

H-Diplo | ISSF Review Essay 55

Erin M. Kearns and Joseph K. Young. *Tortured Logic: Why Some Americans Support the Use of Torture in Counter Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780231188968 (hardcover, \$105.00); 9780231188975 (paperback, \$35.00).

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Published 20 April 2021 | <http://issforum.org/to/RE55>

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Many popular movies, television series, and even animated films depict torture as an effective means of gaining information from suspected criminals and terrorists. Yet, torture, and cruel and inhuman treatment of detainees violates international treaties as well as U.S. law, and many counterterrorism experts have questioned its efficacy relative to other means of gathering information. Nonetheless, many Americans—having seen torture work on the screens—continue to believe in its usefulness. Public debate around torture as a tool of counterterrorism was heightened by the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with officials in the Bush Administration defending the use of what they termed, ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ against suspected terrorists. While public discussions regarding torture have waned somewhat in recent years, the appropriate means of interrogating suspects continues to be a salient topic in academic and policy debates.

Seeking to shed light on how the U.S. public views torture, Erin M. Kearns and Joseph K. Young have written a brilliant book: *Tortured Logic: Why Some Americans Support the Use of Torture in Counterterrorism*. They write, “...depending on the time period, how questions are asked, and a number of other factors—there is a great deal of variation in support for the use of torture in the United States” (5). As such, their central argument is that while some Americans’ views on torture are relatively fixed, a substantial number of people have fluid views regarding the appropriateness of the practice. For these individuals, how terrorism is framed matters a great deal. Views on torture depend on many factors such as elite cues, its perceived efficacy, media depictions, where it occurs, and the identity of the suspect—factors that the book seeks to analyze in depth.

Of course, others have examined public opinion on torture, and there is a rich literature on the topic.¹ Instead of relying on surveys, however, Kearns and Young present a series of experiments designed to gauge whether these views are malleable. Each empirical chapter presents an experiment designed to test specific hypotheses regarding how different depictions of terrorism and torture influence public support for harsh interrogations. The experiments speak to a wide variety of academic debates in political science, criminology, psychology, and media studies,² and offer a rich and nuanced view of public support for torture.

¹ Paul Gronke, Darius Rejali, Dustin Drenguis, James Hicks, Peter Miller, and Bryan Nakayama, “US Public Opinion on Torture, 2001–2009,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 43:3 (2010): 437–444; Jeremy D Mayer and David J. Armor, “Support for Torture over Time: Interrogating the American Public about Coercive Tactics,” *The Social Science Journal* 49:4 (2012): 439–446.

² Karen J. Greenberg, ed., *The Torture Debate in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Mark Costanzo and Ellen Gerrity, “The Effects and Effectiveness of using Torture as an Interrogation Device: Using Research to Inform the Policy

Yet, beyond the hard data, Kearns and Young have gone a step further and interviewed a wide array of professional interrogators, intelligence experts, and counterterrorism officials in order to add additional detail to their arguments. These interviews help to frame and guide each chapter; they provide a clear contrast between what the experts think about torture's utility in interrogations (that it doesn't work) and what members of the general public, the media, and even high-ranking policy makers who are not directly tasked with interrogations believe. While experimental research designs can make for dry reading material, these interviews, anecdotes, and engaging narratives makes *Tortured Logic* an enjoyable, if dark, book to read.

Following the introduction, Chapter 1 presents an analysis of how media depictions of torture influence public perceptions. As Kearns and Young explain, television shows, such as *24*, often portray physical and psychological abuse as being particularly effective in gathering information and saving innocent civilians from terrorist attacks. Even animated movies such as *Zootopia* and *The Secret Lives of Pets* contain coercive interrogations, underscoring how ingrained the practice is in popular culture. The first experiment, conducted using a sample of college students, measured attitudes about torture before and after watching short clips from the TV show *24*. One condition shows torture to be effective in gaining valuable intelligence, another shows torture as being ineffective, and a third does not show torture. Participants were also asked if they would like to sign a petition supporting or opposing torture (to mask the experiment's intention, they also cleverly ask about other, unrelated policies). Unsurprisingly, the authors find that portrayals of torture as being effective increase support for the practice; but intriguingly, showing torture to be ineffective does not decrease support for it. As a conjecture, the authors posit that people may not necessarily see torture as a means toward an end (i.e. gaining intelligence), but as a punitive act against 'bad guys.'

