P-P plots, and Q-Q plots demonstrated normal distribution of residuals and no significant outliers. Levene's test highlighted homogeneity of variance ($p > .05$), and scatterplot analysis demonstrated homoscedasticity and a linear relationship between variables. Durbin-Watson values between zero and two indicated positive autocorrelations and suggested independence of errors. VIF values close to one indicated minimal multicollinearity.

Dock Condition Differences

A series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine the differences in GL and punishment between dock conditions. Participants in the SD condition had significantly higher GL ($M = 19.09$, $SD = 3.31$) than those in the ND condition ($M = 18.45$, $SD = 3.75$), $t(554) = 2.136$, $p = .017$. However, there was not a significant difference in perception of realistic sentence length (RSL) between the SD condition ($M = 144.80$, $SD = 125.32$) and the ND condition ($M = 138.26$, $SD = 109.08$), $t(554) = -.655$, $p = .256$. Furthermore, there was not a significant difference in suggested sentence length (SSL) between the SD condition ($M = 255.01$, $SD = 188.77$) and the ND condition ($M = 238.25$, $SD = 178.97$), $t(554) = -1.074$, $p = .142$.

Predicting Jurors' Guilt Perception

Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between variables prior to regression analyses. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics and correlations.

Insert Table 2 About Here

To assess whether differences in IAs could predict perceptions of GL, a multiple regression analysis was performed. Results indicated that the model significantly accounted for variance in GL ($F(3, 552) = 4.22$, $p = .006$), explaining 2.2% of its variability. Beta coefficients were used to access the unique variance associated with each variable (see Table 3, section R1).

Insert Table 3 About Here

Split By Dock Condition

To further examine whether IAs uniquely predicted perceptions of GL, a multiple regression was conducted with the data file split by dock condition. Results demonstrated that the overall fit of the model split by the ND condition was statistically significant $F(3, 273) = 3.43$, $p = .018$, explaining 3.7% of its variability, highlighting the included predictors' substantial impact. Beta coefficients were used to access the unique variance associated with each variable (see Table 3, section R2). However, results demonstrated that the overall fit of the model split by the SD condition failed to reach statistical significance $F(3, 281) = 1.39$, $p = .247$, suggesting that the model does not explain a significant portion of the variance in GL (see Table 3, section R3).

Exploratory Analyses

Exploring IAs on GL

To explore the non-significant finding of RWA failing to predict GL, a parallel mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether SDO and BJW significantly mediate this relationship between RWA and GL. As can be seen in Figure 1, analysis revealed that SDO and BJW significantly mediated the relationship between RWA and GL. Although RWA did not directly predict GL, it significantly predicted both mediators (SDO and BJW), which in turn, directly predicted GL.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Exploring Jurors' Sentencing Perceptions

To investigate whether IAs could predict perceptions of RSL, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results indicated that the model was marginally significant ($F(3, 552) = 2.62$, $p = .050$), explaining 1.4% of its variability. Beta coefficients were used to access the unique variance associated with each variable, although these did not demonstrate significance (see Table 3, section ER1). To examine whether IAs uniquely predicted recommendations for SSL, a multiple regression was conducted. Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the overall fit of the model failed to reach statistical significance $F(3, 552) = .36$, $p = .782$, suggesting that the model does not explain a significant portion of the variance in SSL (see Table 3, section ER2).

Discussion

The study aimed to compare GL and sentencing perceptions between jurors viewing defendants in SDs versus those at the bar table. Independent samples *t*-test analyses revealed partial support for the hypothesis indicating higher GL in the SD condition, compared to the ND condition. No significant differences in sentencing lengths were observed between the SD and ND conditions, supporting the null hypothesis. Additionally, the study examined the influence of IAs on GL through regression analyses, revealing partial support for the hypothesis indicating higher GL among high BJW individuals. Although, in support of the null hypothesis, low SDO predicted higher GL. Furthermore, RWA did not significantly predict GL. Finally, the impact of jurors' IAs on defendant GL, split by dock condition was explored. Regression analyses suggested partial support for differential relationships between GL and IAs across dock conditions. Specifically, in the ND condition, higher GL was associated with higher BJW and lower SDO scores, while no relationship was found between GL and RWA. In the SD condition, no significant relationship was found between GL and IAs, supporting the null hypothesis.

