

1969

Comparative Study of Puerto Rican Attitudes Toward the Legal System Dealing with Crime

Jaime Toro-Calder

Ceferina Cedenó

Walter C. Reckless

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jaime Toro-Calder, Ceferina Cedenó, Walter C. Reckless, Comparative Study of Puerto Rican Attitudes Toward the Legal System Dealing with Crime, 59 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 536 (1968)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUERTO RICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE LEGAL SYSTEM DEALING WITH CRIME

JAIME TORO-CALDER, CEFERINA CEDEÑO AND WALTER C. RECKLESS

Jaime Toro-Calder is Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, and Associate Director of the Program in Criminology at the Social Science Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico. He received his B.A. from the same university, and an M.A. from the University of Wisconsin. He is currently a candidate for a Ph.D. from New York University.

Ceferina Cedeño is a Research Associate at the Social Science Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico. She previously served as a psychologist at the State Penitentiary and was Acting Director of Classification and Treatment from 1957-1965.

Walter C. Reckless is Professor of Sociology at Ohio State University and is the author of standard text books in criminology, as well as of many articles on crime and delinquency. Dr. Reckless has also served in the following capacities: Board of Directors, Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training; President of American Society of Criminology, 1964-1966; Chairman of Section on Criminology, American Sociological Association, 1963-1964; and Consultant on Corrections for Technical Assistant Administration, United Nations, assigned to India, 1951-1952.

An attitudinal gradient was found by the authors to exist between adult male Puerto Rican prisoners of a maximum security institution and Puerto Rican laborers. The former made a more unfavorable showing on a questionnaire which had been pre-tested to measure attitudes toward the law, court system, and police. The same sort of gradient difference between male prisoners and male laborers was found to exist in six other jurisdictions. The sample of prison guards in Puerto Rico made a better showing in attitudes than the laborers and the Puerto Rican police made still a more favorable showing. It is felt that the favorable to unfavorable direction of attitudes toward the legal institutions on the part of various adult groups indicates an internalization of life experiences which are related to involvement and noninvolvement in delinquency and crime. Such attitudes might be used as a criminality index, indicating a direction toward or away from involvement in crime as an adult.

The present study¹ focuses upon the comparative showing of a sample of adult male Puerto Rican prisoners, laborers, prison guards, and police on a questionnaire type of schedule which contained, among other things, 89 items dealing with attitudes toward the criminal law, the court system, and law enforcement officials. The same schedule of so-called "law items" was administered to similar samples in Ohio, Ontario (Canada), Quebec

(Canada), Rome (Italy), Athens (Greece), West Pakistan, and South Korea.²

In all countries or sections of countries where the "law items" have been administered to various adult male samples, the prisoners have shown a more unfavorable attitude toward the legal system dealing with crime than have the workers or laborers (presumably noncriminal for the most part). And there have been other samples, such as the police, who have shown even a more favorable attitude than the laborers.

¹ The funds for implementing the administration of schedules in Puerto Rico were supplied by the Development Fund of The Ohio State University. The Office of Research of The Ohio State University contributed funds which enabled Professor Reckless to have the responses on the schedules processed through the Data Center of the College of Commerce and Administration, Ohio State University, by Dr. Patrick T. Cleaver of the Department of Sociology, who developed a data-processing program for this study on the IBM 1620 computer. Funds for administering the research schedule in other countries, mentioned in this report, were also supplied by the Development Fund and the Office of Research. Dr. Cleaver also did the data processing of the schedules from the other countries.

² The collection of schedules and analysis of data in all countries involved has been under the direction of Professor Reckless. Dr. A. D. Mylonas administered the schedule in Greece; Dr. Riaz Hassan, in West Pakistan; Dr. Sung Tai Cho, in South Korea; Dr. Mylonas, in English-speaking Canada (Ontario) and in French-speaking Canada (Quebec). Dr. Cho made a comparative analysis of the data from the schedules administered in South Korea, West Pakistan, and Ohio. He presented his findings in his doctor's dissertation. See Sung Tai Cho, *A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Criminality Level Index*, Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1967.

