AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Psychology, Public Policy, and Law

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ISSN: 1076-8971

https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000476

The Power of Victim Narrative: Eponymous Legislation Increases Voter Sympathy and Support

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Legislators often propose bills in honor of a victim following a tragic event involving public outrage (e.g., AMBER Alerts, Megan's Law). Such bills and subsequent laws that involve a victim's name and story are known as eponymous legislation. Legal commentators have raised concerns that this legislation garners unwarranted emotional support from the public. We conducted three experiments to empirically test whether eponymous legislation received greater public support than legislation without a victim's name and story. In Study 1 and Study 2, participants read a proposed bill that either included a victim's name and narrative (eponymous condition) or not (control) and rated their approval of the bill, cognitive and affective responses, and reasoning. In both of these studies, participants were significantly more likely to support the eponymous bill than the control bill. Study 2 further suggested the effect was mediated by sympathy. In Study 3, we manipulated the victim's name and narrative separately and found that narrative, not name, drove increased support. Narrative also increased sympathy in Study 3, but sympathy did not mediate the effect of narrative on bill support. Findings support legal commentators' concerns about eponymous legislation. Legislators need to be cautious when proposing such bills to ensure that they are not ineffective or harmful despite receiving increased public approval.

Keywords: crime control theater, eponymous legislation, sympathy, dehumanization, voting

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In 2012, 16-year-old Amelia Keown was on her way home to pick up pom poms for her after-school dance practice when she was killed by a man driving under the influence of drugs (WBIR, 2014). The driver was on parole and had an extensive criminal record that included speeding, drug use, aggravated robbery, and fleeing and evading the police. The community was outraged at this event. Amelia's family pushed for a legislative reaction. In response, the Tennessee legislature unanimously passed "Amelia's Law" (House Bill 1759), which requires people convicted of substance-involved crimes to wear a transdermal monitoring device that tracks their intoxication levels upon release. However, a year later, the law had yet to be enforced as the departments did not have the devices (Brobeck, 2015).

Amelia's Law is an example of eponymous legislation—a bill or law named after a specific person (also known as apostrophe laws or memorial laws; Hampson, 2013; Pason et al., 2017). Typically, eponymous legislation is proposed following a tragic event that involves public outrage and calls for change to prevent similar events from happening in the future. These laws have increased in prevalence since the 1990s and now can be found in nearly every

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Results from this study have previously been presented at the American Psychology-Law Society conference (2018, 2022) and the Judgment and Decision-Making preconference at the annual conference for the Society of Personality and Social Psychology (2022). We would like to thank Brenda Torres for her assistance in developing the content coding codebook as well as the research assistants who assisted with content coding, including Andrea Sandoval, Belen Renteria, Cinthya Magallanes, Dana Smith, Elisa Torres, Jenny Unpingco, Mara Rouse, Maren Ogg, Priscila Rodante, and Vanessa Rivero. The authors would also like to thank Brian Bornstein for initial discussion of the idea. This work was supported by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, RAC-Warden funds. The authors have no known conflicts of interest to disclose. We incorporated open science practices into this article where possible. All materials are available publicly on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/3my4w/?view_only=7ef989eaf6244efe863cd0377b50ba7f. Data for Study 3 are publicly available on the OSF, but we did not have Institutional Review Board approval or participant consent to make the data for Studies 1 and 2 publicly available.

Krystia Reed served as lead for investigation, project administration, resources, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing, contributed equally to methodology, and served in a supporting role for formal analysis and visualization. Grace Hanzelin served as lead for formal analysis and visualization, contributed equally to project administration, and served in a supporting role for investigation, methodology, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing. Rubi M. Gonzales served in a supporting role for formal analysis, supervision, and writing–review and editing. Melanie B. Fessinger served as lead for funding acquisition and served in a supporting role for methodology, project administration, and writing–review and editing. Krystia Reed and Melanie B. Fessinger contributed equally to conceptualization. Krystia Reed and Grace Hanzelin contributed equally to supervision.

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jurisdiction in the United States (B. C. Jones, 2012; Surette, 2007). For example, following the highly publicized death of Caylee Anthony, many states enacted Caylee's Law, which made it a felony for parents to fail to report a missing child (Randall & deBoer, 2012). Many states have also proposed, and sometimes enacted, these types of laws based on their own local events, including Lauren's Law in Illinois (state law requiring schools to train staff and students in CPR; Illinois SR0139) or Emma's Law in New Jersey (state law regulating school buses for students with special needs; NJ A2027). They can also be found in federal legislation, such as Megan's Law (national law creating the public sex offender registry; 34 U.S.C. § 20901). These examples are just a small sample of enacted eponymous legislation.

Legal commentators have raised concerns that eponymous legislation uses a sympathetic figure to garner unwarranted support for legislation by lawmakers and voters (e.g., Frank, 2016; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Hampson, 2013; B. C. Jones, 2012; Pason et al., 2017). However, these concerns have received little empirical attention. In this article, we review the existing research relevant to these legal concerns and discuss two potential psychological mechanisms that could drive increased support for eponymous legislation: dehumanization and sympathy. We then present the results of three studies that experimentally tested the role of eponymous legislation on bill approval. Findings support legal commentator concerns that eponymous legislation receives greater public support. We conclude with a discussion of the political implication of our studies.

Legal Concerns

Legal commentators have raised concerns that eponymous bills receive unwarranted support due to an emotional response to the victim's story, not because of the actual substance of the proposed bill (e.g., Frank, 2016; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Hampson, 2013; B. C. Jones, 2012; Pason et al., 2017). This concern highlights that enacting such policies can lead to bad law or a disproportionate allocation of resources (i.e., "lawmaking by anecdote"; Hampson, 2013). One commentator explained that it can be difficult to argue against these proposals, saying "who's going to say no to them? All the [victims' family's] have to say is who they are and what they support … their story is enough" (Hampson, 2013). Thus, legislators who oppose these bills risk appearing unsympathetic to victims' families and losing public support even if doing so for good reason based on the legislation itself.

There is some preliminary empirical evidence suggesting that these concerns may be warranted. Socia (2022) presented participants with different versions of a distracted driving bill that either was named after a victim and described their story (i.e., the bill was "a response to the death of a specific victim who was killed while walking down the sidewalk after being struck by a distracted driver who was checking their email on their cellphone," p. 1456) or was presented without a victim's name or narrative. Results showed a strong effect of the victim information, with the odds of strong support being 1.61 times higher for named versions of the bill compared to an unnamed version. However, results also suggested variability based on the victim's characteristics, such as their race, age, and gender. Thus, this study provides some initial support for the contention that eponymous legislation can increase public support but also suggests that effects may not be universal. As such, it is important to explore whether results replicate across other bills and to begin identifying potential psychological mechanisms driving the effect.

Theoretical Perspectives

There are two relevant areas of psychological and criminological research that provide a theoretical context for better understanding these concerns: stories and crime control theater (CCT).

Stories

Research suggests that stories are powerful—"images created by sensory text details … are more convincing, easier to comprehend, and more memorable than abstract propositions" (Tannen, 1999, p. 6). Stories create context and relevance in a way that makes information memorable (Haven, 2007). Storytelling also increases attention to information (Bolkan, 2021), which is why many articles—including this one—begin with a story (see, e.g., Kassin, 2005; Kovera, 2019; Loftus & Hoffman, 1989). And stories have been found to be more persuasive than facts in most situations (Krause & Rucker, 2020; Simmons, 2019). The impact of stories has been found to extend to the legal context. For example, Pennington and Hastie (1986, 1988) developed the story model of juror decision making, which posits that jurors organize trial evidence using a narrative story structure. Research on this model suggests that jurors develop stories to understand what happened and render a verdict. Furthermore, research suggests that more complete stories are more persuasive than less complete stories (Pennington & Hastie, 1992).

Beyond general stories, stories of individuals in particular tend to be powerful. The identifiable victim effect is the phenomenon in which people are more willing to use resources to save a specific, identifiable victim than equal or greater numbers of unidentified or statistical victims (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997). Similarly, people are more willing to punish an identifiable perpetrator (Small & Loewenstein, 2005). A meta-analysis found support for the identifiable victim effect across studies and suggests that it is particularly strong when the victim is a child or when the need is monetary (Lee & Feeley, 2016). Although these studies have primarily focused on giving behavior, they have shown that identifiable victims are perceived as more important than unidentified victims, which could have implications for support for eponymous legislation (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997).

CCT

Another line of research that indirectly supports legal commentators' concerns about eponymous legislation is CCT. CCT consists of four elements: (a) a tragic event involving an easily identifiable victim and a perceived commonsense solution (mythic narrative); (b) disproportionate public concern over the threat (moral panic); (c) unquestioned acceptance of the commonsense legislative solution (unquestioned acceptance); and (d) the legislative solution is ultimately unsuccessful at addressing the concern (empirical failure; Hammond et al., 2010). In other words, CCT occurs when the public becomes panicked about a tragedy involving a sympathetic victim and therefore unquestioningly supports a policy that appears to respond to the threat but is ultimately ineffective. In fact, many of these policies receive continued widespread public support even when people recognize they are ineffective (Campbell & Newheiser, 2019).

