



4th Global Conference on Psychology

21 - 23 August 2026

Oxford, United Kingdom

The Wrong Opinions: Psychological Underpinnings of Ideological Punishment

Selen Goksal, Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Giuliana Spadaro

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Social Psychology Section, Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Abstract

Why do people often call for punishment of political adversaries across the political spectrum? Across three studies (one exploratory pilot study and two preregistered experimental studies using a between-subjects design; $N_{\text{total}} = 1,488$), the present research examines the psychological processes through which ideological dissimilarity translates into punitive intentions and behaviors. The correlational pilot study provided preliminary evidence that ideological punishment desires are primarily associated with dogmatic intolerance, intergroup hate, and parochial altruism. In Study 1, we experimentally examined the impact of ideological dissimilarity on punishment desires using the least-liked group paradigm. Individuals expressed stronger ideological punishment desires, as well as greater support for unlawful surveillance and restrictions on political rights for ideologically dissimilar others as compared to those with similar views. These effects were mediated by intergroup hate, parochial altruism, and dogmatic intolerance. Study 2 replicated these findings on actual punitive behaviors through a third-party punishment game. This research illuminates the main drivers of ideological punishment tendencies and provides converging evidence on the roles of parochial altruism, dogmatic intolerance, and intergroup hate.

Keywords: ideological punishment, polarization, political intolerance, political repression, ideological conflict