Does this trend hold true in Puerto Rico? The present report attempts to answer this question and at this juncture it can be said that the answer is YES.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

A questionnaire type of schedule, which was originally developed for the Ohio study and subsequently used in other countries, was administered to a sample of 202 prisoners at the State Penitentiary (Rio Piedras), to 204 laborers, 69 prison guards at the penitentiary, and 137 Puerto Rican police, during the last part of 1966 and the first half of 1967. The schedule consists of three parts: the Socialization Scale of the California Psychological Inventory, containing 54 items; 89 so-called "law items," developed by A. D. Mylonas;³ and the Crissman Moral Judgment Scale, consisting of 50 items. This report will be primarily concerned with the 89 "law items."

The schedule was translated into Spanish of the common man by the first two authors of this paper and the translation was pretested on a small number of prisoners and laborers to make adjustments in language for comprehension of the items by respondents. The revised schedule was then administered by the first two principals to the prisoners, laborers, prison guards, and police. The schedules were sent to the senior author at Ohio State University for data processing, which consisted of coding the responses from the schedules to code sheets, verifying the coding, punching the coded responses onto IBM statistical cards, verifying the punched cards, and processing the statistical cards through the IBM 1620 computer, according to an especially designed program.

It should be noted that the scoring format for the 89 law items was 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, in which 5 was the most unfavorable and 1 was the most favorable direction of the response to any item. The scores on each item for each respondent were summated into a total score. The total scores for each respondent in each of the four Puerto Rican samples were added and the sum was divided by the number of respondents in each sample. Hence, an average (mean) total score was obtained.

The responses to the 54 items in the Socialization Scale were scored according to format 1 or 0,

³ Mylonas & Reckless, *Prisoners' Attitudes toward Law and Legal Institutions*, 54 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 479-84 (1963).

where 1 represented the favorable and 0 unfavorable response. The 1's were added and the sum became the score on the Socialization Scale. Likewise, the (total) scores on the Socialization Scale were added for all the respondents in each sample and the sum was divided by the number of respondents in each sample, thus giving an average (mean) score.

The Crissman Moral Judgment Scale, consisting of 50 items, has a response format of 1 to 10. The respondent was asked to circle a number from 1 to 10 according to how wrong he felt the itemized behavior was. Hence, high scores represent a moral response in the favorable (most wrong) direction; low scores, a moral response in the unfavorable (least wrong) direction. A respondent's total score on the 50 moral values items was procured and the total scores for every respondent in the sample were added. The average (mean) score was obtained by dividing the sum of the total scores by the number of respondents in each sample.

FINDINGS

The findings of the present study are presented in Table 1 in the form of average (mean) scores for the four Puerto Rican samples studied. One notices that the average (mean) total score of the prisoners on the 89 "law items" (scored in the unfavorable direction from 5 to 1) is considerably higher than that of the laborer. Hence, the Puerto Rican prisoners display a more unfavorable attitude toward law than the Puerto Rican laborers.

TABLE 1
AVERAGE SCORES FOR SELECTED SAMPLES
IN PUERTO RICO

Sample	89 "Law Items" ^a	Socialization Scale ^b	Moral Judgment Scale ^c	Number of Respondents
Prisoners	285.83	28.09	294.86	202
Laborers	259.52	31.89	341.24	204
Prison Guards	212.75	34.32	335.86	69
Police Officers	198.78	37.54	337.96	137

^a High scores are in the unfavorable direction.

^b Contains 54 items. Higher scores in favorable direction; lower scores, unfavorable direction.

^c Consists of 50 items. The scores were computed on the basis of 0 to 9, instead of 1 to 10 as given in the response format. Hence, 50 points should be added to the average score of each sample.

The sample of prison guards is much lower in average total score than the common laborers and the police sample is still lower in average (mean) total score. In other words, the prisoners display the most unfavorable attitudes toward law, legal institutions, and officials of any of the four groups, even more unfavorable than their presumable "first-cousins"—the common laborer.

In all other jurisdictions where the same schedule of 89 "law items" was administered, the prisoner sample always displayed a more unfavorable attitude toward law and legal institutions than did the laborers. See Table 3. Hence, a gradient in attitude seems to exist and one can assume that prisoners, as a result of life experiences, internalize more unfavorable attitudes toward law than the nonprisoners (laborers).