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CCT research often involves eponymous legislation (e.g., AMBER Alerts, Megan's Law; Miller et al., 2018). For example, AMBER Alerts were enacted in response to public fears about the 1996 kidnapping and murder of Amber Hagerman (Hammond et al., 2010). The public was highly moved by Amber's story and still shows high support for the AMBER Alert system, despite the system being an empirical failure and an ineffective use of taxpayer money (Griffin & Miller, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007). Thus, CCT research provides indirect support that eponymous legislation can receive unwarranted support that results in bad policy. But, importantly, the two concepts are not identical—not all CCT is eponymous in nature (e.g., three-strikes laws do not have a victim's name or narrative), and not all eponymous legislation is CCT (e.g., if an eponymous policy is effective, it is not CCT). Therefore, CCT research has identified that eponymous legislation might produce problematic policies, but research needs to isolate the role that eponymous legislation (i.e., a victim's name and narrative) specifically has on bill support.

Psychological Mechanisms

If voters show increased support for eponymous legislation, it is important to understand why. Research on CCT suggests that appealing to people's emotions might be a driving factor increasing support (Krauss et al., 2021). In this study, we consider three different cognitive and affective processes that might play a role in this response: dehumanization of the perpetrator, humanization of the victim, and sympathy.

Dehumanization and Humanization

The mythic narrative element of CCT requires an identifiable villainized perpetrator and a sympathetic victim (Griffin & Miller, 2008). In the case of Amelia's Law discussed in the opening of the article, Amelia's human characteristics (e.g., a 16-year-old honor student on the dance team), while the perpetrator was portrayed as a habitual criminal on parole. Thus, it is possible that dehumanization of the perpetrator and humanization of the victim might be driving increased support for eponymous legislation.

Dehumanization is the denial of full humanness to others, stripping away their humanity and classifying them as "other" or "less than" (Haslam, 2006; Kteily & Landry, 2022). Extensive research indicates that dehumanization results in greater emotional hostility, increased prejudice, decreased empathy, and support for harsher punishment or torture (E. Bruneau & Kteily, 2017; Costello & Hodson, 2010; Kteily et al., 2016). Within the legal context, greater juror dehumanization of defendants results in harsher punishments (Conley, 2016; Haney, 2004; Lynch & Haney, 2011). Specific groups, such as sex offenders, are even more likely to be dehumanized as cold, callous animals (Camman, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2015; Viki et al., 2012), which is linked to harsher punishments (Stevenson et al., 2015; Viki et al., 2012). Eponymous legislation can dehumanize the perpetrator, which could result in greater willingness to support a policy that would penalize the perpetrator.

On the other hand, eponymous legislation can humanize the victim. Research on humanization indicates that people report increased empathy and decreased prejudice toward humanized groups, especially when people are prompted to consider the motions and thoughts of the target (E. G. Bruneau et al., 2015; Costello & Hodson, 2010; Moore-Berg et al., 2022). For example, people who were exposed to a 2-min video of a reunion between an undocumented mother and her child after being separated for months reported less dehumanization toward migrants (Moore-Berg et al., 2022). Those who were exposed to the video and were given relevant crime statistics were less likely to dehumanize, more likely to feel empathy, and less likely to support antimigrant policies. In a similar vein, eponymous legislation might also increase support through humanization of the victim.

Sympathy

Another potential mechanism through which eponymous legislation may garner increased support is sympathy. The persuasive effect of storytelling/narrative (described above) has been found to be partially mediated by sympathy (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Wirtz et al., 2016). In the legal context, more sympathetic victims result in greater juror punitiveness of defendants (Hanslmaier & Baier, 2015). Consequently, it is possible that the story increases sympathy toward the victim, which has downstream effects on other decisions (i.e., that sympathy might mediate the effect of eponymous legislation on bill support).

Present Studies

This article presents the results of three studies that examined how eponymous legislation (i.e., legislation with a victim's name and narrative) influences public support for proposed bills. We tested how eponymous legislation influences voting behavior using community sentiment as a framework (Miller & Chamberlain, 2015). Although there is a common belief that individuals have little impact on the political process (A. Chamberlain, 2013), research indicates that community sentiment can impact the law (J. Chamberlain, 2015; see also Miller et al., 2015). Not only do community members vote for candidates who represent their values and interests (J. Chamberlain, 2015), but research suggests that legislators are responsive to community sentiment when voting (Oldmixon & Calfano, 2007), especially emotional reactions to eponymous legislation (Arbogast, 2011; Smith, 2011; Socia & Harris, 2016). In fact, some legislators point to the number of calls they have received from the public about these bills as a reason for supporting them with their votes (e.g., Arbogast, 2011; Smith, 2011).

Although related to existing research on CCT, these studies are distinct in two ways. First, they isolate the role that a victim's name and narrative have on bill support. Second, because the concerns of increased support for eponymous bills should apply to all eponymous legislation, not just famous cases, we used bills based on lesser-known laws instead of the well-known laws CCT research focuses on such as AMBER Alerts. In all three studies, we tested the psychological mechanism of dehumanization. In Studies 2 and 3, we also explored sympathy as a possible psychological mechanism. In Study 3, we also isolated the effect of the victim's name compared to the victim's narrative. Based on existing research, we developed three hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Eponymous legislation would increase bill support. In all three studies, we expected that participants would be more likely to support an eponymous bill (i.e., a bill with a victim's name and story) than a control bill. We expected this effect to occur after controlling for the participant's relevant

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attitudes (Hypothesis 1a). In Study 3, we expected both name and narrative individually to increase support.

Hypothesis 2: Eponymous legislation would result in cognitive and affective responses. In all three studies, we predicted that, compared to the control bill, the eponymous bill would affect perceptions of humanness, specifically greater humanization of the victim (Hypothesis 2a) and greater dehumanization of the perpetrator (in Studies 2 and 3, which involved an identifiable perpetrator; Hypothesis 2b). In Studies 2 and 3, we also expected the eponymous bill would result in greater sympathy toward crime victims (Hypothesis 2c) and lesser sympathy toward crime perpetrators (Hypothesis 2d) than the control bill.

Hypothesis 3: Cognitive and affective responses would mediate the effect of eponymous legislation on bill support. In all three studies, we expected emotional responses to mediate the relationship between victim narrative and bill support.

Study 1

Method

Transparency and Openness

All materials and measures are available to view on the Open Science Framework (OSF; https://osf.io/3my4w/; Hanzelin et al., 2025) and were considered exempt by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Participants

Participants were 126 undergraduate students at a large Southwestern university who received course credit for participation. We excluded participants who were not U.S. citizens ($n = 5$) or who were unable to provide an on-topic description of the bill ($n = 10$). Therefore, the final sample was 112 participants (56 per condition). Sensitivity analyses in G*Power 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that this sample size provided us with 80% power to detect medium effect sizes on our major χ^2 and *t*-test analyses ($w = 0.26$, $d = 0.53$). Thus, we were limited in our ability to detect small effects based on the sample size. See Table 1 for full demographic information.

Design

Study 1 used a two-group between-subjects design comparing an eponymous bill to a control bill. The main outcome was bill approval. We measured humanization of the victim as a potential mediator.

Materials

Bill. All participants read California Senate Bill 124 (C.A. Legis. Assemb., 2015)—a bill that proposed to limit the use of solitary confinement in juvenile detention facilities. Specifically, it proposed to prohibit the use of solitary confinement when the juvenile had a mental disorder or grave disability and allow the use of solitary confinement only under specific conditions (e.g., not exceeding 4 h). We selected this bill because it was based on real eponymous legislation but was not likely to be known by our participants (it was not widely publicized, it was dated, and it was from a different state) and has not previously been examined as CCT. The bill also involves a policy about a group that is not always perceived sympathetically (i.e., juveniles who are justice-involved), but a victim that would likely receive sympathy (i.e., a teenager who died of suicide because of state action). We randomly assigned participants to read the control bill or the bill with an eponymous narrative.

Control. In the control condition, the bill was called "Bill 124" and was presented without additional information.

Eponymous. In the eponymous condition, participants read "Rosemary's Bill," which included the narrative of 16-year-old Rosemary Summers—a trauma survivor with a history of depression and suicide attempts—who died of suicide[1] after being held in solitary confinement for 6 weeks during her stay in a juvenile detention facility. The story explained that she had repeatedly asked to see her counselor while being held in solitary confinement but was denied those requests. The narrative also included a statement from her family saying that they believed her death could have been avoided if she had not been placed in solitary confinement. This story was based on true events that inspired actual eponymous legislation (August & Walsh, 2015).

Bill Approval. Consistent with the community sentiment framework (Miller & Chamberlain, 2015), we assessed support for the bill using both a categorical question (approve or disapprove) and a scaled question (1 = *strongly disapprove* to 6 = *strongly approve*; $M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.50$).

Reasoning. We also asked participants to explain their reasoning for their approval or disapproval of the bill with an open-ended prompt. The authors and a set of research assistants read the responses to create a coding scheme that contained 25 total categories of things participants mentioned (e.g., Rosemary's story, specific aspects of the bill, mental health concerns). Pairs of research assistants then coded each response (i.e., 100% double-coding) using the coding scheme and demonstrated high interrater reliability (Fleiss $\kappa = .80$). Disagreements were settled by Grace Hanzelin. While assessing disagreements, Grace Hanzelin added and coded two additional codes that were not covered by the initial coding scheme and that captured a number of the discrepancies: confusion about the bill's contents and general dislike of solitary confinement. Thus, the final coding scheme included 27 total categories and is available on the OSF at https://osf.io/3my4w/.

Attention Check. We asked participants to recall the name or number of the bill and to explain it in their own words as an attention check. We excluded participants who both failed to recall the name or number of the bill and who were unable to provide an on-topic summary.

