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Predicting Public Opinion About Juvenile Waivers

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The accountability movement of the juvenile justice system in the late 1980s and early 1990s encouraged more punitive practices. Public opinion was strong during this time. The attitudes about the juvenile justice system are a product of individual demographic, cultural, and political characteristics. This study addresses opinions about juvenile waivers—a punitive sanction—examining data from the National Opinion Survey of Crime and Justice in the 1990s. This study analyzes attitudes about juvenile waivers, using multivariate quantitative methods. The results indicate a consistent relationship between the perception of the sentencing goals of the juvenile court (punishment versus rehabilitation) and one's attitudes toward the use of juvenile waivers. Contrary to the generated hypotheses, though, attitudes about juvenile waivers were not consistently dependent on individual demographic, cultural, or political characteristics.

Keywords: *juvenile waivers; public opinion; accountability; punishment*

Caseloads in the juvenile justice system grew to staggering numbers, and levels of serious crime rates increased almost exponentially from the late 1970s to the 1980s (Bishop, Frazier, & Henretta, 1989). From 1987 to 1996, caseloads increased by 49%, even though the juvenile population only increased by 11% (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). A greater proportion of youths—in fact, twice as many youths—have been sentenced to adult prison in the last decade (Austin, Johnson, & Gregoriou, 2000). The apparent increase in youth crimes, especially serious and violent crimes, caused lawmakers to question the effectiveness of the rehabilitative practices of the juvenile court and to seek more punitive practices toward juvenile offenders (Austin et al., 2000).

Fear of serious juvenile crime also shaped public attitudes and prompted calls for harsher punishment of youthful offenders (Lane & Meeker, 2000). Lawmakers aimed to remove serious juvenile offenders from society early in their criminal careers (Klein, 1998). In short, treating youthful offenders similar to adult offenders was,

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theoretically, an effective means of preventing future juvenile crime; that is, providing accountability for the youthful offender.

This accountability movement shifted perceptions of youthful offenders from naïvely innocent to “heinous, vicious, ‘adult’-type [criminals]” (Feld, 1999, p. 162). In discussing the pendulum swing of the juvenile justice system, Bernard (1992) suggested that juvenile delinquents are “naïve risk-takers”, and that youths who are “rational calculators” should not be subjected to the treatment of the juvenile justice system but transferred to adult court’s authority (pp. 168-169). When a youth is rational in making choices to engage in criminal activity, then there must be some accountability to his or her actions. Bernard (1992) suggested that transfer to adult court may provide an avenue to supply that accountability. Although Bernard (1992) posited that many youths are *not* “rational calculators,” he argued that “get tough” policies in the 1980s and early 1990s created a stronger desire to provide higher levels of accountability through juvenile waivers.

Within the last few decades, the juvenile justice system has undergone several changes transforming from an individualized treatment model to a generalized deterrence model, focusing on keeping the general public safe (Podkopacz & Feld, 1996). This get-tough approach of the juvenile justice system simulated the harsh treatment of the adult criminal justice system. Consequently, the transfer of juvenile offenders to adult courts was a trend under this get-tough policy (Fritsch & Hemmens, 1995).

“Distilled to its essence, how do we decide whether to prosecute a particular young offender as a criminal or as a kid, and what difference does it make for the youths, for public safety, or the juvenile court?” (Feld, 1999, p. 161). Empirical research on public opinion regarding the juvenile justice system is an important phenomenon to examine because it often influences criminal justice policy (Baron & Hartnagel, 1996). Policy is often generated from legislative action that can be influenced by public opinion. For example, in jurisdictions where legislative waivers are instituted, public opinion can be influential. Public opinion can also affect the individual decision-making process. For example, if the juvenile waiver decision is initiated by the prosecutor (i.e., prosecutorial waiver) and/or judge (judicial waiver) in jurisdictions where these actors are elected officials, then public opinion can, once again, be influential. Therefore, understanding public perceptions about juvenile crime and processing of juvenile offenders through the waiver process may assist in understanding the support of the juvenile justice policy changes during the accountability movement.

Review of the Literature

A juvenile waiver involves sending a youth to adult court by removing him or her from the authority of the juvenile court (Fritsch & Hemmens, 1995). The juvenile transfer rate increased 400% between 1971 and 1981. During this time, every state amended its juvenile code to facilitate juvenile waiver to adult court (Fritsch &

Hemmens, 1995). Currently, all states allow juveniles to be tried as adults in criminal court (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2003; Steiner & Hemmens, 2003).