In Greece, as well as in English- and French-speaking Canada, where police samples were collected, the police group tested much more favorable in direction than the laborer group and very much more than the prisoner group. See Table 3. The same is true in Puerto Rico. A glance at Table 1 will indicate that the Puerto Rican police have an average score very much more in the favorable direction than the laborer group and still much more favorable than the prisoner group. In the three countries involved, one might be justified in saying that the police represent a specially selected group who develop favorable occupational or professional attitudes toward the law after joining the service or who internalize favorable attitudes toward the law prior to entering the service, which set of attitudes makes them gravitate toward police work.

One notices in Table 1 that the prison guards in Puerto Rico have a much more favorable direction of score on the 89 "law items" than the laborers but not quite as favorable in direction as the police. This trend is born out in the direction of the average total scores on the 89 items for the prison guards of English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Canada, which represent the only places where comparable samples of prison guards are available at the time of this writing. See Table 3.

The average (mean) scores on the 54 Socialization items and the 50 moral judgment items are also listed in Table 1. They are presented to give directional validation to the average (mean) total scores on the "law items." The Socialization Scale, scored in the favorable direction (higher scores favorable; lower scores less favorable to un-

favorable), represents a measure of direction toward or away from good socialization or away from or toward delinquency and crime. One notices that the Puerto Rican police test the most favorably on socialization which is in line with their testing the most favorably on the "law items".

The Puerto Rican prisoners test much less favorably than the police on the Socialization Scale and they test the most unfavorably on the law items. The prison guards come next in favorable showing and the laborers next. The same trend is found for these groups on the average (mean) scores for the 89 "law items."

The Puerto Rican prisoners test the least favorable on the 50 moral judgment items, while the laborers, prison guards, and police score more favorably. However, the latter three groups are very close in total average score. While there is a gradient difference between the offender sample and the three nonoffender samples in the expected direction, the difference in the scores for moral judgments are not as discriminating between the samples as the difference in the scores on the Socialization Scale.

The average (mean) score of the Puerto Rican prisoners was compared with the average (mean) score of the Puerto Rican laborers on each of the 89 "law items," and the 24 items which showed the greatest difference between the average (mean) scores were selected. (The difference in the average scores between the prisoner and laborer samples in the instance of the 24 items was so large, that it could hardly be due to chance.) This practice was followed in Ohio, English-speaking and French-speaking Canada, Rome, Athens, West Pakistan, and South Korea.

The Puerto Rican samples were rescored for total average score on the 24 "law items" which most significantly differentiated the adult male prisoner from the adult male laborer. One notices that the Puerto Rican prisoners, as would be expected, score higher (more unfavorably) on the 24 most significant "law items" than the laborers, and that the prison guards and police score lower than the laborers on these items. See Table 2.

The list of the 24 significant items, discriminating the most between prisoners and laborers in Puerto Rico, are presented in Appendix A. One notices that 12 of the 24 significantly differentiating Puerto Rican law items are focused on the police, while 10 deal with the court system (judges, trial, prosecutors, etc.) and 2 are general items. In the

TABLE 2

AVERAGE SCORES ON 24 MOST SIGNIFICANT "LAW ITEMS" FOR PUERTO SAMPLES

Sample	Score ^a	Number of Respondents
Prisoners	81.70	202
Laborers	64.63	204
Prison Guards	60.36	69
Police Officers	54.89	137

^a Higher scores in unfavorable direction; lower, in favorable direction.

analysis of the 24 significant "law items" for the other countries studied, the major concentration of attitude gradients (between laborers and prisoners) dwelt on the police. Undoubtedly, the police as an authority figure act as a magnet for unfavorable attitudes of the prisoners but not for (the presumably noncriminal) laborers. It could be that the experiences which are associated with involvement in delinquency and crime generate attitudes of hostility and distrust of police as the enemy of the person and as an authority figure to be feared.

CROSS-CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS

While the gradient difference in attitude between prisoners and noncriminal samples was the major concern of this report, there are some cross-cultural overtones which have emerged from comparisons of samples in different countries. Table 4 presents the rank order of the average (mean) scores on the 89 "law items" for the prisoner and the laborer samples in seven jurisdictions.