Humanization. We examined humanization by adapting Bastian and Haslam's (2010) dehumanization scale for detained juveniles. Participants rated detained juveniles on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) on 20 traits that comprise two subscales: animalistic dehumanization (uniquely human characteristics; e.g., civility) and mechanistic dehumanization (characteristics related to human nature; e.g., agency). Both subscales were reliable in our study (animalistic

[1] Because we were drawing from actual news reports, in the study we used the term "committed suicide." However, we recognize that the mental health community advises against using this language to discuss suicide because it implies criminality (Spencer-Thomas, 2021). Therefore, in the article, we refer to the act using more appropriate terms (e.g., dying of suicide).

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Table 1
Demographic Information for Experiments 1–3

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age in years	21.67	3.12	38.08	13.08	21.15	4.21
Variable	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Gender						
Man	41	36	91	47	84	23
Woman	71	63	102	52	268	74
Nonbinary	0	0	0	0	5	1
Other	0	0	1	1.9	8	2
Race/ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	12	10.6	149	75.6	24	6.6
Hispanic/Latinx	89	78.8	8	4.1	315	86.1
Black	5	4	16	8	8	2
Asian	1	1.0	14	7.1	7	1.9
Native American	2	2.0	4	2	4	1
Other	3	2.7	6	2.0	8	2.2
Political beliefs						
Very liberal	16	14.2	36	18.3	52	14.2
Somewhat liberal	33	38.90	62	31.5	92	25.1
Moderate	32	28	42	21	123	34
Somewhat conservative	8	7	42	21.3	36	9.8
Very conservative	3	2.7	12	6.1	13	3.6
Not applicable	9	8.0	3	1.5	49	13.4
Political party						
Democrat	73	64.6	96	48.7	117	32.0
Republican	14	12.4	44	22.3	38	10.4
Libertarian	2	1.80	6	3	16	4.4
Independent	3	3	37	19	10	3
Other	2	2	2	1	7	2
No political party	18	16.1	12	6.1	177	48.4
Regular voter						
Yes	75	66	158	80	109	30
No	24	21	33	17	169	36
Not registered	13	12	6	3	88	24

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dehumanization: $M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.66$, $\alpha = .71$; mechanistic dehumanization: $M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.77$, $\alpha = .80$).

Attitudes. We assessed general attitudes about justice-involved juveniles and solitary confinement. These variables were included as covariates in the analyses.

Attitudes About Justice-Involved Juveniles. Participants completed the Recidivism/Rehabilitation Potential subscale of the Juvenile Offender Stereotype Scale (Haegerich et al., 2013). Participants rated attitudes about juveniles' ability to be rehabilitated after committing a crime on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*; e.g., "Society is too lenient on youths who commit crime"). Higher scores indicate more stereotypical views of justice-involved juveniles. The scale was reliable in our sample ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.82$, $\alpha = .79$). Participants also responded to two questions from the Patterns of Offending subscale of the Juvenile Offender Stereotype Scale (Haegerich et al., 2013). They estimated, in their opinion, (a) what percentage of crime is committed by juveniles, and (b) of that percent, what percent of juvenile crimes are violent.

Attitudes About Solitary Confinement. We asked five questions to assess perceptions of solitary confinement. First, we asked binary questions about whether solitary confinement should be allowed for juveniles and adults. Participants then rated how harmful solitary confinement is on a 6-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 6 = *extremely*) for both juveniles suffering from a mental illness ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.02$) and not suffering from a mental illness ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.37$). Finally, we asked participants whether they thought juveniles should be subjected to solitary confinement less often than, at the same rate as, or more often than adults.

Demographics. Participants also answered questions about their age, gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, and political ideology. They also provided information about their experiences with juveniles and the juvenile justice system.

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants read the bill which either included the narrative or not depending upon randomly assigned condition. Participants voted to approve or disapprove of the bill, provided their perceptions of the bill, completed the attention check, completed the dehumanization measure, reported their attitudes, and provided demographics.

Results

Overall, most participants (87%) approved of the bill, creating somewhat of a ceiling effect. However, we continued to test our

hypotheses while also planning to use a more balanced bill in future studies (i.e., Studies 2 and 3). To test whether the eponymous bill resulted in increased support compared to a control bill (Hypothesis 1), we conducted a χ^2 analysis using dichotomous approval as the outcome variable and an independent samples *t* test using scaled approval as the outcome variable. To test whether these effects occurred after controlling for relevant attitudes (Hypothesis 1a), we conducted a logistic regression using bill condition, attitudes about justice-involved juveniles, and attitudes about solitary confinement as the predictors and dichotomous support as the outcome variable. A correlation (see Table 1 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/) indicated that condition significantly positively correlated with one attitude (recidivism and rehabilitation), but none of the others, so we opted to retain all attitudes in the model. We also mirrored this analysis using the scaled bill approval using a linear regression (see Table 2 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/). Finally, we assessed whether eponymous legislation humanized the victim (Hypothesis 2a) with an independent samples *t* test.

Hypothesis 1: Eponymous Legislation Increased Bill Support

As expected, people were more likely to support the eponymous bill (100%) than the control bill (73%), $\chi^2(1) = 17.30$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .39$ (see Figure 1, left panel). This effect was replicated with scaled approval, $t(110) = -4.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.03$ (see Figure 1, right panel). Also, as expected (Hypothesis 1a), this effect was robust—none of the attitudinal variables significantly predicted support for the bill (see Table 2, Step 2).

Hypothesis 2: Eponymous Legislation Did Not Increase Humanization

Contrary to expectations, bill condition did not significantly affect animalistic humanization (control bill: $M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.65$; eponymous bill: $M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.67$), $t(108) = 0.61$, $p = .54$, $d = 0.66$, nor did bill condition affect mechanistic dehumanization (control bill: $M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.87$; eponymous bill: $M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.67$), $t(106) = 0.03$, $p = .98$, $d = 0.78$.

Hypothesis 3: Mediation Not Tested

There were no significant direct effects of bill condition on dehumanization nor of dehumanization on bill approval (see Table 2, Step 2). Therefore, we did not conduct a mediational analysis to test for indirect effects.

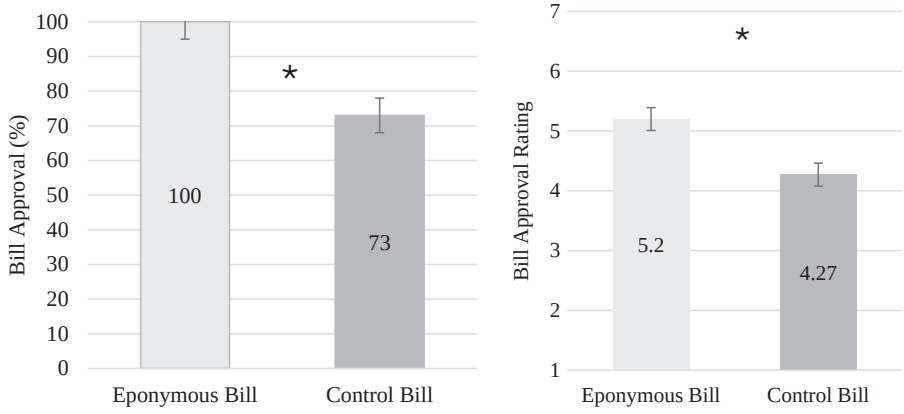
Exploratory Analyses: Eponymous Policies Resulted in Less Confusion

We conducted exploratory analyses examining participants' reasoning for their decision (see Table 3). Participants in the eponymous condition acknowledged the role the victim's story had on their vote—21% mentioned the victim's story as a justification for their decision. Moreover, they were more likely to focus on concerns highlighted by the story (suicide and mental health) compared to participants who read the control bill who focused more on general perceptions of solitary confinement.

However, the narrative also appeared to reduce confusion about the purpose of the bill. Participants more often mentioned being confused in the control condition (13%) than in the eponymous condition (0%), $\chi^2(1, 109) = 7.47$, $p = .006$, $\varphi = -.26$. In fact, all participants who mentioned being confused were in the control condition. And of the 15 participants who disapproved of the bill, 20% listed reasons for disapproval that indicated that they were confused about the purpose of the bill. For example, one of the participants said, "I'm not sure if it is completely in the best interest in juveniles considering how harmful solitary confinement can be," despite the purpose of the bill being to prevent solitary confinement of juveniles. Because this confusion represents what could happen during voting, we included these participants in our analyses. No participants who read the eponymous bill provided a response that indicated they were confused about the purpose of the bill.

Figure 1

Study 1: Eponymous Bills Receive More Support Than Control Bills for Both Dichotomous Approval (Left) and Scaled Approval (Right)



Note. Error bars indicate standard error.
* $p < .05$.

