Robbing a robber is not robbing

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Abstract: Do outside observers judge differently an identical act of robbery if the victim is known as a robber rather than an honest individual? Popular wisdom, as magnified in several proverbs, suggests that most people do. We examine such a tenet using an experimental survey in Algeria (North-Africa). We also examine whether a differentiated moral judgement holds for two occupations tarnished with the reputation of robbing consumers, namely bankers and customs officials. Our findings support the proverb that 'robbing a robber is not robbing' and even its extension to custom officials. However, robbing a banker has not been found to be significantly different from robbing an honest individual. We draw several business and policy implications.

Key-words: bankers; custom officials; ethics; experimental survey; robbers; victims.

JEL numbers: C91; K42.

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1. Introduction

Robbing is frequent in everyday life and takes different forms such as shoplifting, wardrobing, theft of intellectual property, energy theft, etc. In 2017, it was estimated that shoplifting costs the global retail industry about $34 billion in lost sales (Du and Maki, 2019). Electricity and water theft by consumers and other agents are also big issues in several countries (Kelly-Detwiler, 2013). Surprisingly, despite the high cost burden to the concerned sectors, the literature is relatively limited on the moral judgment of such types of unethical actions (Rotman et al., 2018).

In most western justice systems, fairness and equality are two fundamental principles. These principles suggest that persons who commit the same offense should receive similar judgment and sentencing outcomes. From a purely rational approach, people will judge similar wrongdoings the same way, regardless of the victim attributes like origin or morality. Rather than taking such an insight for granted, we adopt a social intuitionist approach and argue that making ethical judgment over wrongdoings is sensitive to a number of situational factors, such as the victim origin or morality.

In this paper, we use an experimental survey to examine an important and overlooked justification for robbing that can have strong managerial and business implications, namely the victim morality. Immoral victims can be perceived as deserving their misfortunes, even if their misfortunes are unrelated to their immoral characteristics (Reich et al., 2020). More precisely, we manipulate the 'morality' of the victim of a given robbery, that is, whether s/he is her/himself a robber or an honest individual, and hypothesize that outside observers will judge less harshly the perpetrator when the victim is a robber, *ceteris paribus*. Our hypothesis is well reflected in several real-world examples (Baron, 2018; Massicotte, 2016; BBC, 2005)

and proverbs from various countries: *'To rob a robber is not robbing'* (France), *'Who robs a robber, is pardoned for a hundred years'* (Spain), *'One who robs a thief is free from punishment'* (Hebrew maxim). Moreover, we also test whether robbing other types of individuals sometimes considered as robbers (banking executives and custom officials) is judged more or less harshly relative to an honest citizen.

As far as we know, our paper is the first one using an experimental survey to investigate whether the victim morality (operationalized as being previously known as a robber or not) affects the moral judgement of robbing. Our study is conducted in a developing country, namely, Algeria (North Africa) which is an understudied population (see Barbara et al., 2018). On one hand, this allows us to partially address the concerns raised by Henrich et al. (2010; see also George et al., 2016) about studying human nature on the basis of samples drawn only from western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies. On the other hand, Algeria has been repeatedly ranked among countries with an important level of corruption affecting several life domains, including minor ones (Jolly, 2001; Boyer, 2017; Henley, 2018). The pervasiveness of unethical practices in the management of Algerian companies has been also documented in Cheriet (2013).

The remainder of the empirical note is organized as follows. Section 2 overviews how individuals make moral judgements using a social intuitionist perspective and integrates elements of the belief in a just-world to draw main hypotheses. Section 3 describes the empirical strategy. Section 4 provides the main result, discusses them and draws some policy implications. Section 5 concludes and indicates some paths for future research.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Moral judgment can be considered either from a rationalist viewpoint or more recently from a social intuitionist viewpoint. In the rationalist perspective, moral judgement and conclusions

are the results of conscious moral reasoning. The process involves careful, rational thinking and the consistent application of general moral rules or principles. Individuals who use a consequentialist framework focus on the outcomes (maximization of well-being) of their decisions and actions while individuals who use a formalistic framework are motivated by the duty to follow rules and principles, although these two constructs are not mutually exclusive (Love et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, moral judgment is frequently not made on the basis of a conscious reasoning but is the result of automatic, intuitive, and affective processes. The social intuitionist model emphasizes that in most cases moral judgment results from quick and automatic evaluations (intuitions) which are strongly influenced by social and cultural factors, and, posits that moral reasoning is usually a *post hoc* construction generated after a judgment has been reached (Haidt, 2001). Interestingly, these intuitions can be incidental or irrelevant to the situation being judged. Although they are almost irrelevant for the considered judgment, contextual or situational factors, such as the victim origin, situation or morality, or even the language used, can interfere. For instance, robbing a drug addict can be judged as less serious than robbing an ordinary counterpart (see Reich et al. 2020).