It is clear that the juvenile waiver decision became more popular to control juvenile delinquency during the late 1980s and 1990s. Although legislatures found the waiver concept popular, legislators today are starting to lose support for juvenile waivers from practitioners within the criminal justice system (Steiner & Hemmens, 2003).

The Importance of Public Attitudes

Public opinion is of utmost concern for decision makers in democratic societies (Flanagan, 1996). "Public opinion is the fundamental undergirding of any working democracy" (Herbst, 2001, p. 451). Public attitudes affect legislative decision making and court decisions (Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999). By using popular pressure to influence legislative changes, public concern can affect reform of the criminal justice system (Hindelang, 1974). To understand recent policy changes, it is important to comprehend how public opinion influences these policy changes within the criminal justice system (Sprott, 1998). Public opinion data on crime and the criminal justice system serve as a tool to improve useful public services and establish priorities for criminal justice reformers (Flanagan, 1996).

Findings from a survey about attitudes regarding juvenile justice policies indicated that the majority of respondents supported treatment and rehabilitation for young offenders (Schwartz, Guo, & Kerbs, 1993). The majority of respondents also believed that juvenile offenders should not have the same sentences as adults. On the other hand, nearly 80% of respondents thought juvenile courts were too lenient on the punishment of serious juvenile offenders (Schwartz et al., 1993). Even though a majority of respondents believed that punishment should be different for juveniles and adults, a majority of respondents favored trying juveniles in adult courts for serious felonies.

Determinants of Attitudes of Juvenile Waivers

There are important determinants of attitudes toward juvenile waivers. In a world where juvenile laws are changing—where the pendulum is swinging to the more punitive—it is important to discuss the literature of determinants of public support for juvenile waivers, knowing these determinants may explain the swing of support for juvenile waivers in such a punitive society.

Political ideology and party affiliation can have important effects on support of criminal justice policies. Sowell (1987) offered two contrasting visions of how the world's views shape one's thoughts about human affairs: constrained and unconstrained visions. The constrained (or conservative) vision suggests that human activities are limited by an innate human nature that is self-serving and unalterable. The unconstrained (or liberal) vision suggests that human nature is a blank slate and is formed exclusively by culture (Sowell, 1987). Thus, one would expect those who identify

themselves as conservatives to be tough-minded without regard to cultural pressures and those who identify themselves as liberals to be more inclined to rehabilitate offenders based on a sense of individualized treatment programs based on cultural needs (Walsh & Ellis, 2004).

Political party affiliation also can influence attitudes about juvenile justice policies. Those who identify themselves as Republicans are presumably more willing to support more punitive measures, and those who identify themselves as Democrats tend to support rehabilitation (Feld, 2003).

Demographic factors may also have an influence on one's attitudes toward juvenile offenders and juvenile justice policies. Race may be an important predictor of support for juvenile waivers. In fact, Black citizens report feeling more fearful of crime than White citizens because they are typically the victims of crime (Braungart & Hoyer, 1980; Garofalo, 1977; Houts & Kassab, 1997). Higher level of fear leads to more punitive attitudes. For example, a national public opinion survey in 1991 addressed attitudes toward juvenile crime and juvenile justice (see Schwartz et al., 1993). They found that Black parents with children had a more punitive attitude about juvenile justice policies than other racial groups (Schwartz et al., 1993). On the other hand, White respondents were more likely to support capital punishment than non-Whites (Bohm, Clark, & Aveni, 1991; Langworthy and Whitehead, 1986; Young, 1991). Gallup and Newport (1991) reported that three fourths of Whites (78%) favored the death penalty for murderers compared with 59% of African Americans. Given the fact that Black citizens are more likely to be a victim of crime and likely have a higher fear of crime, it is probable that Black citizens may be more supportive of a more punitive approach with juvenile waivers than White citizens.