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Table 2
Study 1: Effects of Eponymous Bill, Attitudes, and Emotions on Bill Support (Logistic Regression)

Variable	Summary of results ($N = 112$)					
	B	*SE*	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp(*B*)
Step 1—bill condition						
Eponymous bill	**2.81**	**1.06**	**7.051**	**1**	**.008**	**16.67**
Constant	1.10	0.32	11.768	1	<.001	3.00
Step 2—attitudes						
Eponymous bill	**3.01**	**1.12**	**7.30**	**1**	**.007**	**20.37**
Solitary harm to juveniles with MI	0.56	38	2.20	1	.14	1.75
Solitary harm to juveniles without MI	−0.19	0.31	0.36	1	.55	0.83
Permit solitary for juveniles	1.53	1.15	1.78	1	.18	4.60
Permit solitary for adults	−0.44	0.89	0.24	1	.62	0.64
Treat juveniles and adults the same	−0.31	0.92	0.11	1	.74	0.73
Crimes committed by juvenile (%)	0.00	0.02	0.00	1	.97	1.00
Violent crimes committed by juveniles (%)	−0.01	0.02	0.06	1	.81	0.99
Recidivism/rehabilitation	−0.19	0.45	0.18	1	.68	0.83
Constant	−0.32	3.10	0.01	1	.92	0.73
Step 3—emotions						
Eponymous bill	3.04	1.13	7.19	1	.007	20.80
Solitary harm to juveniles with MI	0.51	0.38	1.80	1	.18	1.67
Solitary harm to juveniles without MI	−0.19	0.32	0.34	1	.56	0.83
Permit solitary for juveniles	1.46	1.18	1.52	1	.22	4.29
Permit solitary for adults	−0.26	0.91	0.16	1	.69	0.70
Treat juveniles and adults the same	−0.39	0.93	0.18	1	.67	0.68
Crimes committed by juvenile (%)	0.00	0.02	0.01	1	.91	1.00
Violent crimes committed by juveniles (%)	−0.01	0.02	0.07	1	.79	0.99
Recidivism/rehabilitation	−0.13	0.46	0.07	1	.79	0.88
Dehumanization—animalistic	−0.05	0.56	0.01	1	.93	0.96
Dehumanization—mechanistic	0.34	0.44	0.61	1	.44	1.41
Constant	−1.61	3.75	0.19	1	.67	0.20

Note. Approval was coded such that 0 indicated disapprove and 1 indicated approve. Step 1: $\chi^2(1) = 13.56$, $p < .001$, $-2LL = 68.33$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .12$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .23$; Step 2: $\chi^2(8) = 4.66$, $p = .79$, $-2LL = 63.67$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .16$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .30$; Step 3: $\chi^2(2) = 0.66$, $p = .72$, $-2LL = 63.60$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .16$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .31$. Final model: $\chi^2(11) = 18.87$, $p = .06$. No participants in the eponymous condition disapproved of the bill, so in order to run the model, we added a data point to that condition that disapproved of the bills and had values on all variables at the mean of the overall sample. Lines in bold indicate significant effects ($p < .05$). MI = mental illness.

Discussion

As expected, an eponymous bill with the victim's name and narrative garnered significantly more support from participants compared to the exact same bill with no name or narrative. This effect occurred despite having relatively high numbers of participants approving of the bill overall (and thus a potential ceiling effect). In fact, all participants (100%) who read the victim's story supported the bill, while a smaller percentage (73%) of participants who did not read the victim's story supported the bill—a 27% difference.

Moreover, the effect of eponymous bill was robust and occurred after controlling for attitudes. Interestingly, although preexisting attitudes tend to be extremely important for political behavior, eponymous bills were more important than attitudes—none of the relevant attitudes significantly predicted bill approval.

Thus, these data provide support for legal commentators' concerns that eponymous bills can garner more support by adding a sympathetic victim's story than the same legislation would alone. Humanization of the victim was not the psychological mechanism driving the effect in this experiment. However, this study did not involve an identifiable perpetrator, and therefore, we could not test dehumanization of the perpetrator. Given this effect, we dove deeper into the literature and began considering sympathy as another potential emotional mechanism driving increased support (described in the introduction). So, although Study 1 cannot offer insight into whether sympathy mediates the effect of eponymous bill, we included it in Studies 2 and 3.

It is important to note that the effect of eponymous legislation might not be entirely biasing. In fact, providing the narrative also improved understanding of the bill. As anyone who has voted can affirm, legislative materials are not always written clearly. This bill was based on an actual proposed and enacted bill, one similar to those that voters might face in jurisdictions that have direct voting. Thus, it is possible that narrative might have the benefit of providing context for understanding the bill.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and improve on Study 1 in several ways. First, we used a more traditional CCT-type policy (based on Amelia's story presented at the beginning of this article) that was still not nationally publicized. We selected a bill that we believed would not receive the nearly unanimous support that was found in Study 1 (i.e., reduce concerns with ceiling effects). This new bill also allowed us to examine whether effects replicate

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Table 3
Study 1: Effect of Eponymous Bill on Frequency of Open-Ended Response Categories

Code	χ^2	*df*	*p*	φ	Percent of participants mentioning category	
					Control	Eponymous
Victim's story	**13.44**	**1**	**<.001**	**.35**	**0**	**21**
Bill name	0.44	1	.51	.06	21	27
Bill components	0.57	1	.45	−.07	20	14
Bill approval	**10.61**	**3**	**.014**	**.31**		
Stated approval					**38**	**55**
Stated disapproval					**20**	**2**
Confusion	**7.47**	**1**	**.006**	**−.26**	**13**	**0**
Solitary	**3.77**	**1**	**.052**	**−.18**	**20**	**7**
Prevent suicides	**7.03**	**1**	**.008**	**.25**	**2**	**17**
Good outcomes	2.24	1	.33	.14	9	16
Punishment	0.7	1	.40	.08	4	7
Mental health	**4.36**	**1**	**.037**	**.20**	**36**	**55**
Rehabilitation	0.21	1	.65	−.04	5	4
Detainee age	**4.66**	**1**	**.031**	**−.20**	**46**	**27**
Safety	0.8	1	.37	−.09	27	20
Protection	0.23	1	.63	−.05	21	18
Trauma	2.94	1	.09	−.16	18	7
Length of time	0.57	1	.45	−.07	19	14

Note. Lines in bold indicate effects significant at the $p = .05$ level.

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to other legislation. Second, we selected a bill that included an identifiable perpetrator (in addition to an identifiable victim) to more closely examine dehumanization. Although we did not find evidence of humanization driving the effect in Study 1, we opted to include it again as a possible mediator given the alterations to this study. Third, we included a measure of sympathy as a potential psychological mechanism driving the effect of increased approval for eponymous legislation, which we had not considered in Study 1. Finally, we used a community sample rather than an undergraduate sample to ensure results replicate in other populations.

Method

Transparency and Openness

All materials and measures are available to view on the OSF at https://osf.io/3my4w/ and were considered exempt by the Institutional Review Board at University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Participants

Participants were 215 community members recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk who received $0.50 for their participation. We again arrived at this sample size based on resource availability (Lakens, 2022). As in Study 1, we excluded participants for not being U.S. citizens ($n = 3$) and for not being able to accurately describe the bill in their open-ended responses ($n = 18$). Therefore, the final sample included 194 participants (97 per condition). Sensitivity analyses in G*Power 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that this sample size provided us with 80% power to detect effect sizes between the small and medium traditional cutoffs on our major χ^2 and *t*-test analyses ($w = 0.20$, $d = 0.40$), thus giving us slightly increased power compared to Study 1. See Table 1 for full demographic information.

Design

Study 2 used the same two-group between-subjects design comparing an eponymous bill to a control bill as used in Study 1. The main outcome was bill approval. We measured humanization of crime victims, dehumanization of people on parole, general sympathy, and specific sympathy as potential mechanisms.

Materials

The materials in Study 2 were generally similar to Study 1, but with four changes. First, we used a new bill. Second, we updated the coding to reflect the new bill. Third, we added measures of dehumanization of the perpetrator and sympathy. Fourth, we replaced the attitudinal measures with measures relevant to the new bill. We describe these differences below, but the attention checks and demographics were the same as in Study 1 and are therefore not described.

Bill. Study 2 was based on the story of Amelia Keown discussed at the beginning of this article. All participants read Tennessee House Bill 1759 (Tennessee General Assembly, 2014)—a bill that proposed to require monitoring to test alcohol and drug use of people on parole who were convicted of an alcohol or drug offense. Specifically, it would allow for transdermal alcohol monitoring, location monitoring, and random alcohol testing for people on probation or parole following a drug or alcohol related offense. We randomly assigned participants to receive a control bill or an eponymous bill.

Eponymous. In the eponymous condition, participants read the story of Amelia (renamed Alyssa to reduce the likelihood of participants recognizing the bill given the national sample), a 16-year-old high school student who was killed by a reckless driver under the influence of drugs on her way home from school. The victim's mother exclaimed on local news that if the perpetrator, who had recently been released on parole for a drug-related offense, had been monitored and tracked, the victim's death would have been prevented.

Control. In the control condition, the bill was called "Bill 124(a)" and was presented without additional information.

Bill Approval and Reasoning. Bill approval was assessed in the same way as Study 1—dichotomously and on a 6-point scale with higher scores indicating more support ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.67$). The coding scheme for participants' reasoning was updated to reflect the difference in bill content and included 18 categories, including the mention of Alyssa's story, of bill-specific aspects like transdermal monitors or monitoring people on parole, and of preventing future crimes (see the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/). Pairs of research assistants then coded each response (i.e., 100% double-coded) using the coding scheme and demonstrated high interrater reliability (Fleiss $\kappa = .80$). Disagreements were settled by Grace Hanzelin.

Humanization. Participants completed two versions of Bastian and Haslam's (2010) dehumanization scale. The first version was adapted to measure humanization of crime victims (animalistic: $M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.85$, $\alpha = .72$; mechanistic: $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.05$., $\alpha = .76$). The second version was adapted to measure dehumanization of people on parole (animalistic: $M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.71$, $\alpha = .68$; mechanistic: $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.04$, $\alpha = .80$).