Dock Condition Differences

Independent samples *t*-test analyses revealed a significant difference in GL between the SD and ND conditions, with participants in the SD condition scoring higher on GL than participants in the ND condition. This aligns with previous literature indicating that SDs undermine the presumption of defendants' innocence (Rosen, 1966; Stumer, 2010). However, there were no significant differences in sentencing lengths between the SD and ND conditions, contrasting the aforementioned literature. Non-significant findings may be attributed to societal misunderstanding, particularly among laypersons and jurors, regarding crimes and appropriate measures for dealing with offenders (Byrne, 2023). These results tentatively suggest that the presence of SDs increase the likelihood of jurors finding the defendant guilty. However, SD presence did not significantly affect juror perceptions of defendants' sentence lengths.

Predicting Jurors' Guilt Perception

Regression analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between BJW and GL, consistent with existing literature (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017). Contrastingly, analyses revealed a significant negative relationship between SDO and GL. Further investigation is needed to clarify the direction of this relationship within the context of jurors. RWA was not a significant predictor of GL, suggesting that jurors with differing levels of RWA perceive guilt similarly. These findings tentatively support previous literature, suggesting that IAs influence jurors' GL perceptions (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2020). Specifically, jurors high in BJW are more likely to find defendants guilty, although the opposite trend is observed for SDO. Furthermore, RWA levels do not impact GL perceptions. These opposing findings may be attributed to limitations with self-report measures, including acquiescence and moderacy bias (Kreitchmann et al., 2019).

Split By Dock Condition

Regression analyses for the ND condition revealed a significant positive relationship between BJW and GL, consistent with literature (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017). Analyses also revealed a significant negative relationship between SDO and GL. As mentioned previously, further investigation is required for clarification on relationship direction. RWA was not a significant predictor of GL in the ND condition. Regression analyses for the SD condition demonstrated that neither BJW, SDO, nor RWA significantly predicted GL, suggesting other factors may contribute more to GL than IAs when the defendant is placed in a SD. We could therefore tentatively suggest that the presence of the SD alone is enough to render guilty verdicts, irrespective of jurors' IAs. This corroborates previous literature suggesting that IAs influence jurors' perceptions of GL (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2020), although only when the defendant is sat at the bar table with their lawyer and not when they are placed in a SD. Findings suggest jurors high in BJW are more likely to find the defendant guilty, although the opposite trend is found for SDO. Furthermore, high levels of RWA do not influence jurors' perceptions of GL. As mentioned previously, these opposing findings may be attributed to limitations with self-report measures (Kreitchmann et al., 2019). Furthermore,

non-significant SD condition findings suggest that IAs do not affect jurors' perceptions of GL when the defendant is placed in a SD.

Exploratory Analyses

Exploring IAs on GL

Further exploratory mediation analysis examined both SDO and BJW as parallel mediators in the relationship between RWA and GL. Both SDO and BJW emerged as significant mediators in this relationship. The significance of their mediating impact may explain the discrepancy in findings of the present study in comparison to existing literature examining the relationship between RWA and GL (e.g., Bray & Noble, 1978; Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2020). Further research should take these findings into account when examining the relationship between RWA and GL, utilising measures of SDO and BJW simultaneously.

Exploring Jurors' Sentencing Perceptions

Despite a significant overall model, findings from further exploratory multiple regression analyses demonstrated that RWA, SDO, and BJW did not uniquely predict RSL. Furthermore, RWA, SDO, and BJW did not uniquely predict SSL. Findings suggest that IAs of jurors have no impact on their perception of sentencing and punishment of defendants. These findings contradict the existing body of literature (Stumer, 2010), although these non-significant findings may be attributed to external factors regarding sentencing perceptions, as mentioned above (Byrne, 2023).