Gender may also affect attitudes about juvenile justice policies. A variety of studies have shown that men and women differ in their opinions relating to important social issues (Geary, 2000; Walsh, 1993; Whitehead & Blankenship, 2000). Women are consistently more altruistic, empathetic, and nurturing than men (Geary, 2000; Pinker, 2003). Therefore, it is hypothesized that women might have a more lenient stance regarding punitive policies—juvenile waivers—toward youthful offenders than men. On the other hand, women generally have a greater fear of crime. Given this higher fear of crime, women may be more accepting of a punitive response toward youthful offending. A review of 54 studies from 8 different countries found that women reported much greater fear of crime than did men (Ellis & Walsh, 2000).

It has been found, though, that among probation officers, women recommend significantly more lenient sentences for offenders, even in rape cases (Walsh, 1984). Because men are found to be more empathetic, and altruistic and female probation officers are more willing to offer more lenient sentence recommendations, it is hypothesized that male respondents will be more supportive of juvenile waivers—a more punitive approach to juvenile justice.

Age has also been found to be predictive of punitive attitudes. Older respondents were more likely to support punitive sanctions than were younger respondents (Cullen, Clark, Gullen, & Mathers, 1985). Contrarily, Langworthy and Whitehead (1986)

found that younger people tended to be more punitive than older people. Thus, the evidence is mixed regarding age. Specific to the issue of treating juveniles similar to adults, Schwartz et al. (1993) found that older individuals were more likely to support trying youthful offenders in adult court than were younger individuals. The weight of evidence, therefore, tends to support the notion that older respondents would be more likely to favor juvenile waivers.

Education may also influence attitudes toward juvenile waivers. Citizens with more education usually have more lenient attitudes about punishment (Guller, 1972). A 1970 crime and lawlessness poll showed that the higher the education a person had was directly related to his or her accountability level of holding society—not the individual offender—more responsible for criminal activity (Guller, 1972). Mears (2001) found that education was inversely related to attitudes toward juvenile waivers. In other words, those with less education were more likely to support juvenile waivers than those with more education.

Crime and delinquency rates vary greatly between urban and rural settings. Crime and delinquency rates were typically much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. However, rural courts show a tendency to be more punitive than urban courts, especially for youthful offenders (Feld, 1991; Myers & Talarico, 1986). A higher youth crime rate in urban areas may engender more punitive attitudes than are present among rural residents. The more punitive sanctions noted in rural courts may be a reflection of a general get-tough attitude prevailing in those areas. Therefore, location may be a significant factor influencing one's opinion about juvenile waivers.

Hypotheses

Given the trend of accountability in the juvenile court during the 1980s and early 1990s, and based on the previous literature, this study proposes that there are certain groups of individuals who will be more supportive of juvenile waivers—a punitive sanction. The following research hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Conservative respondents will have more support for juvenile waivers than liberal respondents.

Hypothesis 2: Republican respondents will have more support for juvenile waivers than Democrat respondents.

Hypothesis 3: Non-White respondents will have more support for juvenile waivers than White respondents.

Hypothesis 4: Male respondents will have more support for juvenile waivers than female respondents.

Hypothesis 5: Older respondents will have more support for juvenile waivers than younger respondents.

Hypothesis 6: Respondents without any college education will have more support for juvenile waivers than respondents with some college education.

Method

Because this study is examining the historical accountability movement, the data were collected during the mid-1990s to address public opinion about a component of the accountability movement—juvenile waivers. The data for this study are derived from the National Opinion Survey of Crime and Justice (NOSCJ; see Flanagan, 1996). The original NOSCJ data were collected through a telephone survey, using a nationally representative random sampling design. These telephone interviews were completed in a period of approximately 3 weeks in June of 1995. Missing or non-responses (i.e., “Do not know”) were dropped from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 953 (63% response rate).

The survey questions include a wide variety of respondent attitudes about fear of crime, the effectiveness of the police, and the perceived problems of the courts. The current project used a subset of 4 items from the NOSCJ to examine attitudes regarding waivers of juvenile offenders to adult court.

Dependent Variables

There are 4 dependent variables used in the current study. The first 3 dependent variables addressed the respondents’ support of juvenile waivers for one of three general types of crimes: a serious property crime, the sale of illegal drugs, and a serious violent crime. The responses to these items were measured by a Likert-type scale with *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither disagree nor agree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*.

A fourth dependent variable was a composite measure of the previous 3 dependent variables, creating a juvenile waiver score (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.79$). By summing across these 3 items, the current study assesses overall attitudes on the dependent variable as well as providing greater variance. The higher composite value indicates more general support for juvenile waivers, and a lower composite value indicates less general support for juvenile waivers.