Sympathy. We assessed general sympathy using a modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson et al., 1988), which measures participants' positive and negative affect. Participants rated the extent to which they felt each emotional word (e.g., cheerful, attentive, disgusted, and irritable) right now using 5-point scales ranging from 1 = *very slightly/not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. We embedded the word "sympathetic" in the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule to measure sympathy without producing demand characteristics by making participants aware of the specific emotion in which we were interested ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.36$). We also measured specific forms of sympathy on 6-point scales ranging from 1 = *very unsympathetic* to 6 = *very sympathetic* for crime victims ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.54$) and people on parole ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.67$).

Attitudes. We assessed the relevant attitudes about drug/alcohol offenses and perceptions of bodily autonomy. Participants indicated how harsh current laws are for criminals, ranging from 1 = *very lenient* to 7 = *very harsh* ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.28$). Participants also indicated how important the right to bodily autonomy is on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *very unimportant* to 7 = *very important* ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.21$).

Procedure

Study 2 used the same procedure as Study 1.

Results

Support for the bill in Study 2 was again high but not as high as we observed in Study 1 (70%). Unless otherwise indicated, analyses were conducted in the same way as Study 1. None of the attitudes correlated with experimental condition in Study 2 (see Table 3 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/). We also tested Hypothesis 2 using the scaled outcome variable through a linear regression, but the results were similar (see Table 4 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/).

Hypothesis 1: Eponymous Legislation Increased Bill Support

As expected (Hypothesis 1), there was significantly more support for the eponymous bill (79%) than the control bill (62%), $\chi^2(1) = 6.30$, $p = .008$, $\varphi = .18$ (see Figure 2, left panel). This effect was replicated for the continuous support variable, $t(195) = -3.38$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.63$ (see Figure 2, right panel). Again, this effect was robust. After controlling for attitudes about drug offenses and bodily autonomy (Hypothesis 1a), there was still significantly more support for the eponymous bill than the control bill (see Table 4, Step 2). However, attitudes also predicted support—people were less supportive of the policy if they believed current laws are too harsh on crime or that a person's right to bodily autonomy is important (see Table 4, Step 2).

Hypothesis 2: Eponymous Legislation Increased Sympathy

As expected, participants who read the eponymous bill showed significantly more sympathy toward crime victims than those who read the control bill (see Table 5 for *t*-test results, means, and standard deviations for humanization and sympathy). The eponymous bill also increased general sympathy compared to the control bill. However, the effect of sympathy toward people on parole was not significant ($p = .08$). Contrary to expectations, and consistent with Study 1, there was no significant effect of eponymous bill on humanization of victims (Hypothesis 2a) or dehumanization of people on parole (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 3: General Sympathy Mediated the Effect of Bill Condition on Bill Support

After including the cognitive and affective mechanisms in the logistic regression, general sympathy and sympathy toward people on parole were significant, but the effect of eponymous bill was no longer significant (Table 4, Step 3). Therefore, we determined that a parallel mediation analysis was appropriate (see the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/ for correlations between general sympathy, specific sympathy, and dehumanization). Correlations between general sympathy and specific sympathy (i.e., toward victims and people on parole) were generally weak ($rs < .20$), suggesting they could be placed in the same model without concerns about multicollinearity. We used the PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 4 with 10,000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2013). The mediation analysis indicated that general sympathy mediated the role of bill condition on bill support (see Figure 3). When adding the three forms of sympathy to the model, the direct effect of bill condition on bill support was no longer significant; instead, bill condition indirectly affected bill support through general sympathy.

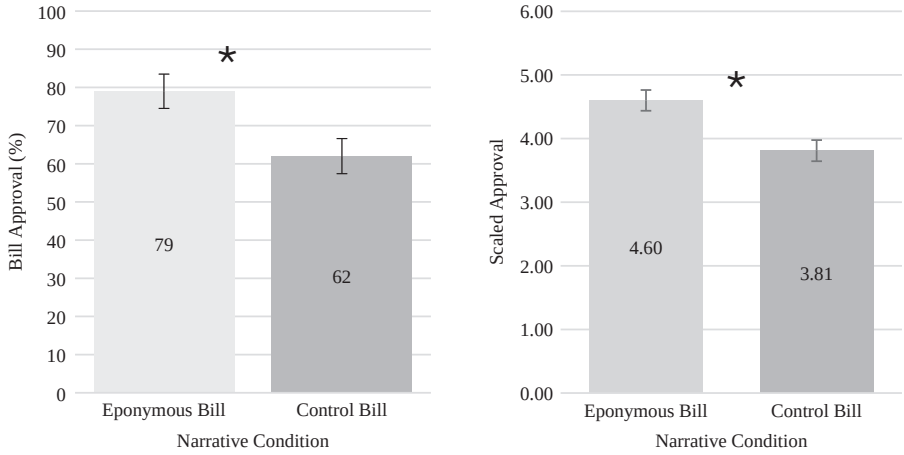
Exploratory Analyses: Eponymous Bills Focused People on Preventing Future Victims

We again explored whether eponymous bills explicitly impacted participants' reasoning for supporting the bill (see Table 6). Only 11% of participants who received the eponymous bill directly mentioned the victim's story in their reasoning for support. However, participants who received the eponymous bill were more likely to focus on how the bill would prevent future victims, whereas people who received the control bill were more likely to focus on

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Figure 2

Study 2: Eponymous Bills Receive More Support Than Control Bills for Both Dichotomous Approval (Left) and Scaled Approval (Right)



Note. Error bars indicate standard error.
* $p < .05$.

accountability of the perpetrator. Surprisingly, participants who received the eponymous bill more often discussed being unsure of their decision. Open-ended responses also provided support for our belief that this was a more controversial bill. Forty-seven percent of participants who disapproved of the bill disclosed that they felt the transdermal monitors were a violation of human rights, though this did not vary based on condition. Unlike in Study 1, none of the open-ended responses in Study 2 indicated any confusion about the bill.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the finding that the public is more likely to support an eponymous bill with a name and narrative than the same bill with no name or narrative. Thus, the effect of eponymous legislation replicated using a different bill and a national community sample. Attitudes played a larger role in Study 2 than Study 1. For example, attitudes about the importance of bodily autonomy were significant predictors of bill support in the final model. It is possible that

Table 4

Study 2, Hypotheses 1 and 2: Effects of Eponymous Bill, Attitudes, and Emotions on Bill Support (Logistic Regression)

	Summary of results ($N = 194$)					
Variable	*B*	*SE*	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp (*B*)
Step 1—bill condition						
Eponymous bill	**0.89**	**0.32**	**7.07**	**1**	**.008**	**2.36**
Constant	0.47	0.21	4.95	1	.026	1.60
Step 2—attitudes						
Eponymous bill	**1.05**	**0.39**	**7.28**	**1**	**.007**	**2.85**
Current Laws Harsh on crime	**−0.63**	**0.18**	**12.08**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.53**
Right to bodily autonomy	**−1.12**	**0.23**	**25.04**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.33**
Constant	8.31	1.32	39.55	1	<.001	4,080.62
Step 3—emotions						
Eponymous bill	0.35	0.48	0.55	1	.458	1.43
Current laws Harsh on crime	−0.27	0.23	1.41	1	.236	0.76
Right to bodily autonomy	**−1.15**	**0.25**	**21.39**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.32**
Dehumanization (crime victims)—animalistic	0.04	0.49	0.01	1	.935	1.04
Dehumanization (crime victims)—mechanistic	−0.04	0.39	0.01	1	.921	0.96
Dehumanization (people on parole)—animalistic	−0.41	0.47	0.77	1	.382	0.66
Dehumanization (people on parole)—mechanistic	−0.17	0.34	0.25	1	.614	0.84
Sympathy general	**0.51**	**0.21**	**5.97**	**1**	**.015**	**1.66**
Sympathy toward victims	0.24	0.17	2.06	1	.151	1.27
Sympathy toward people on parole	**−0.88**	**0.22**	**16.64**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.41**
Constant	10.21	2.60	15.67	1	<.001	27,072.54

Note. Approval was coded such that 0 indicated disapprove and 1 indicated approve. Step 1: $\chi^2(1) = 7.30$, $p = .007$, −2LL = 230.79, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .04$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .05$; Step 2: $\chi^2(2) = 66.68$, $p < .001$, −2LL = 164.11, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .31$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .45$; Step 3: $\chi^2(7) = 28.80$, $p < .001$, −2LL = 135.32, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .41$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .58$. Final model: $\chi^2(10) = 102.77$, $p < .001$. Lines in bold indicate significant effects ($p < .05$).

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Table 5
Study 2, Hypothesis 3: Effect of Eponymous Bill on Emotions and Attitudes

Emotion/attitude	*t*	*df*	*p*	*M* (*SD*)	
				Eponymous	Control
Animalistic dehumanization (victims)	0.07	195	.95	3.77 (0.83)	3.78 (0.87)
Mechanistic dehumanization (victims)	−1.02	195	.31	3.68 (1.08)	3.53 (1.02)
Animalistic dehumanization (people on parole)	−1.06	195	.29	4.29 (0.67)	4.18 (0.75)
Mechanistic dehumanization (people on parole)	−0.48	195	.63	4.51 (1.04)	4.43 (1.05)
Sympathy (general)	**−6.4**	**195**	**<.001**	**3.45 (1.18)**	**2.32 (1.30)**
Sympathy (victims)	**−3.73**	**195**	**<.001**	**5.06 (1.32)**	**4.27 (1.65)**
Sympathy (people on parole)	1.79	195	.08	2.74 (1.59)	3.16 (1.74)
Current Laws Harsh on Crime	0.77	195	.44	3.55 (1.15)	3.69 (1.40)
Bodily autonomy	0.14	194	.89	4.56 (1.15)	4.58 (1.27)
Marijuana legalization	−0.62	195	.54	77% (0.42)	73% (0.43)

Note. Analyses were conducted using a series of independent samples *t* tests. Lines in bold indicate effects significant at the $p = .05$ level.