Deservingness can be considered as 'the adhesive that connects an actor to an event' (Schlenker et al., 1994), making the agent responsible for his/her own plight. According to the Just World Theory (Lerner and Miller, 1978; Lerner, 1980), individuals who hold a belief in a just world (BJW) believe that only people who deserve to suffer do in fact suffer. In other words, people with strong BJW who see someone gets punished would infer that he/she is immoral and deserves his/her suffering. Given that undeserved suffering threatens one's BJW, people with a strong BJW may be more likely to believe that those who have been victimized are deserving their suffering (White et al., 2012). In forming moral judgment, high BJW-onlookers may over rely on information about some features of the victim such as his/her

origin or morality when assigning blame for his/her suffering. Selective attention to some details regarding the victim can guide the moral judgment of the perpetrators by onlookers. This selective attention is likely to be coupled with a reduction of attentional resources that could be allocated elsewhere (Weinberger, 2015). Ultimately, this strategy allows the observers to maintain their BJW (Reich et al., 2020). Applied to our issue, individuals with strong BJW are more likely to believe that a robber deserves his/her suffering, that is, being robbed.

Given that robbing is morally wrong in probably all societies, we predict that individuals will make a negative judgment on a robbery act. Nevertheless, their moral judgments can be tempered by a number of situational factors, such as the robber's motives (e.g., robbing because someone is starving) or the economic profile of the victim compared to those of beneficiaries, as in the Robin Hood case. For example, 'a Spanish mayor has become a cult hero in the austerity-gripped country after orchestrating several thefts at local supermarkets, giving the stolen food to the poor' (RT, 2012; see also Grolleau et al., 2008; Poddar et al., 2012). In some circumstances, robbing a robber can be considered as a way to restore some fairness, leading observers to perceive the situation as more morally acceptable than if the robbing affects an honest counterpart. Based on the preceding discussion, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> *H1: Individuals will judge 'robbing a robber' as less morally condemnable than robbing an honest victim, ceteris paribus.*

As explained above, the belief in a just world makes that perceiving the victim as immoral is likely to increase the moral acceptability of the wrongdoing and the subsequent moral judgment. Intuitively, individuals who are perceived as robbers are more likely to be subject to various unethical behaviors. For instance, recent estimates indicate that employee theft is a crime that costs U.S. businesses $50 billion annually (Statistic Brain quoted by Pofeldt, 2017;

see also Gross-Schaefer et al., 2000). If employees perceive employers as robbers, this perception could facilitate dishonest behaviors by increasing their moral acceptability.

Interestingly, a sizeable anecdotal evidence suggests that some businesses and occupations (e.g., bankers, insurers, real estate agents, car salesmen, custom officials in Algeria [see also Section 3]) are frequently considered as white collar robbers (Courrier International, 2008; Eychenne, 2013; Parramore, 2016; Semmar, 2020). The number of web pages presenting bankers as robbers, thieves and so on is huge and several recent scandals seem consistent with this widespread belief (see also Cohn et al., 2014 for a consistent scientific evidence). For instance, it was revealed that several thousands of employees of Wells Fargo Bank fraudulently opened millions of fake accounts for their own customers and stole them via fees (Corkery, 2016). Yet some companies go further and attempt to change this tarnished image (Bohineust, 2008). For instance, the Axos Bank has even launched an advertising campaign based on this popular perception in the following terms: '*Don't Get Robbed by Your Bank*' (Griner, 2019). Consequently, we predict that people are likely to judge less severely wrongdoers who target agents with such a tarnished image. Hence, we also formulate another hypothesis:

> *H2: Individuals will judge robbing an individual belonging to a group with a*
> *tarnished image as less morally condemnable than robbing an honest victim.*

3. Empirical strategy

In order to test the above-formulated hypotheses, we administered an experimental questionnaire in Algeria, with a between-subjects design (Weber, 1992; Croson et al., 2007). We designed a simple scenario, which is frequent in business ethics studies, and took precautions to ensure a high level of realism (Weber, 1992). First, participants were invited to read a scenario describing a robber robbing jewels of a value of DZD 1,000,000 (equivalent of

more than four years of the minimum salary in Algeria) at the house of a given individual without physical aggression. Participants had to indicate on 7-point Likert scale the moral acceptability of that action, ranging from 1 (completely moral) to 7 (completely immoral). Second, individuals were invited to indicate the number of years that the robber has to spend in prison, with a maximum threshold of 10 years.