Independent Variables

The independent variables relate to individual characteristics that may affect one’s support for juvenile waivers. All of these measures are self-reported. The following traditional demographic factors are used: race/ethnicity, gender, age, and marital status. Because of low cell sizes, race/ethnicity (i.e., White and non-White) and marital status (i.e., married and not married) were recoded to reflect a dichotomous measure.

Another set of factors that reflect sociological influences on attitudinal measures regarding juvenile waivers to adult court are education and location. In the overall survey, education is measured with 5 discrete, ordered categories: less than high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, and some graduate education. However, due to low cell sizes, this factor is recoded to reflect a

dichotomous measure: no college education and at least some college education. Location was measured by the type of community within which the respondents lived and was separated into 5 categories: rural, small town, small city, suburb, and urban. In the multivariate analyses, dummy variables were created with rural acting as the reference category.

The final set of independent variables includes political orientation: political ideology and political party affiliation. These factors address the political orientation of the participants that are proposed to influence their attitude about juvenile waivers. Political ideology is measured by 2 distinct categories: conservative and liberal.¹ Political party affiliation is also measured by 2 distinct categories: Republican and Democrat.

Finally, an important characteristic of attitudes is one's general philosophy toward purposes of sentencing given that the focus of this study is on attitudes toward sentencing orientations between adult criminal court and juvenile court. Therefore, the participants were asked what the purpose of sentencing was for juvenile offenders. Their attitude about the sentencing purpose could have a direct relationship with their attitudes toward juvenile waivers to adult court. This variable was recoded as a dichotomous variable: punishment and rehabilitation.

Findings

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the current sample along with their responses of their attitudes toward juvenile waivers. Most of the respondents are White (81.9%). The sample consisted of fairly equal representation of male respondents (52.1%) and female respondents (47.0%), with the mean age of the sample equaling 45 years. Most of the respondents attended some college (58.2%). Approximately one third of all residents considered themselves as conservative. Politically, 32% of respondents identified themselves as Republican and 29% as Democrats. More than one fourth (26.9%) of the respondents live in suburban communities—the largest representation.

Table 1 also reports respondents' attitudes regarding juvenile waivers. More than 65% of the respondents agreed that juveniles charged with a serious property crime should be tried as adults. When juveniles are charged with selling illegal drugs, almost three fourths of the respondents (70.4%) supported juvenile waivers. Not surprisingly, approximately 9 out of 10 respondents (87%) agreed that juveniles who commit serious violent offenses should be waived to adult court. Overall, there appears to be moderate to strong public support for transferring juveniles to adult court.

As an initial technique to explore potential bivariate relationships, a zero-order correlation matrix was run. These results can be found in Table 2. The most consistent statistically significant bivariate effect was respondents' opinion about the purpose of sentencing on juvenile waivers. The results in Table 2 indicate that those who characterized the purpose of sentencing for youthful offenders as punishment had more positive attitudes toward juvenile waivers in all cases than those who characterized the purpose of sentencing as rehabilitation.

Table 1
Dependent and Independent Variables: Responses and Frequencies

Variable and Responses	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>
Dependent variable			
Juvenile tried as an adult if serious property crime			
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	26	2.6	
<i>Disagree</i>	249	25.2	
<i>Neither</i>	68	6.9	
<i>Agree</i>	483	48.8	
<i>Strongly agree</i>	163	16.5	
Juvenile tried as an adult if illegal drug crime			
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	23	2.3	
<i>Disagree</i>	221	22.3	
<i>Neither</i>	49	4.9	
<i>Agree</i>	510	51.5	
<i>Strongly agree</i>	187	18.9	
Juvenile tried as an adult if violent crime			
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	9	0.9	
<i>Disagree</i>	77	7.7	
<i>Neither</i>	43	4.3	
<i>Agree</i>	531	53.4	
<i>Strongly agree</i>	334	33.6	
Composite juvenile waiver attitude (minimum = 3 <i>strongly disagree</i> ; maximum = 15 <i>strongly agree</i>)			11.26
Independent variables			
Race/ethnicity			
White	817	81.9	
Non-White	181	18.1	
Gender			
Female	481	47.9	
Male	524	52.1	
Age			45.0
Marital status			
Not married	214	21.4	
Married	784	78.6	
Education			
No college	415	41.8	
Some college or more	579	58.2	
Political ideology			
Conservative	326	33.5	
Liberal	175	18.0	

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable and Responses	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>
Political party			
Republican	306	32.1	
Democrat	273	28.6	
Location			
Rural	165	16.6	
Small town	207	20.9	
Small city	194	19.6	
Suburb	267	26.9	
Urban	158	15.8	
Purpose of sentencing			
Rehabilitation	478	49.6	
Punishment	486	50.4	

Note: Percentages may not necessarily equal 100% because of missing data.