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preexisting attitudes and political beliefs are more important for more controversial bills.

Emotional processes were also more important in Study 2. General sympathy mediated the effect of bill condition on support. It is important to note that the effects of the mediation analysis should be approached with caution as mediation using cross-sectional data can often produce biased results (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Regardless, the role sympathy has in the relationship between eponymous legislation and support for a bill warrants further investigation.

However, both Study 1 and Study 2 were unable to disentangle whether increased support for eponymous legislation was being driven by the provision of a victim's name, a victim's story, or both. The joint presentation of name and story is more realistic to what actual voters might see but makes it difficult to isolate effects psychologically. Therefore, we conducted Study 3 to separate the effects of the victim's name and story.

Study 3

Study 3 was designed to replicate and improve on Studies 1 and 2 by isolating the effects of the victim's name and story. In the previous two studies, eponymous legislation was manipulated using both the name and the narrative. Therefore, it was impossible to determine if each factor alone increased bill support or if they were needed jointly.

Method

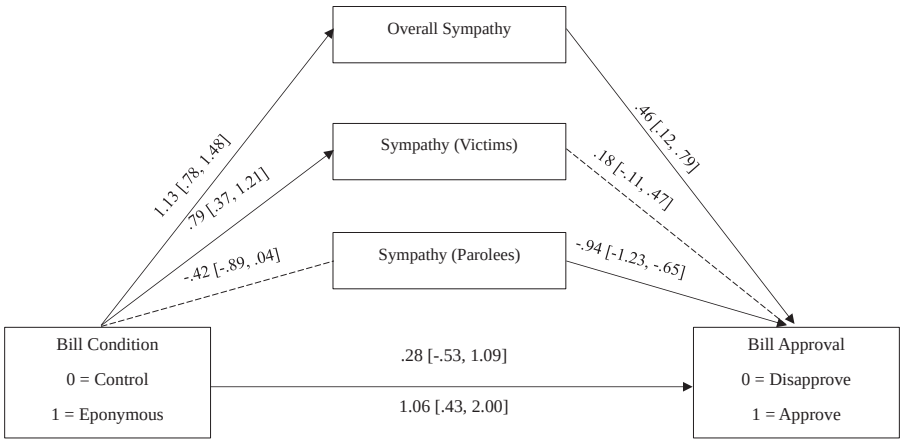
Transparency and Openness

All materials and measures are available to view on the OSF at https://osf.io/3my4w/ and were considered exempt by the Institutional Review Board at Univeristy of Texas at El Paso.

Participants

Participants in Study 3 were 392 undergraduate students from the psychology research participant pool at a large Southwestern university who received course credit for participating. We returned to using an undergraduate sample based on resource constraints and because the basic patterns observed in the undergraduate sample in Study 1 replicated to the national community sample in Study 2,

Figure 3
Study 2: General Sympathy Mediates Effect of Bill Condition on Bill Approval



Note. Solid lines indicate significant effects; dotted lines indicate insignificant effects. General sympathy mediated the effect of bill condition on bill approval.

suggesting they are likely robust across participant characteristics. We again arrived at this sample size based on resource availability (Lakens, 2022). We excluded participants who could not accurately describe the bill they read ($n = 27$). Therefore, the final sample included 365 participants (86–98 per condition). Sensitivity analyses in G*Power 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that this sample size provided us with 80% power to detect effects moderate effects for the main and omnibus effects in our major logistic regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA) analyses ($OR = 1.82$, $\eta^2 = .02$). See Table 1 for full demographic information.

Design

Study 3 followed a 2 (bill name: eponymous vs. control) × 2 (bill narrative: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. The main outcome was bill approval. We also measured dehumanization and sympathy as consistent with Study 2.

Materials and Procedure

The materials and procedure in Study 3 mirrored Study 2 exactly with one change: participants were randomly assigned to manipulations of the bill name and narrative separately. For bill name, participants either read the eponymous bill (Alyssa's Bill) or the control bill, Bill 124(a). For bill narrative, participants either read Alyssa's narrative (described in Study 2) or no additional narrative.

Results

Support for the bill in Study 3 was again high (77%). In order to test the effects of victim's name and narrative separately, we modified the analyses from χ^2 tests to logistic regressions and from independent samples t tests to independent samples ANOVAs. Support for the bill in Study 2 was again high but not as high as we observed in Study 1 (70%). Unless otherwise indicated, analyses were conducted in the same way as Study 1. None of the attitudes correlated with experimental condition in Study 3 (see Table 5 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/). We also tested Hypothesis 2 using the scaled outcome variable through a linear regression, but the results were similar (see Table 6 in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/). Deidentified data for Study 3 are available on the OSF at https://osf.io/3my4w/.

Hypothesis 1: Victim's Story and Name Increased Bill Support

As expected, victim's story significantly increased bill support (82%) compared to no story (70%) in the initial model (Hypothesis 1a; see Table 7, Step 1). Similarly, the victim's story also increased continuous support compared to no story, $F(1, 361) = 29.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$ (see Figure 4, Panel B).

There was partial support for the effect of victim's name. Victim's name did not significantly influence dichotomous bill support (79%) compared to no name (72%; Hypothesis 1a; see Table 7, Step 1). However, the victim's name resulted in significantly increased continuous support compared to no name, $F(1, 361) = 4.82$, $p = .029$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (see Figure 4, Panel B).

Interestingly, including the interaction between victim's story and victim's name in the logistic regression model was not significant, but also accounted for too much variability in the model and resulted in the main effect of victim's story becoming not significant (see

Table 6
Study 2: Effect of Eponymous Bill on Frequency of Open-Ended Response Categories

Code	χ^2	*df*	*p*	φ	Percent of participants mentioning category: Control	Eponymous
Victim's story	10.54	1	.001	.23	0	11
Bill name	1.02	1	.312	.07	1	3
Bill components	2.28	1	.131	.11	13	22
Bill outcomes	1.08	2	.58	.07		
Good					32	29
Bad					10	7
Deterrence	3.56	3	.31	.13	8	4
Prevent future victims	**9.28**	**1**	**.010**	**.22**	**11**	**26**
Unsure	**5.42**	**1**	**.020**	**.17**	**2**	**10**
Need more information	1.96	1	.16	.10	2	6
Personal rights	0.96	1	.326	−.07	19	13
Impractical	1.23	1	.27	−.10	10	6
Taxes	2.88	1	.09	−.12	5	1
Not cost effective	4.77	2	.09	.15	8	3
Accountability	**3.99**	**1**	**.046**	**−.14**	**8**	**2**
Rehabilitation	3.29	2	.19	.13		
Would rehabilitate					4	8
Would not rehabilitate					2	0
Conditional approval	0.00	1	.990	.001	3	4
Recidivism	4.22	2	.12	.14		
Would reduce					12	5
Would not reduce					0	1

Note. Full code book guidelines are available as the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/. Lines in bold indicate effects significant at the $p = .05$ level.

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Table 7

Experiment 3, Hypotheses 1 and 2: Effects of Bill Name, Narrative, Attitudes, and Emotions on Bill Support (Logistic Regression)

Variable	Summary of results ($N = 365$)					
	B	*SE*	Wald	*df*	*p*	Exp (*B*)
Step 1—bill condition						
Narrative	**−0.68**	**0.26**	**6.72**	**1**	**.010**	**0.51**
Named bill	−0.26	0.26	0.98	1	.321	0.78
Constant	**−0.80**	**0.21**	**14.79**	**1**	**<.001**	**0.45**
Step 2—interaction						
Narrative	−0.55	0.36	2.34	1	.126	0.58
Named bill	−0.14	0.34	0.18	1	.668	0.87
Narrative × Named Bill	−0.27	0.52	0.27	1	.603	0.76
Constant	−0.85	0.23	13.26	1	<.001	0.43
Step 3—attitudes						
Narrative	−0.53	0.36	2.13	1	.144	0.59
Named bill	−0.16	0.34	0.22	1	.642	0.86
Narrative × Named Bill	−0.25	0.53	0.22	1	.641	0.78
Current Laws Harsh on crime	0.19	0.12	2.37	1	.124	1.21
Right to bodily autonomy	−0.09	0.12	0.58	1	.445	0.92
Constant	−1.08	0.70	2.36	1	.124	0.34
Step 4—emotions						
Narrative	−0.48	0.38	1.55	1	.213	0.62
Named bill	−0.22	0.34	0.42	1	.519	0.80
Narrative × Named Bill	−0.14	0.54	0.06	1	.803	0.87
Current Laws Harsh on crime	0.21	0.13	2.43	1	.119	1.23
Right to bodily autonomy	−0.08	0.12	0.40	1	.526	0.93
Dehumanization (crime victims)—animalistic	0.09	0.20	0.22	1	.643	1.10
Dehumanization (crime victims)—mechanistic	−0.39	0.26	2.20	1	.138	0.68
Dehumanization (people on parole)—animalistic	−0.20	0.22	0.83	1	.363	0.82
Dehumanization (people on parole)—mechanistic	−0.05	0.27	0.03	1	.856	0.95
Sympathy general	0.06	0.10	0.31	1	.580	1.06
Sympathy toward victims	−0.21	0.13	2.70	1	.100	0.81
Sympathy toward people on parole	0.11	0.14	0.61	1	.434	1.11
Constant	1.23	1.41	0.77	1	.382	3.42

Note. Approval was coded such that 0 indicated disapprove and 1 indicated approve. Step 1: $\chi^2(2) = 7.94$, $p = .019$, $-2LL = 370.91$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .02$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .03$; Step 2: $\chi^2(1) = 0.27$, $p = .603$, $-2LL = 370.64$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .02$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .04$. Step 3: $\chi^2(2) = 2.68$, $p = .263$, $-2LL = 367.97$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .03$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .05$. Step 4: $\chi^2(7) = 7.07$, $p = .421$, $-2LL = 360.90$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .05$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .08$. Final model: $\chi^2(12) = 17.96$, $p = .117$. Lines in bold indicate significant effects ($p < .05$).