Considerations,

The present study's strengths and limitations merit evaluation. Despite a relatively high attrition rate of 27.7%, which could affect reliability (Brueton et al., 2011), initial power calculations indicated sufficient statistical power for both proposed and exploratory analyses (Uttley, 2019). While a large sample size could increase the risk of Type I errors, finding significant results even for small or nonexistent effects (Lieberman & Cunningham, 2009), this risk was mitigated by splitting the data for cross-sectional analysis to explore differences between dock conditions. However, 34.0% of the participants were psychology students

from the lead university's research scheme, potentially introducing bias. Research indicates that students may render more guilty verdicts and harsher sentences than community members (Hosch et al., 2011; Martín et al., 2007; Neuschatz et al., 2008; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2015). Future studies should compare student and non-student populations using a cross-sectional design to address this issue. Using an online survey methodology enhanced accessibility and convenience, facilitating the recruitment of a diverse sample (Andrade, 2020). This method also reduced social desirability bias by providing anonymity (Ried et al., 2021), unlike traditional courtroom settings. However, the online mock jury simulation had notable drawbacks. Participants evaluated hypothetical crimes without real consequences for the alleged offenders (Bornstein & McCabe, 2005), and the absence of collective deliberation meant that verdicts lacked the social dynamics of real jury deliberations, such as conformity and diffusion of responsibility (Najdowski, 2010). These limitations pose challenges for inferring the study's findings. Nevertheless, the study's focus on individual differences in jury decision-making contributes valuable insights to existing literature, justifying the use of an online mock jury simulation.

Practical and Policy Implications

This study supports the perspective held by many judges that the use of a SD in courtrooms may introduce bias and should be discontinued (Rossner et al., 2017). Additionally, while the direction of the relationship is contradictory and inconclusive, the current research continues to suggest that IAs can influence JVs. This raises concerns about the presumption of innocence, which should always be safeguarded to prevent wrongful convictions (Naughton, 2011). Our recommendations align with recent efforts to modernise courtrooms, including plans to close nearly 100 courts and enhance digitisation of trial procedures, although these are not devoid of their own limitations (Donoghue, 2017). To reduce the impact of IAs on jury decision-making and prevent erroneous judgements, legal systems must implement enhanced jury selection procedures, involving more rigorous screening of potential jurors to identify and address biases. While further research is warranted to validate our findings, we tentatively propose phasing out SDs in existing

criminal courtrooms and refraining from including them in the design of new court facilities. Furthermore, more rigorous jury selection procedures should be employed to mitigate the effects of IAs. Employing these practical and policy changes are necessary, based on the notion that continued wrongful convictions have far-reaching implications, eroding trust in the legal system and perpetuating systemic injustices. Urgent reform is required to uphold fairness and equity.

Conclusion

The present findings underscore the multifaceted nature of juror decision-making processes and highlight the need for comprehensive interventions to mitigate biases in legal proceedings. By informing policy decisions regarding courtroom design and addressing the influence of IAs on juror perceptions, this research contributes to the promotion of fair and equitable legal outcomes. Further research is warranted to elucidate the complex interplay between individual biases, courtroom dynamics, and legal decision-making processes.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics for Current Study Sample

Demographic Characteristic	*n*	%
Biological Sex at Birth		
Male	116	20.9
Female	439	79.0
Prefer Not to Say	1	0.2
Ethnicity		
White British	391	70.3
Asian	45	8.1
African	10	1.8
European	40	7.2
Other	28	5.0
Prefer Not to Say	42	7.6
Courtroom Experience		
Jury Service [a]	32	5.8
Professional Legal [a]	17	3.1
Courtroom Observation [a]	32	5.8
Participation Credit		
Lead University's Research Scheme [b]	189	34.0

Note. [a] Displays the number and respective percentage of participants who had relevant courtroom experience. [b] Displays the number of students recruited through the scheme for participation credit.

Table 2

Table Displaying Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RWA Global Score	64.70	23.91	—						
2. SDO Global Score	35.55	15.72	.610**	—					
3. BJW Global Score	23.19	7.94	.431**	.460**	—				
4. GL Score [a]	18.77	3.54	-.072	-.090*	.057	—			
5. RSL [b]	141.58	117.54	.111**	.089*	.083	.022	—		
6. SSL [c]	246.75	184.03	.024	-.008	-.018	.104*	.703**	—	
7. Dock Condition	0.51	0.50	-.053	-.033	-.025	.090*	.028	.046	—

Note. [a] Score demonstrates participants' perception of guilt likelihood. [b] Participants' perception of realistic sentence lengths that would be used in real-world settings. [c] Participants' suggestion for recommended sentence length. **. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