Age of the respondent was a statistically significant factor in all but one juvenile waiver model, that is, juvenile waiver for violent crimes. Each of these statistically significant effects resulted in a positive correlation, indicating that older respondents were more positive toward juvenile waivers than younger respondents; however, these effects were fairly weak because of the low magnitude of correlation. Another factor that resulted in a fairly consistent correlative effect is political affiliation. As expected, those respondents who indicated that they were Republican were more positive toward juvenile waivers than those who were Democrat. Again, though, these effects were fairly weak due to the low magnitude of correlation.

Other factors did not prove to be as consistent in predicting the attitudes toward juvenile waivers. Marital status was only significantly related to attitudes toward juvenile waivers for drug crimes and the composite juvenile waiver score. These results indicate that in comparison with those who were not married, those who were married had more positive attitudes toward juvenile waivers and the composite waiver score. Finally, the zero-order correlation matrix in Table 2 indicates that respondents who reported they were conservatives had more positive attitudes toward juvenile waivers to adult court involving drug crimes only.

Multivariate Analyses²

To better explain the effect of individual characteristics on attitudes about juvenile waivers, the current study ran a set of multivariate regression models. There are four regression models, three of which relate to attitudes about juvenile waivers for three types of cases—property, drug, and violent. The fourth regression model used a composite measure to yield an analysis on the overall attitude toward juvenile waivers. This study uses an ordinary least squares regression technique to identify the statistically significant predictors of attitudes toward juvenile waivers to adult court.

Table 2
Zero-Order Correlation Matrix Among the Variables

	Y_1	Y_2	Y_3	Y_4	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5	X_6	X_7	X_8	X_9	X_{10}	X_{11}	X_{12}
Y_1 , Waiver (property)	1.000	.618*	.501*	.855*	-.009	.054	.087*	.055	-.054	.094*	.061	-.013	-.017	-.011	-.012	.237*
Y_2 , Waiver (drug)		1.000	.567*	.874*	-.035	.007	.126*	.065*	-.051	.089*	.150*	-.008	-.014	-.013	-.047	.222*
Y_3 , Waiver (violent)			1.000	.791*	-.038	.059	-.001	.056	.016	.077	.064	-.018	-.018	.034	-.014	.184*
Y_4 , Waiver (composite)				1.000	-.025	.049	.091*	.071*	-.040	.106*	.104	-.016	-.010	-.003	-.033	.268*
X_1 , Race					1.000	-.018	-.233*	-.160*	-.044	-.163*	-.082	-.034	.009	-.069*	.183*	-.066*
X_2 , Gender						1.000	-.102*	.121*	.019	.138*	.131*	-.056	-.080*	.062	.039	.056
X_3 , Age							1.000	.111*	-.044	-.062	.128*	.023	.001	-.030	.010	.045
X_4 , Marital status								1.000	.042	.088*	.198*	.017	-.058	-.003	-.060	.076*
X_5 , Education									1.000	.117*	-.058	-.095*	-.013	.112*	.064*	-.096*
X_6 , Political affiliation										1.000	.449*	-.010	-.038	.043	-.045	.050
X_7 , Political ideology											1.000	.067	-.040	-.028	-.51	.060
X_8 , Small town												1.000	-.254*	-.312*	-.224*	.001
X_9 , Small city													1.000	-.300*	-.215*	-.015
X_{10} , Suburb														1.000	-.264*	-.011
X_{11} , Urban															1.000	-.034
X_{12} , Purpose of sentence																1.000

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 3
OLS Regression Analyses for the Support for Juvenile
Waivers to Adult Court by Type of Case