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Table 7, Step 2). The interaction did not significantly influence continuous bill support, $F(1, 360) = 0.38$, $p = .54$, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Hypothesis 2: Victim's Story Increased Sympathy

Partially consistent with expectations (Hypothesis 2c), the bill with a narrative resulted in significantly higher sympathy toward crime victims ($M = 4.60$ [4.46, 4.75], $SE = 0.07$) than the bill without a narrative ($M = 3.96$ [3.82, 4.11], $SE = 0.07$; see Table 8 for ANOVA results for all analyses). However, contrary to expectations, there were no other significant effects. Victim's name did not significantly influence general sympathy. And there was no significant effect of bill name or narrative on dehumanization of crime victims (Hypothesis 2a) or people on parole (Hypothesis 2b), or sympathy toward people on parole (Hypothesis 2d).

Hypothesis 3: Mediation Not Tested

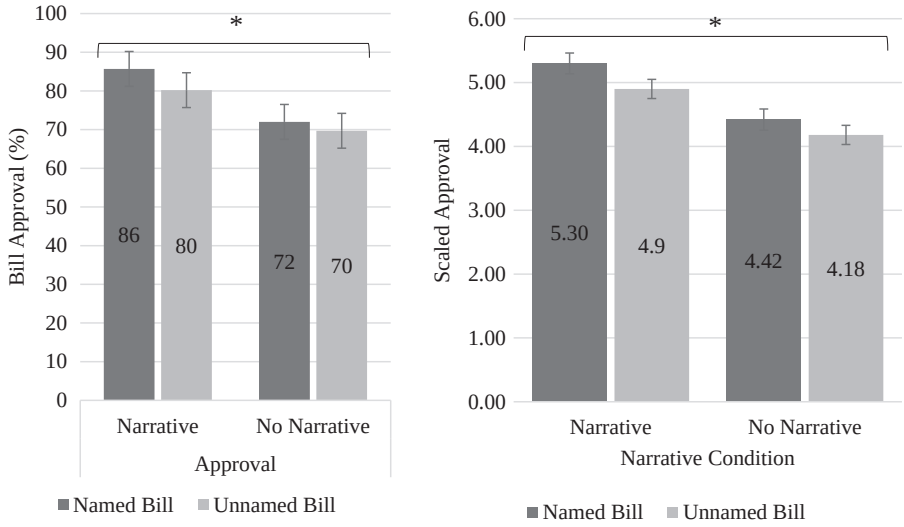
As our cognitive and affective measures were not significantly associated with the overall voting outcome, mediation analyses were not indicated in Study 3.

Exploratory Analyses: Reasoning

As in Studies 1 and 2, we explored participants' open-ended responses concerning their reasoning to vote for or against the proposed bill. This process was more difficult in Study 3, as a large portion of participants did not elaborate on their reasoning in any way matching the code book used for Studies 1 and 2. Across the 18 categories of codes, 15 of the categories were mentioned in fewer than 5% of all responses. To account for this, we the irrCAC package in R (Gwet, 2019) to conduct assessment of Gwet's AC as a measure of rater agreement, which can help account for low incidence in ratings. Across all categories, Gwet's AC was high, AC_1s > .90.). However, similar to Study 2, the most-mentioned category across responses was concerns for public safety/preventing future accidents from occurring (17%, $n = 62$). Using χ^2 analyses, we found that this consideration was influenced by victim narrative, but not victim name. Participants in the narrative condition ($n = 41$) were significantly more likely to consider public safety than participants in the no narrative condition ($n = 21$), $\chi^2(1, 332) = 7.93$, $p = .005$. However, there was no significant main effect of

Figure 4

Study 3: Eponymous Bills Receive More Support Than Control Bills for Both Dichotomous Approval (Left) and Scaled Approval (Right)



Note. Error bars indicate standard error.
* $p < .05$.

victim name on the mention of public safety, $\chi^2(1, 332) = 2.74$, $p = .10$.

Discussion

Study 3 provided further replication that participants were more likely to support an eponymous bill than a control bill. However, it expanded on the previous findings by demonstrating that most of this support could be explained by the inclusion of a victim's narrative, not just the victim's name. Including a narrative significantly increased bill support both dichotomously and on a scale relative to a bill without a narrative. Including the victim's name only increased bill support on the scale; the effects on the dichotomous measure were marginally significant (in the χ^2 analysis) and not significant (in the logistic regression also including narrative). Interestingly, there was no significant interaction between victim's name and narrative on any of the outcome variables. Therefore, it seems likely that the effect of increased support for eponymous bills is primarily driven by victim's story, which is consistent with the research on the importance of stories.

However, the cognitive and affective effects were not replicated in Study 3. The victim's narrative increased sympathy toward victims, but there were no other effects on sympathy, humanization, or dehumanization.

Overall Discussion

Across three studies, we found consistent evidence that eponymous legislation—particularly bills accompanied by a victim's narrative—increases public support. These effects held across diverse policy contexts and samples and remained significant even after controlling for relevant preexisting attitudes. Together, these studies demonstrate the power of emotionally compelling narratives in shaping support for legislation.

Eponymous Legislation Increased Bill Support (Hypothesis 1)

As expected, all three studies found that having an identifiable victim increased support for the bill compared to the control bill. This effect was robust and occurred even after controlling for relevant attitudes. These findings suggest that stories are powerful and can be a driving factor in increased support, even for bad policies (e.g., CCT). Increased support for eponymous bills occurred independent from relevant attitudes, indicating that the response might occur regardless of the content of the bill.

Nevertheless, this study also identified a potential benefit of eponymous legislation: increased comprehension of complicated policies. Our materials were directly adapted from real legislation, which can be difficult to understand. In Study 1, several of the participants in the control condition reported that they were confused by the bill and voted in the opposite direction of their stated reasoning. Participants in the eponymous condition did not show the same confusion, likely because the victim's narrative provided context that eased comprehension of the bill. Although this effect was not replicated in Studies 2 and 3, it might be because the bill in those studies was more straightforward. Importantly though, we did not directly assess bill comprehension. Thus, more research should investigate whether context, such as the eponymous narrative, helps people understand legislation. Such research could help guide recommendations about how to provide a narrative that will aid public comprehension while not unduly increasing support for bad law by evoking emotions. This research could also be instructive for how to provide summaries and other materials that will aid voters in understanding the proposed policies, potentially without political bias. Particularly because the only context voters might be given currently is partisan advertisements.

The results from Study 3 further clarify that the role of narrative is stronger than the role of the victim's name alone. Nevertheless, just

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Table 8
Study 3, Hypothesis 3: Effects of Victim's Name and Victim's Story on Sympathy and Dehumanization

Variable	*F*	*df*	*p*	η^2
Animalistic dehumanization of crime victims		357		
Victim's name	0.25	1	.62	.00
Victim's story	0.80	1	.37	.00
Name × Story	0.11	1	.74	.00
Mechanistic dehumanization of crime victims		359		
Victim's name	0.02	1	.89	.00
Victim's story	0.48	1	.49	.00
Name × Story	2.99	1	.09	.01
Animalistic dehumanization of people on parole		360		
Victim's name	0.41	1	.52	.00
Victim's story	3.53	1	.06	.01
Name × Story	1.00	1	.32	.00
Mechanistic dehumanization of people on parole		360		
Victim's name	0.80	1	.37	.00
Victim's story	0.55	1	.46	.00
Name × Story	1.42	1	.24	.00
General sympathy		361		
Victim's name	0.39	1	.54	.00
Victim's story	0.81	1	.37	.00
Name × Story	0.84	1	.36	.00
Sympathy toward crime victims		361		
Victim's name	0.84	1	.36	.00
Victim's story	**37.37**	**1**	**<.001**	.00
Name × Story	0.00	1	.99	.00
Sympathy toward people on parole		362		
Victim's name	0.78	1	.38	.00
Victim's story	0.88	1	.35	.00
Name × Story	1.42	1	.23	.00

Note. Separate analyses were conducted for each of the dependent variables, each of which included the main effects of bill name, narrative, and their interaction. Lines in bold indicate significant effects ($p < .05$).

having the bill named after a victim increased scaled bill support compared to the control bill. Thus, even a subtle form of eponymous legislation, such as naming a bill after a victim without an accompanying narrative, might be persuasive alone. However, when both name and narrative were included in the model, it was clear that the narrative primarily drove the effects.