In order to test the effect of the victim morality, we used five treatments (Table 1) where variations across treatments were kept to a minimum, by just changing two words suggesting the morality of the victim (see Appendix 1). In the control treatment (T0), the above-mentioned scenario was presented providing only the name of the victim (*Mr. Mahjoubi*; a common-sounding name in Algeria), without any other information regarding his morality. However, in order to give a more humanized description of the victim, we described him as married and a fan of football. In the other treatments, we mentioned the same name and human description and indicated that the victim is an honest citizen (T0'), a robber (T1), a banking executive (T2), or a custom official (T3).

Let us briefly clarify the rationale behind the choice of the previous treatments. The secondary control treatment (T0') is introduced because of a popular belief in Algeria that most people are dishonest, especially among wealthy ones (Belaïd, 2017). This strategy allows us to ensure that surveyed people do not simply consider an unspecified victim (T0) as a dishonest one. The treatments T2 and T3 are introduced to test our hypothesis H2 regarding occupations with a tarnished image. While the choice of the banker occupation is straightforward given the discussion in Section 2, the choice of custom officials is motivated by its potential relevance in the Algerian context (see Anonymous, 2003; Semmar, 2020). Indeed, as indicated below, we conducted a preliminary study prior to this one, considering only the case of bankers. Interestingly, several respondents indicated that a more natural

candidate in Algeria would be customs officials who are frequently accused to abuse their authority and power to rob citizens and organizations.

Insert Table 1 around here

Moreover, rather than taking our assumptions regarding bankers and custom officials for granted, we asked all respondents, regardless of the treatment, to also report (after responding to the main questions) the perceived morality of an average Algerian inhabitant, a banking executive and a custom official on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not moral at all) to 7 (very moral).[1] Furthermore, we also invited them to estimate his wealth on a scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 7 (very rich). Finally, all respondents were asked to indicate some socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, and monthly earnings).

The questionnaires were administered online in May 2020 to a convenience sample of Algerian inhabitants using *Google forms*. Despite some criticisms against the use convenience samples, Mullinix et al. (2015) found evidence to their utility, by providing effects which are considerably similar to those obtained from nationally representative population-based samples. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the five treatments. The survey instrument was presented in French which is fluently spoken in the studied area and pervasive in everyday life and institutions. We collected 500 observations (100 per treatment). Our respondents are 42.8% male with an average age of 33 years old. It is worthy to note that the questionnaires were also pretested on ten individuals not included in the final sample, notably to a final check for understanding and improve the reader friendliness. Last but not least, our

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[1] Unfortunately, we did not ask the respondents to indicate the morality of the 'honest' Algerian and the morality of the robber, considering that this addition would seem weird, as the questions seem to include their own answers. It is very likely that they (i.e., the honest Algerian and the robber) would get respectively the highest and lowest means regarding their morality.

survey experiment was preceded by a pilot study among a convenience sample of 208 individuals in the same area, which allowed us to substantially improve the above design on several dimensions. First, we added a description of the victim to avoid a 'dehumanization' effect. Second, we refined the designation of bankers (used in the pilot study) and explicitly mentioned banking executives to avoid a possible confusion with banking employees. Third, as mentioned above, we added a new treatment corresponding to the victim being a custom official. Fourth, we introduced questions about the wealth level of the victim and individuals' perception of the morality of the examined types of victims.[2]

4. Results and implications

As suggested above, our results can be analyzed by comparing them to two benchmarks: (*i*) a legalistic one with fairness and equality principles where identical acts deserve identical judgment and (*ii*) a more behavioral-oriented one where people can nuance their judgment according to the perceived victim status or deservingness. Nevertheless, before analyzing our results, we report in Table 2 participants' responses regarding their perceptions of the morality of individuals under the different conditions. On one hand, we report and compare the mean morality ascribed to different types of individuals (average individual, banking executive, custom official) for the whole sample (first column). On the other hand, we report and compare the mean morality for each type of individuals when participants are assigned to the treatment where the victim belongs to that type and when they are assigned to other treatments. For instance, we compare the mean of morality ascribed to a banking executive in the treatment where the victim is a banking executive with the mean of morality ascribed to a banking executive in the other treatments where the victim is everyone else, except a banking executive. These responses allow us to better interpret our main findings.