	Juvenile Waiver (property)		Juvenile Waiver (drugs)		Juvenile Waiver (violent)		Composite Juvenile Waiver	
	<i>b</i>	β	<i>b</i>	β	<i>b</i>	β	<i>b</i>	β
Race	0.102		0.109		0.186		0.539	
Gender	0.205		0.081		0.242*	0.124	0.600	
Age	0.006		0.009*	0.135	-0.001		0.013	
Marital status	0.328*	0.146	0.198		0.193		0.697*	0.130
Education	-0.052		0.000		0.129		0.016	
Political party	0.058		0.034		0.060		0.235	
Political ideology	-0.001		0.192		0.108		0.183	
Small town	0.042		-0.354		0.041		-0.259	
Small city	0.155		-0.231		0.328		0.380	
Suburb	-0.026		-0.206		0.203		-0.011	
Urban	-0.196		-0.405		0.110		-0.501	
Purpose of sentence	0.544*	0.245	0.518*	0.229	0.342*	0.191	1.449	0.275
Constant	3.330		2.961		3.847		10.308	
<i>N</i> of cases	290		291		290		286	
<i>F</i> values	3.425*		3.072*		2.854*		4.075*	
<i>R</i> ²	.128		.116		.109		.151	

Note: OLS = ordinary least squares.

* $p < .05$.

The results of these four regression models are summarized in Table 3. All of the regression models are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Regarding attitudes about juvenile waivers for juveniles who commit property offenses, the R^2 value of .128 indicates that 12.8% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables included in the model. The only two variables that are found to be statistically significant are marital status ($p < .05$) and one's perception of the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile court ($p < .05$). Married respondents were positively related to a higher level of agreement for juvenile waivers for property offenses than nonmarried respondents. Similarly, respondents who stated that the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile court was punishment (not rehabilitation) had a higher level of agreement for juvenile waivers for property offenses. Finally, the standardized coefficients were calculated to represent relative importance among the included independent variables. Perceptions about sentencing ($\beta = .245$) are almost twice as important in this model as marital status ($\beta = .146$).

Table 3 also summarizes the results for the model predicting attitudes about juvenile waivers for juveniles who committed drug offenses. This model explained approximately 12% ($R^2 = .116$) of the variance in the dependent variable. Age ($p < .05$) and

one's perception about the purpose of sentencing ($p < .05$) were statistically significant. Older respondents were more in favor of juvenile waivers for drug offenders than younger offenders. Those respondents who perceived the purpose of sentencing in juvenile court as punishment (not rehabilitation) had higher levels of agreement about juvenile waivers for drug offenders. In fact, the standardized coefficient for this model indicates that the perception of sentencing in the juvenile court ($\beta = .229$) is almost twice as important in the prediction of attitudes toward juvenile waivers as age ($\beta = .135$).

The third regression model addresses respondents' attitudes toward juvenile waivers charged with a violent crime. This model produced an explained variance of about 11% ($R^2 = .109$). The only variables statistically significant to these attitudes are gender of the respondent ($p < .05$) and perception about the purposes of sentencing ($p < .05$). Not surprisingly, men were in more agreement with juvenile waivers for violent offenders than were women. Those who responded that the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile court is punishment rather than rehabilitation had higher levels of agreement about juvenile waivers for violent offenders. Unlike the other models, though, the perception of the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile court ($\beta = .191$) was of fairly equal relative importance to gender of the respondent ($\beta = .124$).

In hopes to measure a general, overall attitudinal measure, this study created a composite juvenile waiver score by summing across each of the three juvenile waiver measures. The overall model was statistically significant ($p < .05$) and explained 15% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .151$). There were only two statistically significant factors in this model: marital status ($p < .05$) and perceptions about the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile court ($p < .05$). Married respondents had a higher composite score, indicating more support for juvenile waivers to adult court, than had unmarried respondents; respondents who perceived the purpose of sentencing juveniles as punishment had a higher composite score than those who perceived the purpose of sentencing as rehabilitation. Similar to most of the other models, the perception about the purpose of sentencing ($\beta = .275$) is approximately twice as important in the prediction of overall attitudes toward juvenile waivers as gender of the respondent ($\beta = .130$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The accountability movement during the 1990s addressed more punitive, get-tough approaches in the juvenile justice system. One of these approaches was juvenile waivers to adult criminal court. The relevant issue for the current study to examine was the determinants of public opinions about juvenile waiver policies.