Eponymous Legislation Increased Sympathy (Hypothesis 2)

This series of studies also examined how having a victim's name and narrative influenced cognitive and affective responses of dehumanization and sympathy. Findings suggest that eponymous legislation, specifically the victim's story, increases sympathy. In Study 2, the eponymous legislation increased sympathy; in Study 3, the victim's story but not the victim's name increased sympathy. Unfortunately, we had not yet considered sympathy as a potential emotional mechanism when conducting Study 1, and therefore do not have a measure of sympathy in Study 1. But the results from Studies 2 and 3 suggest that the victim's story increases sympathy.

Although sympathy was an important factor, we did not find support for our predictions about humanization and dehumanization. Eponymous legislation did not influence humanization of the victim nor dehumanization of the perpetrator in any of the three studies. This suggests that sympathy rather than shifts in perceived humanity is the more relevant psychological pathway.

Sympathy Might Mediate the Effect of Eponymous Legislation on Bill Support (Hypothesis 3)

We were also interested in whether sympathy and dehumanization mediated the effect of eponymous legislation on bill support, but the results were mixed. In Study 2, sympathy mediated the effect of eponymous legislation on bill support. In Study 3, sympathy was not associated with voting, so the mediation was not warranted.

Legal Concerns

These findings provide empirical support for legal commentators' concerns that eponymous legislation results in unwarranted public support for bills (Frank, 2016; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Hampson, 2013; B. C. Jones, 2012; Pason et al., 2017). Taking these concerns to the extreme and in relation to CCT, these findings raise concerns that eponymous legislation might drive increased support for bad law. There are three primary concerns. First, law is supposed to be general, but eponymous bills are often designed quickly in response to a specific victim's story. When a law is enacted in response to a specific event, it is possible that it is not sufficiently general.

Second, the eponymous legislation might receive unwarranted support based on emotion rather than rationality. Both Studies 2 and 3 increased sympathy, and sympathy mediated the effects of eponymous legislation in Study 2. Thus, it is clear that at least some of the reaction to bills with a victim's narrative is an emotional response that seems to be altering voting behavior.

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Third, eponymous policies might be ineffective. The ineffectiveness of the policies is a main concern in CCT research but was not directly examined in these studies. However, Amelia's Law (the policy used as a basis for Studies 2 and 3) required transdermal monitoring of people on parole. Not only was this law expensive and burdensome and had major hurdles in its enactment (we cannot find evidence that it has ever been successfully enacted), but the law arguably would not have prevented Amelia's death. In the control condition for Experiment 2, several of our participants recognized that this bill might not be practical, cost-effective, or even protect the public. However, no one in the eponymous conditions had these concerns. At the extreme, eponymous laws can be harmful. For example, some of the eponymous sex offender registration laws have resulted in limited reductions in crime but large increases in rates of homelessness, unemployment, and recidivism for the people who are subject to them (Budd & Mancini, 2016).

Limitations and Future Directions

The present studies found consistent support for the hypothesis that eponymous legislation received greater support than bills without a victim's name and narrative. We identified and tested three possible mechanisms, but results were not consistent—in Study 2, there was support for sympathy driving the effects, but the results were not replicated in Study 3; dehumanization/humanization were not significant in any of the studies. Therefore, future research could further explore the mechanism driving the effect. In addition to further examining sympathy, future research could test other cognitive biases, such as the availability heuristic. It is possible that the victim's narrative increases the salience of a low-probability event, resulting in participants overestimating how problematic the issue is. Future research could directly examine the availability heuristic or other cognitive biases as a possible mechanism.

Alternatively, effects might be driven by people interacting more with the eponymous bill than the control bill. Although this is arguably similar to real life—voters often do not have more than a proposed bill in front of them, but they might have additional context for highly publicized eponymous bills from the media—future research should aim to disentangle these effects. One option would be to compare the eponymous condition to one in which the general need for the law is described. Although this might be less realistic given that voters are not often informed of the reason for the law unless it is highly publicized (as eponymous legislation tends to be), it would give further insight into whether it is mere interaction with the information that matters. Moreover, this design could allow for a further examination of the identifiable victim effect through providing statistical information, rather than a specific victim.

In the future, researchers should also examine other samples to see if perceptions are the same in other samples. Studies 1 and 3 used an undergraduate sample drawn from a large Southwestern university, which resulted in a high proportion of Latinx participants—a group that tends to be understudied in research—offering a diversity in psychological research is not often found (Henrich et al., 2010). Yet, the sample was also college students who are not necessarily representative of the general population in terms of age, education, and political affiliation. They might be more representative of future generations' beliefs, but we also decided it was important to replicate the findings with a national community sample in Study 2. But the community sample was primarily White and therefore contributes less to diversity of findings in research. Moreover, the community sample had fewer Republicans than is typical in national polls (J. M. Jones, 2023). Such distribution of political attitudes limits the generalizability of the findings.

Although we purposefully opted for less partisan legislation, it is possible that findings might be different for different political groups. Here, attitudes were only important for the slightly more controversial bill, but there was relatively high support for both bills. We also note limitations with the attitudinal measures because the scale reliabilities were on the lower end and attitudes were assessed after the manipulation, creating a potential confound. Across all three studies, only one attitude correlated with condition (see the additional tables in the additional online materials at https://osf.io/3my4w/), so we opted to keep all attitudes in the analyses, but future research could consider assessing general attitudes prior to the manipulation. It would also be interesting to see if the effects hold for more partisan legislation (see Abramowitz, 2010, for a discussion on the polarization of voting behavior along the Democrat/Republican divide). In order to assess how powerful eponymous bills are, it is necessary to assess whether the effect only occurs when political beliefs and attitudes are not driving the decision. Moreover, the bills we used in these studies likely would have little impact on our participants. Thus, future research could also examine whether the effects hold when the policy more directly affects the voter.

Researchers could also attempt to use actual legislators as participants. These studies were built on the community sentiment framework, assessing public support for bills. Although research has found that community sentiment can impact the law, often this support is indirect (J. Chamberlain, 2015). Only a few states allow citizens to directly vote on laws; in most states, citizens vote for legislators who cast the direct votes. Legislators are often responsive to community sentiment (Burstein, 2003; Oldmixon & Calfano, 2007), but future research would benefit from examining the decision making of legislators. Are legislators directly influenced by emotion (e.g., sympathy) as our community sample was? Or does legislator support for these bills only occur when there is overwhelming community support?

Future research could also more fully examine the role of the victim's narrative. Here, we used existing legislation with which participants would likely be unfamiliar. However, often support is driven by a public reaction to the publicized event. Thus, future research could examine how participants were exposed to the narrative to test whether more emotional and/or frequent exposure (such as through news media) to the story further increases support. Additionally, research could examine more political policies that are referred to by name, but not necessarily related to a victim, e.g., DREAM Act, Inflation Reduction Act, Obamacare).

Research should also examine whether the demographic characteristics of the eponymous victim influence decisions. It has been pointed out that the media tends to focus more time and energy into stories of young, white, female victims, while focusing less on, or completely ignoring, stories of other victims (see, e.g., Stillman, 2007; Wood, 2005). Stillman (2007) suggests this stems from a phenomenon called "missing White girl syndrome," which is the tendency for people to react more sympathetically toward young, White, conventionally attractive women. Although this study did not specify the race/ethnicity of the victim, the present

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studies were limited in that we used two bills involving young female victims. Future research should investigate whether victims of other ages, other gender identities, or specified race/ethnicities would elicit similar levels of sympathy and increased bill support as demonstrated here.

Finally, although we found evidence that eponymous bills receive increased support, we did not preregister this study. Therefore, the exclusions and analyses were not constrained by a detailed preregistered plan. This increases the possibility of experimenter bias and chances of false positives. Thus, these findings are preliminary and should be considered tentative. Future research should be conducted examining these effects under the constraints of a detailed preregistration.

Conclusion: Policy Implications

Eponymous legislation is likely to receive increased support relative to policies without a victim's name or narrative attached. Given that many policies identified as CCT are eponymous in nature, these findings suggest that such increased support for eponymous policies can have harmful consequences. Some policies are merely ineffective (e.g., Amelia's law, discussed at the beginning of this article), others are a waste of resources (e.g., AMBER Alerts; Griffin & Miller, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007), while other eponymous policies can be actually harmful (e.g., Megan's Law; DeVault et al., 2016). Although there is a possibility that eponymous policies can actually be beneficial, and there are arguably other benefits (e.g., memorializing a victim, Duvall & Costello, 2021), the increased support independent of the content of the bill raises concern. This study suggests that the concern exists with voters who might vote on such bills. But there are also likely concerns for legislators voting on similar bills, whether because they are individually influenced by the eponymous legislation like the participants in these studies or because they are influenced by the public who are influenced by eponymous policies (J. Chamberlain, 2015; Oldmixon & Calfano, 2007). Ultimately, such eponymous policies can and do have adverse consequences, so as a society we should consider whether their potential costs outweigh the benefits. If so, we might consider limiting policymakers ability to enact eponymous legislation. As a lesser step than banning eponymous policies altogether, it might be necessary to require increased consideration of the financial and collateral consequences of eponymous policies before enactment. In other words, it is likely necessary to ensure the policy is sound and driven by more than emotional response to one story.

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Received May 16, 2025
Revision received September 18, 2025
Accepted September 20, 2025 ■

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