One notices that the Puerto Rican sample of prisoners ranks third highest in unfavorable atti-

tudes toward the law as measured by the 89 items and that the French and English-speaking Canadian prisoners rank first and second in the list. Fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh places are occupied by West Pakistan, Greek, Korean, and

TABLE 3

AVERAGE SCORES FOR SELECTED SAMPLES IN SIX ADDITIONAL JURISDICTIONS

Sample	89 "Law Items"	Socialization Scale	Moral Judgment Scale	Number of Respondents
Greek Prisoners	281.48	—*	326.86	200
Greek Laborers	249.09	30.61	344.29	200
Greek Police	210.18	32.28	368.37	200
Korean Prisoners	250.19	22.04	328.35	194
Korean Laborers	224.07	23.79	320.03	179
W. Pak. Prisoners	283.75	—*	—*	165
W. Pak. Laborers	262.28	—	—	170
Engl. C. Prisoners	290.67	25.02	258.70	202
Engl. C. Laborers	235.83	33.58	312.94	190
Engl. C. Prison Guards	191.05	36.97	339.39	200
Engl. C. Police Guards	173.68	37.17	317.56	199
French C. Prisoners	302.21	24.60	289.61	200
French C. Laborers	237.49	35.58	328.00	200
French C. Prison Guards	206.91	36.93	326.52	200
French C. Police Guards	187.18	37.65	321.20	200
Ohio Prisoners (white)	238.81	27.47	305.48	218
Ohio Laborers	208.32	35.82	328.23	195

* Not available.

TABLE 4

RANK ORDER COMPARISONS (FROM HIGH TO LOW) OF AVERAGE SCORES ON THE 89 "LAW ITEMS" BY JURISDICTION FOR THE PRISONERS AND LABORERS

Rank	Prisoners		Laborers	
	Jurisdiction	Average Score	Jurisdiction	Average Score
1	French Canadian	302.21	West Pakistan	262.28
2	English Canadian	290.67	Puerto Rican	259.52
3	Puerto Rican	285.83	Greek	249.09
4	West Pakistan	283.75	French Canadian	237.49
5	Greek	281.48	English Canadian	235.83
6	South Korean	250.19	South Korean	224.07
7	Ohio	238.81	Ohio	208.32

Ohio prisoners. Some of the average scores of the prisoner samples are very close but there are sizable differences between the French Canadian and the Puerto Rican prisoners and between the latter and the South Korean and Ohio prisoners. The total difference between the French Canadian and the Ohio prisoners is very large. It is possible that historical and/or cultural factors could cause this difference, assuming that the two groups of prisoners represent about the same selection in the law enforcement process—namely, maximum security cases. Just what this historical-cultural factor is that determines the height of the unfavorable attitude toward law is not known. On the other hand, if the various samples of prisoners are not comparable, then it is possible that factors having to do with the selection of adult males who get arrested, sentenced, and committed to prison control the variation in attitudes toward the law.

The laborer samples in each of the seven places where the "law" schedule was administered also show sizable differences in average (mean) total score on the 89 items. The samples of West Pakistan and Puerto Rican laborers occupy first and second place (very close) in the average total score, followed by the Greek laborer in third position. French and English Canadian laborers occupy fourth and fifth place (very close together) and their average total scores are in a more favorable direction than the scores of the Pakistani and Puerto Rican laborers. Korean laborers occupy sixth place, still more favorable in direction than the English and French Canadian samples, while the most favorable place is occupied by the Ohio laborers.

Undoubtedly, the reason that the Ohio labor sample shows up the most favorably in attitudes toward the law is due more to a special selection factor than to possible historical-cultural differences. The Ohio sample consisted of labor union members who elected to take a course in labor education, offered as continuing education by The Ohio State University. On the other hand, the best guess by the senior author would be that an ordinary laborer sample in Ohio would score somewhere in the vicinity of where the South Korean laborers scored—favorable but not extremely favorable in attitude.