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[2] The details as well as the results of the pilot study are available from authors upon request.

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Insert Table 2 around here

Three relevant points can be highlighted from Table 2. *First*, the perceived morality of an average individual in society is relatively low, given its mean of 3.69 on a 1-7 scale. *Second*, the morality of a banking executive (3.85) is perceived to be significantly higher (p-value=0.0084) than the morality of an average individual in society (3.69). In other words, unlike our assumption, banking executives seem to benefit from a relatively good image in Algeria. On the opposite, custom officials are perceived to be less moral than others, which supports our assumption. *Third*, participants assigned to a given treatment do not ascribe a significantly different morality to the individual of the same type as the victim in that treatment, compared to participants in the other treatments, except for T3 (the victim is a custom official). In other words, when participants are assigned to the treatment T2 (the victim is a banking executive), the mean morality ascribed to a banking executive is not significantly different from the morality ascribed to a banking executive in the other treatments. The same finding is obtained for participants to T0 (unspecified). However, the mean of the morality ascribed to a custom official is significantly higher (at the 10% level) when participants are assigned to the treatment T3 (the victim is a custom official) than to the other treatments.

In the following, we present the results regarding the hypotheses formulated in Section 2. The findings regarding moral judgment of robbing and deserved punishment by treatment are provided in Table 3, together with the significance of a Kruskal-Wallis test comparing mean responses across treatments. Moreover, we also report in Table 4 the significance of a multiple hypotheses testing (i.e., a simultaneous comparison of all treatments using the pairwise option) using the MHTEXP procedure developed by List et al. (2019).

Insert Tables 3 and 4 around here

First, Hypothesis *H1* is supported, since robbing a robber (T1) is significantly more acceptable (adj. p-value=0.033) and less condemnable in terms of deserved punishment (adj. p-value=0.036) than robbing an honest citizen (T0'). Interestingly, the examined theft is the most acceptable (6.36) in the treatment T0 (unspecified). This finding is somewhat surprising and can be explained by the relatively low morality attributed to the average individual in society presented in Table 2. Yet, although the deserved punishment is significantly different (adj. p-value=0.049) between T0 (an unspecified victim) and T1 (a robber victim), mean responses regarding moral judgment are not, which may indicate that an unspecified victim is to some extent perceived as a dishonest one. This perception can be reinforced by the value of jewels stored at home, which may indicate an individual with ill-gotten wealth. Another possibility can be related to a relative dehumanization or infrahumanization by denying humanness to some categories of victims or by attributing more human essence to their in-group compared to out-groups (Hasla and Loughnan, 2014). The result obtained in the treatment T0 regarding an average Algerian victim can be read through a dehumanization/infrahumanization lens, as the lack of specific information such as the occupation of the victim allows participants to not identify and humanize him/her as easily.

Second, regarding Hypothesis *H2*, the findings are different according to the examined occupation. On one hand, we did not find a significant difference in terms of both moral judgment and suggested sanction between treatments T0' (honest citizen) and T2 (banking executive). On the other hand, robbing a custom official (T3) is found to be significantly more acceptable (adj. p-value=0.033) than robbing an honest citizen (T0'). Nevertheless, there is no significant difference in the deserved punishment between the latter treatments. Again, these

divergent findings can be explained by the relatively higher (respectively, lower) morality attributed to banking executives (respectively, custom officials) among surveyed individuals, as reported in Table 2.[3] Moreover, statistical power issues related to the structure of our experimental data can partly drive these results. Given the significant differences in perceived morality between the three groups, one would therefore expect significant differences in punishment and moral acceptability, but the pairwise comparisons do not support this insight. For instance, the difference in perceived morality between the average unspecified individual and the banking executive is computed on the full sample (N=500). The difference is small, only .16, but is statistically significant, by using a paired t-test that is quite sensitive to differences. The main comparisons regarding punishment and moral acceptability for different victims are between-subjects comparisons with more limited samples, i.e., only 100 individuals per cell. However, the differences between the custom official (M = 2.90) and the other two types of victims are somewhat more problematic as they reflect larger differences of .95 and .79 and as such, it is a little surprising and perhaps inconsistent with our theoretical predictions that we do not find differences on the focal dependent variables. This inconsistency is particularly salient in the case of the custom official victim where the theft is not deemed to be more morally acceptable when compared with the unspecified victim and the robber is not deemed to deserve significant more punishment when compared with the

