**Crime News and Radicalized Beliefs: Understanding the Relationship Between Local News Viewing and Perceptions of African Americans and Crime**

Author(s): Travis L. Dixon

Summary by: Austin Barber, University of Arkansas

**Summary**

The purpose of the article is to evaluate if exposure to overrepresentation of African Americans as criminals on local news programs leads to predicted perceptions of African Americans and crime. While several media experiments suggest media-distorted portrayals may influence social judgements regarding race and crime, little research has been conducted that includes survey methodology to investigate the relationship between the two factors. The study tests 3 hypotheses:

1. News exposure, attention to crime news, and television news trust are positively related to concerns about crime.
2. News exposure, attention to crime news, and television news trust are positively related to harsher culpability judgements of African American and unidentified suspects but not White suspects.
3. News exposure, attention to crime news, and television news trust are positively related to the perception of African Americans as violent.

**Methods**

Telephone surveys were conducted in Los Angeles County, CA. A total of 506 respondents aged 18 years and older were included in the study using a multistage sampling approach from random digit dialing techniques (GENESYS Sampling Systems, 2003). The survey focused on: (a) exposure to African Americans’ overrepresentation as criminals, (b) attention to crime news, (c) television network news exposure, and (d) news trust. The questions were designed to predict concern about crime, culpability judgments of unidentified suspects, culpability judgements of Black and White suspects, and perceptions of African Americans as violent.

**Results**

Findings reveal limited support towards Hypothesis 1 and 2, and robust support for Hypothesis 3. The results indicate that attention to crime news was positively related to concern about crime, but it is not a strong relationship due to limited trust in the media. Crime news was positively related to culpability judgements of African Americans and unidentified subjects but not White suspects, however, the support of the hypothesis was limited because attention to crime news was limited. Finally, it was determined that exposure to African American overrepresentation as criminals was positively related to the perception that African Americans are violent. The reasoning behind the results could be because viewers may selectively pay attention to information that already supports their preconceived beliefs.

**Implications**

The study provides insight into the understanding that news exposure, attention to crime news, and news trust could predict perceptions of race and crime. Many American citizens with a particular political or racial perspective may seek out news programs that support their views and disregard programs with opposing views. Therefore, media outlets will adhere to and expand upon the viewpoints of their consumers. From this, stereotypes may be activated to gain a better story, which then instills an automatic association of the stereotype with the program’s viewers. However, the author contends that future research should be employed to explore the relationship between local news viewing and race/crime perceptions by examining chronic activation mechanisms.

Dixon, T. L. (2008). Crime news and radicalized beliefs: Understanding the relationship between local news viewing and perceptions of

African Americans and crime. *Journal of Communication, 58*(1), 106-125. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00376.x