One final comment or observation is in order. One notices that the difference in average (mean) total scores between the Canadian prisoners and the Canadian laborers who were members of the

Canadian Labour Congress is the largest between any of the prisoner-laborer groups, while the smallest gradient difference in attitudes toward the law is found between the prisoner-laborer samples of West Pakistan. Whether the size of the gradient difference in attitudes between laborers and prisoners, as between the Canadian samples and the Pakistani groups, is controlled by historical and cultural factors or by the special selection of persons drawn into the samples is not known. The most plausible explanation would be to say that the large or small differences between the average scores of the sample pairs is due to special selection of the samples and not to historical and cultural factors.

CONCLUSION

Obviously an attitudinal gradient exists between Puerto Rican adult males who become maximum security prisoners or remain laborers and those who find their way to prison- and police-service. The prisoners in Puerto Rico make a more unfavorable showing on attitudes toward the law than do laborers, while the prison guards apparently have a more favorable and the police a still more favorable set of attitudes toward legal institutions. The attitudinal gradient, whereby the prisoners display more unfavorable direction than laborers, was found to exist in six other jurisdictions, confirming the directionality obtained in Puerto Rico. Quite likely, the attitudinal gradient which is found to exist between laborers and prisoners results from a differential internalization of life experiences which are concerned with involvement and noninvolvement in delinquency and crime.

If attitudes toward the law are found to be an efficient indicator of the amount of involvement in criminal behavior, it is possible, as has been suggested, to use a scale of the most significant "law items" as a "criminality level index,"⁴ which might be more revealing than the present records of arrests, sentences in criminal courts, and admissions to jails and prisons which, in turn, are very fortuitous.

If attitudes toward the law are not found to be an efficient indicator of past and future involvement in crime, it is possible that an allied set of at-

⁴ See Reckless, *The Development of a Criminality Level Index*, in RECKLESS & NEWMAN, *INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS IN CRIMINOLOGY: PAPERS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY*, 1964, pp. 71-82 (1965).

itudes might measure directionality more effectively. Still further, if attitudes are found *not to be* an efficacious index, there are other "self factors" which can be explored, such as the self concept. There is no question but what we need in criminology and corrections indicators or indices of directionality of behavior which are more meaningful than accidental arrests or fortuitous sentences to prison, in order to make better decisions in the process of criminal justice, all the way from arrest through probation and sentencing to release on parole. In addition, administrators need effective indicators to make decisions on inmates relative

to granting daily work furloughs, allowing home visits, release to "half-way" houses, and so forth.

There seem to be important differences in the levels of the average total scores between the comparable samples, wherein Puerto Rican prisoners rank third highest and the Puerto Rican laborers second highest in unfavorable direction of attitudes toward the legal system which deals with crime, in a study of seven jurisdictions. The extent to which the highness or the lowness of attitude scores reflects historical-cultural factors or factors of selection in the sampling process of the research project, is not known.

APPENDIX A

TWENTY-FOUR "LAW ITEMS" HAVING THE HIGHEST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AVERAGE SCORES ON THE RESPONSES OF THE SAMPLES OF PRISONERS AND LABORERS IN PUERTO RICO

<i>Number of the Item in the Schedule</i>	<i>Description of the Item</i>
65	We would have less crime if our laws were more strict.
69	Most people have to do something dishonest every day.
91	On the whole, judges are honest and kindhearted.
92	Almost any jury can be fixed.
93	Court decisions are almost always just.
95	My trial was a farce.
98	Almost anything can be fixed in courts if you have enough money.
101	My trial did not get at all the truth.
103	For the most part, police and the courts are just.
104	A judge is a good man.
108	On the whole, lawyers are honest.
111	Fake witnesses are often produced by the prosecutor.
112	On the whole, policemen are honest.
118	A policeman usually judges you as guilty.
120	Police work rests mainly upon information given by stool pigeons.
124	The police departments do not use humane methods in obtaining confessions.
127	Our society would be better off if there were more policemen.
130	Policemen show favoritism to politicians.
132	Police are careful not to arrest innocent persons.
135	Police usually apprehend criminals in difficult cases.
136	Policemen are mostly selected for personal merit and ability.
138	Policemen are just as crooked as the people they arrest.
140	Policemen should be paid more for their work.
143	Police almost always respect constitutional rights of suspected criminals.