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[3] A related possibility is that a belief in a just world tends to be correlated with right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and the protestant work-ethic (Lambert et al., 1999; Lerner 1978; Ma and Smith, 1985; see Furnham and Proctor 1989 for a review). Right-wing authoritarians exhibit a high willingness to submit to authorities, value uniformity and prefer minimizing diversity in society. In other words, if people believe in a just-world, they tend to see people in power and authority as deserving that power and authority and thus may tend to see those people as more moral (Smith and Overbeck, 2014). Moreover, recent research found that individuals with both high RWA and high SDO (social dominance orientation) make more utilitarian versus deontological judgments in trolley dilemmas (Bostyn et al., 2016).

banker victim. Even if our focal hypotheses are focused on the robber (and typically in contrast to an honest person), these results suggest that there is more going on than just the perception of morality.

Moreover, in order to check the robustness of the previous findings, we also examined the effect of the victim morality on robbing judgment and deserved sanctions using a multivariate regression model, controlling for individuals' age, gender, education level, earnings, and the perceived wealth level of the victim (Table 5). The honest treatment serves as the reference. Although the model is significant for both the Wilks' lambda and Pillai's trace, we caution the reader not to over-interpret these findings as the model is probably under specified. Notwithstanding this limitation, the results are consistent with those reported in Table 4: (*i*) robbing a robber, an unspecified victim or a custom official is judged less harshly than robbing an honest individual, (*ii*) the deserved sanction only decreases when the victim is a robber, and, (*iii*) robbing a banking executive does not significantly influence moral judgment. As collateral results, male are found to judge less harshly the examined robbing while participants who went to university and rich ones are likely to judge it more severely.

Insert Table 5 around here

In sum, we found support that the moral cost of robbing a robber is significantly reduced when compared to an honest victim. A victim who is a robber implies for the wrongdoer *ceteris paribus* identical benefits and reduced moral costs, making robbing more likely. A natural implication of our findings is to know *how* considered individuals or businesses are perceived by others such as consumers or employees. If the perception is tarnished by dishonesty allegations, considered individuals or businesses can have to devote

more resources in order to prevent robbing. This more lenient judgment can help consumers or would-be wrongdoers to rationalize their behavior and behave unethically, while maintaining their self-image (Mazar et al., 2008). Conversely, if considered individuals or businesses are perceived as honest agents, they can benefit from a strategic advantage by being less likely to become theft victims. In the Algerian contest, it seems that the banking profession, even at high hierarchical levels, is not tarnished, unlike the occupation of customs officials that is considered by surveyed participants as a vivid example of disguised theft (Semmar, 2020). In practical terms, a first step can be to know and understand the real perception of a given business and follow its evolution overtime. For instance, an image can be tarnished either because of questionable behaviors adopted by the considered business or/and reputational spillovers (Jonsson et al., 2009). A second and intuitive step includes maintaining and possibly improving a good image. If the image is degraded, enhancing it can be a practical way to decrease the moral acceptability of robbing and make it less likely to occur.

Noteworthy, a surprising and side result from the empirical analysis is that moral acceptability and punishment do not always line up. Besides, in contrast to our prediction, the correlation between these two variables is weak (0.13). Several (speculative) factors can explain this unexpected situation. First, after asking informally some Algerians what they think about individuals punished by jail sentences, some respondents explained that jail sentences are not always perceived in Algeria as a real punishment, given that some detainees are even suspected to enjoy a 'better life' inside jails compared to their everyday life. An interesting extension could be to consider another form of punishment such as a reimbursement of a number of times the robbed amount. Second, there is also a pervasive feeling of impunity according to which some wrongdoers escape the deserved punishment that is possibly publicly proclaimed but never applied or applied in less severe terms. Third,

this disconnection between morality and punishment can be due to the fact that people distinguish between the moral judgement on the action and the deserved punishment that is applied to the individual. The action per se can seem morally serious, but the individual in need (especially in the actual economic crisis amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic) deserves a more lenient punishment. Conversely, the action can seem morally acceptable, but the individual should be punished severely with longer jail sentences to have a real deterrence effect and prevent the spreading of more serious actions as posited by the broken windows theory (Frey, 2011).