As a sample of college students may not be representative of the general public, Chapter 2 expands upon the findings of Chapter 1, this time drawing upon a broader population. Again, depictions of torture as being effective and ineffective were given, along with one of it having ambiguous results. The experiment also contained additional treatments, showing rapport-building approaches to interrogation as being similarly effective or ineffective. As before, showing that torture works increased support for it. But contrary to expectations, subjects shown the rapport-building clips expressed increased support for torture, regardless of its efficacy. Indeed, the shift in support for torture was greatest among those shown the scenario in which rapport-building was effective. Kearns and Young conclude, "This suggest that support for torture is more punitive than instrumental" (76). In other words, many believe that terrorism suspects 'deserve' harsh treatment. The findings in this chapter are more nuanced than can be described here, as the authors also prime some subjects to think about their own mortality; prime them with general, non-terrorist violence; and examine differences between liberals and conservatives. It is somewhat unsatisfying that authors do not offer clear explanations for some of the more complex findings, but they do provoke the reader to think more deeply about them.

Chapter 3 examines how the type of abuse (physical versus psychological), as well as the ethnicity of the interrogator and suspect, and the location of the interrogation influence perceptions of torture. Kearns and Young also leverage the timing of the release of the Senate Torture Report (STR) to examine how a real-world cue may influence respondents. Rather than a general support question, the subjects were asked if the depiction of maltreatment they were given is: 1) torture; 2) justified; 3) legal; and 4) moral. Somewhat surprisingly, the ethnicity of the suspect and interrogator (Caucasian vs. Middle Eastern) does not appear to have mattered very much. Among the wealth of findings in this chapter, perhaps the most significant one is that the respondents were far less supportive of torture if it occurred on US soil, and were more willing to support the practice overseas.

Chapter 4 presents the most interesting set of findings, based on a conjoint experiment which varies expert endorsement/rejection of torture, the suspect's citizenship, the suspect's ideology, and the efficacy of torture. Conjoint experiments are powerful in that they allow the researcher to manipulate several factors at once. Yet, they do produce

Debate," *Social Issues and Policy Review* 3:1 (2009): 179-210. Shane O'Mara, "Torturing the Brain: On the Folk Psychology and Folk Neurobiology Motivating 'Enhanced and Coercive Interrogation Techniques,'" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13:12 (2009): 497-500.

several odd combinations of variables which must be taken with a grain of salt (for example, the subjects were most supportive of torture against a Syrian Neo-Nazi). The findings reveal that people trusted the views of military interrogators more than other sources (such as Member of Congress); they were far more willing to support torture against a Syrian citizen (relative to U.S., UK, and Chinese citizens); and more likely to support it if it was seen as effective. The goal of the perpetrator also mattered quite a bit, with ISIS members eliciting greatest support for torture, followed by members of right-wing militias, neo-Nazis, and Antifa members. As with the previous chapters, the subjects were subdivided and parsed in numerous ways, including by political ideology, to ascertain conditional treatment effects.

The findings in *Tortured Logic* are quite varied and often complex. Readers looking for a neatly-packaged, clean argument about when Americans are most likely to support torture will not find it here. Indeed, some of the findings contradict each other; for example, in Chapter 3, the ethnicity of the suspect did not seem to matter much, while in Chapter 4, Syrian nationality was found to be significant. This may be a function of the experimental design or the wording of the questions. Thus, the answer to the question, “why do some Americans support torture?” does not have a snappy, succinct answer. The answer is complex, context-dependent, and sometimes counterintuitive. Instead, we are given the more general claim that regarding views about torture, “some individuals were *fixed* in their positions, and others were much more *fluid*” (157-158). That a subset of the public has relatively firm views on a policy, while others can be persuaded is hardly a surprising claim, but it is perhaps the main point of the book.

Nonetheless, *Tortured Logic* presents a wealth of empirical material, clever experiments, fascinating interviews, and nuanced takes on the data. Some findings stand out clearly: Americans are more supportive of torture if it occurs overseas; many people view torture as being justifiable for its punitive rather than instrumental value. Still, not all of the findings line up with theoretical expectations and others leave the reader puzzled. Rather than serving as a drawback, these varied findings augur additional theoretical refinement and empirical breakthroughs, and the book will inform additional research. Kearns and Young have provided a masterful book which is thought-provoking, richly detailed, and speaks to important policy questions, not to mention pressing ethical debates about the rights of detainees in the war on terrorism.

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