The findings suggest that the public was dissatisfied with this philosophy of punishment that the juvenile justice system provided as measured by the support for juvenile waivers to adult court. The findings in this study showed that 65% of the respondents agreed that juvenile offenders should be tried as adults when they were involved in serious property crimes, 70.4% for drug crimes, and 87% for violent crimes.

It is apparent that the general public viewed juvenile waivers as a positive approach in the battle against juvenile delinquency during this accountability movement.

Respondents in this sample, though, were almost evenly divided among whether the purpose of sentencing for juveniles is rehabilitation or punishment. Previous studies suggested that the public favors punitive attitudes toward juveniles; however, these studies also suggested that the public believed that juveniles should have different sentencing than adults (Schwartz et al., 1993). Although the majority of respondents in the current study supported juvenile waivers, they did not believe that juvenile offenders should receive similar punishment as adults.

This study's hypotheses suggest that personal characteristics such as race, gender, and political ideology would have an impact on one's support of juvenile waivers. The findings of this study provide inconsistent support for these hypotheses. For example, although gender of the respondent was significantly related to support for juvenile waivers for juveniles committing violent offenses, gender was *not* a significant predictor of juvenile waivers for other types of offenses and the composite measure. Similar to gender, marital status was only a significant predictor for juvenile waivers for juveniles committing property offenses and for the composite measure but not for juvenile waivers for drug and violent offenses. Finally, political party affiliation or political ideology was not a statistically significant predictor of attitudes toward juvenile waivers for any particular offense or for the composite measure.

One consistent finding, though, was the relationship between one's perception of the purpose of sentencing of juveniles and one's attitudes about juvenile waivers. Respondents who believed that the purpose of sentencing for juveniles was punishment were more supportive of juvenile waivers than were respondents who believed the purpose of sentencing was rehabilitation regardless of case type.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of this study that should be addressed. The first limitation of this study is the lack of strong external validity given the racial/ethnic makeup of the sample. The sample is predominately White (81.9%). Attitudes of racial or ethnic minorities may be very different based on cultural and/or socioeconomic status factors. The second limitation addresses the lack of certainty about political ideology or political party. Nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) identified themselves as neither conservative nor liberal; more than one third of the respondents (37.1%) reported that their political status was neither Republican nor Democrat. These respondents were dropped from all analyses, which included a large part of the sample.

A third limitation is that public attitudes vary because they depend, in large part, on what the researcher is asking and when it is asked. Public opinion is complex, and to assess it accurately, one needs to supply respondents with detailed information (Sprott, 1998). Different questions asked at different times may produce different answers. A respondent's harsh views about juvenile justice could be a result of his

or her perceptions of specific events or time of day or personal experience on that particular day. As Wu (2000) suggested, researchers need to provide more information regarding the specifics of the questions asked. The questions within this data set may suffer from these same ills. Research on public opinion should frame the context within which the questions are asked (Wu, 2000).

Conclusion

The results of this study strongly indicate that the public has punitive attitudes toward juvenile offenders during this accountability movement of the 1990s. One's perception of the purpose of sentencing in the juvenile justice system tends to affect one's attitudes toward juvenile waivers to adult court more than political ideology, gender, and political party.

Public opinion is a complex phenomenon; there are many other situations and factors that remain to be examined. Entering the 21st century, juvenile waiver policy is still popular with the general public, although the volume of cases that are transferred to adult court are declining. Future research could examine within which contexts respondents are in more favor (or less favor) of juvenile waivers. For example, history of victimization or offending status of respondents may influence their own attitudes toward juvenile waiver. In the end, this study was intended to address preliminary explanations for attitudes toward juvenile waivers during a period when scholars and practitioners saw an influx of punitive policy practices.

Notes

1. Because of low cell sizes and too many distinct categories of political ideology and political party affiliation, other categories were deleted from the analyses. The intentions of this study were to examine distinct political differentiations and not complicate the analyses with "moderate" or "alternative" categories in this simple exploration.

2. Multicollinearity was tested using the zero-order correlation matrix. The only 2 variables that may have presented a problem were political ideology and political party affiliation. Scholars suggest that a correlation between 2 independent variables exceeding a certain level ($r > .7$ or $.8$) indicates a multicollinear problem (see Bachman & Paternoster, 2004; Studenmund, 1997). The zero-order correlation matrix (see Table 2) indicates that the correlation between these two variables ($r = .449$) does not result in a multicollinear problem.

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