5. Conclusion and directions for further research

We found convincing empirical support that people judge robbing differently when the victim is a robber him/herself. This finding indicates that unethical or dishonest behaviors appear as less unethical when the victims are themselves dishonest and seem to deserve to be victimized. We contend that this insight can be extended to other kinds of unethical behaviors such as lying, tax cheating or fraud. There is a clear implication for organizations or individuals subject to be perceived as robbers or as ethical wrongdoers. Given that robbing them appears as less morally condemnable, they are more likely *ceteris paribus* to become theft victims and may have to incur an extra cost to protect their property. Although it is speculative, this effect is also likely to extend to other domains such as companies harming the environmental public goods, firing employees or practicing unfair prices. Consistently, incriminated companies can be comparatively more subject to a wide variety of unethical acts by consumers, employees or even citizens. More generally, our findings invite economists to take ethics and moral judgements (more) seriously (Hausman and McPherson, 1993).

In the Algerian context, unlike other countries, the good news is that banking executives do not seem to be considered as robbers, unlike custom officials. Given the

tarnished image of bankers in numerous other countries, there is a strong incentive not to allow things to deteriorate. Investigating the practices that lead people to consider bankers as robbers (respectively, as honest people in Algeria or in other countries) can constitute a promising avenue for further research. Unfortunately, and without over-interpreting our results, there is also some bad news. Our findings suggest, indeed, that individuals in our Algerian sample consider an unspecified victim as a dishonest one. As default, people are perceived as dishonest until there is evidence to the contrary. If this belief is widespread in a given society, it can foster a climate of suspicion and undermine trust and ultimately impair economic development. A similar belief also applies to custom officials and indicates the need of devoting resources to repair this tarnished image.

Several directions remain to be explored such as investigating the cross-cultural robustness of this effect and using an incentive-compatible environment. A joint-evaluation by the same individuals of the various treatments can offer interesting insights on the effect strength and a potential way to de-bias individuals. Last but not least, we believe that this quasi-experimental survey can be extended to other categories of occupations such as insurers.

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Table 1: Treatments to measure the effect of the victim morality on the moral judgement of the unethical behavior

Treatment	Description	Number of participants
T0	Robbing a neutral victim (providing only his name)	$N_0 = 100$
T0'	Robbing the same victim as in T0 while mentioning the victim is an honest citizen	$N_{0'} = 100$
T1	Robbing the same victim as in T0 while mentioning the victim is a robber	$N_1 = 100$
T2	Robbing the same victim as in T0 while mentioning the victim is a banking executive	$N_2 = 100$
T3	Robbing the same victim as in T0 while mentioning the victim is a custom official	$N_3 = 100$

Table 2: Participants' perception of morality of individuals in each occupation

Mean morality ascribed to		All treatments	Participants are in treatment:		Participants are in other treatments		K-Wallis test
An average individual in society		3,69	T0	3.89	T0', T1, T2, T3	3.64	ns
A banking executive		3.85	T2	3.79	T0, T0', T1, T3	3.87	ns
A custom official		2.90	T3	3.11	T0, T0', T1, T2	2.85	*
t-test	Average individual/banking executive	***					
	Average individual/custom official	***					
	Banker/custom official	***					

*** stands for parameter significance at the 1% level of a paired t-test comparing the mean responses by type of individual. * stands for parameter significance at the 10% level of a Kruskal-Wallis test comparing the examined treatment and other treatments. ns stands for not significant.