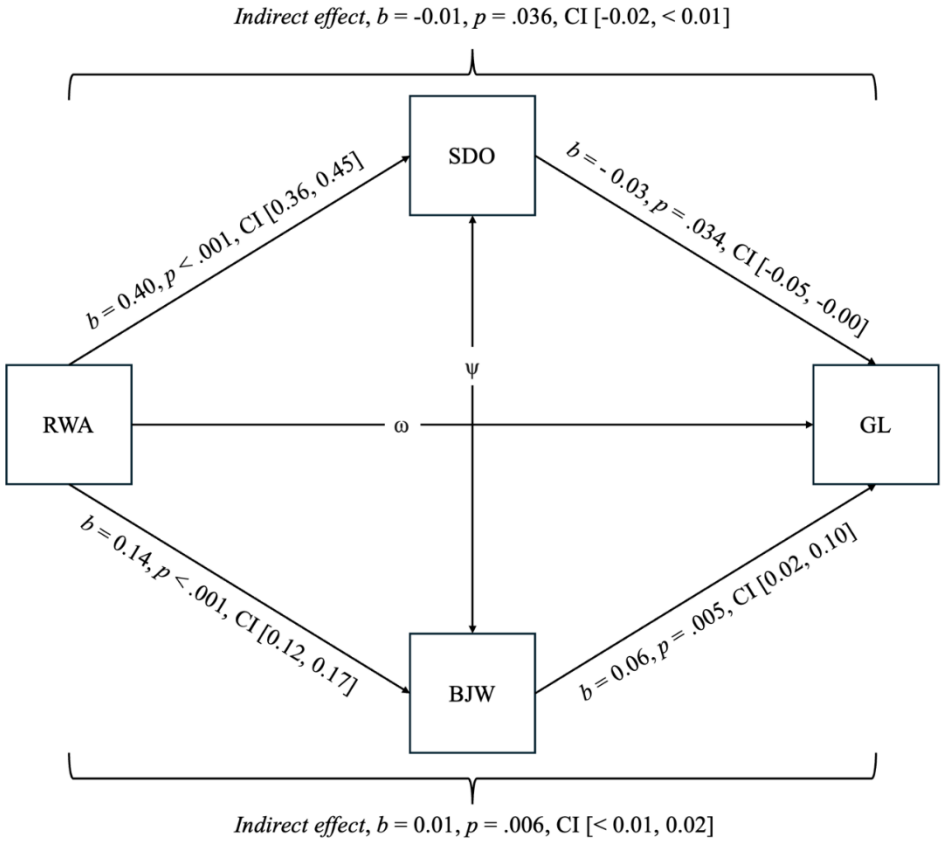
Table Displaying Results From Multiple Regression Analyses

	DV	IV	R^2	*F*	*B*	SE_B	*β*	*t*	*p*
R1	GL		.022	4.22					.006
		RWA			-.009	0.008	-.059	-1.09	.278
		SDO			-.026	0.012	-.116	-2.11	.036
		BJW			.061	0.022	.136	2.80	.005
R2	GL^{ND}		.021	3.43					.018
		RWA			-.001	0.012	-.009	-0.12	.904
		SDO			-.047	0.019	-.198	-2.52	.012
		BJW			.073	0.033	.154	2.24	.026
R3	GL^{SD}		.010	1.39					.247
		RWA			-.014	0.011	-.103	-1.35	.179
		SDO			-.006	0.016	-.027	-0.35	.727
		BJW			.047	0.029	.114	1.66	.098
ER1	RSL		.014	2.62					.050
		RWA			.395	0.269	.080	1.47	.142
		SDO			.173	0.415	.023	0.42	.677
		BJW			.555	0.721	.037	0.77	.442
ER2	SSL		.002	0.36					.782
		RWA			.403	0.423	.052	0.95	.341
		SDO			-.312	0.654	-.027	-0.48	.633
		BJW			-.647	1.137	-.028	-0.57	.569

Note. GL^{ND} refers to guilt likelihood, split by no dock condition. GL^{SD} refers to guilt likelihood, split by secure dock condition.

Figure 1

Figure Displaying the Parallel Multiple Mediation Model to Demonstrate the Mediating Role of SDO and BJW on the Relationship Between RWA and GL



Note. The residual covariance between SDO and BJW (*b* = 24.47, *p* < .001, CI [16.80, 32.15]) is represented by ψ. The path coefficient between RWA and GL (*b* = -0.01, *p* = .275, CI [-0.02, 0.01]) is represented by ω.