Table 3: Mean responses by treatment

	T0 (unspecified)	T0' (an honest)	T1 (a robber)	T2 (a banking executive)	T3 (a custom official)	Kruskal-Wallis test
Moral acceptability	6.36	6.87	6.53	6.58	6.38	***
Deserved Punishment	6.76	6.8	5.59	6.48	6.5	***

*** stands for parameter significance at the 1% level.

Table 4: Multiple hypotheses testing (simultaneous comparison of all treatments)

Compared treatments	Moral acceptability			Deserved punishment		
	Difference in means	p-values		Difference in means	p-values	
		Unadjusted	Adjusted		Unadjusted	Adjusted
T0 vs. T0'	0.506	*0.004*	*0.03*	0.04	0.923	0.997
T0 vs. T1	0.166	0.310	0.688	1.17	*0.007*	*0.049*
T0 vs. T2	0.216	0.210	0.592	0.275	0.492	0.862
T0 vs. T3	0.016	0.935	0.935	0.26	0.551	0.875
T0' vs. T1	0.34	*0.005*	*0.033*	1.21	*0.005*	*0.036*
T0' vs. T2	0.29	0.026	0.127	0.315	0.438	0.865
T0' vs. T3	0.49	*0.005*	*0.033*	0.3	0.478	0.877
T1 vs. T2	0.05	0.732	0.931	0.894	*0.035*	0.184
T1 vs. T3	0.15	0.398	0.740	0.91	*0.037*	0.175
T2 vs. T3	0.2	0.264	0.651	0.015	0.970	0.970

Significant values are highlighted in bold italics.

Table 5: Effect of victim morality on moral judgment and deserved punishment (multivariate regression)

		Coefficients and significance	
		Moral judgment	**Deserved punishment**
Victim identity	Unspecified (T0)	-0.345**	0.024
	Honest (T0') *(Ref)*	**-**	**-**
	Robber (T1)	-0.319**	-1.176***
	Banking executive (T2)	-0.217	-0.310
	Custom official (T3)	-0.466***	-0.310
Age (=1 if less than 30 years old)		0.103	-0.433
Gender (=1 if male)		-0.287***	-0.058
Education	Cat. 1 (Baccalaureate or less) *(Ref)*	**-**	**-**
	Cat. 2 (Between 1 and 3 university years)	2.306***	0.136
	Cat. 3 (4 university years or more)	2.402***	0.524
Earnings	Cat. 1 (=1 if < DZD 30000) *(Ref)*	-	-
	Cat. 2 (=1 if between DZD 30000 and DZD 80000)	0.165	-0.159
	Cat. 3 (=1 if > DZD 80000)	0.361*	-0.373
Perceived wealth level of the victim (=1 if high [responses 5, 6 and 7])		-0.095	0.085
Constant		4.364***	6.635***
Observations		498	498
F		4.011***	1.304
R2		0.0832	0.0287
		Multivariate test, F	
Wilks' lambda		0.8894***	
Pillai's trace		0.1130***	

***, ** and * refer to significance at the levels of 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Appendix 1: Survey instrument (For refereeing purpose – Not for publication)

Anonymous survey

(There is no right or wrong answers. Only your opinion matters. The names and scenarios described below are hypothetical and are taking place in Algeria)

[Changes across treatments are highlighted in bold, between brackets]

A1. Without any physical aggression or violence because of the absence of inhabitants, a burglar robbed for DZD 1.000.000 jewels from the home of Mr. Mahjoubi, *[an honest citizen,] [a robber,] [a banking executive,] [a custom official,]* married and a fan of football. Please, estimate the morality of this action on a scale ranging from 1 (completely moral) to 7 (completely immoral) by circling the corresponding number:

1 Completely moral	2	3	4	5	6	7 Completely immoral

A2. Suppose that the sanction for such crimes varies between 1 year and 10 years in jail, what would be the number of years in prison that you would suggest for this burglar? Please, circle the number corresponding to your choice:

1 year	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 years

A3. At which level you place Mr. Mahjoubi on a wealth scale from 1 (very poor) to 7 (very rich), by circling the corresponding number?

1 Very poor	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very rich

B1. Please indicate the morality of the average Algerian inhabitant on a scale from 1 (not moral at all) to 7 (very moral) by circling the corresponding number:

1 Not moral at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very moral

B2. Please indicate the morality of a banking executive on a scale from 1 (not moral at all) to 7 (very moral) by circling the corresponding number:

1 Not moral at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very moral

B3. Please indicate the morality of a custom official on a scale from 1 (not moral at all) to 7 (very moral) by circling the corresponding number:

1 Not moral at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very moral

C. Please, indicate the following information:

1. **Age**: _____years	2. **Gender**: M. ☐ F. ☐	4. **Your net monthly income (DZD)**:
3. **Education**: Baccalaureate or less ☐ Bac + __ years ☐		a) < 30 000 ☐ b) Between 30 000 and 80 000 ☐ c) > 80 000 ☐