



Between law and conscience: Act legality shapes moral evaluation[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Can legality shape moral judgment? Across four experiments ($N = 1559$), participants judged identical actions as more morally wrong when they were described as illegal rather than “not illegal.” This effect extended to judgments of moral character: individuals who performed illegal actions were evaluated more negatively than those who performed otherwise identical legal actions. The influence of legality was robust across several contexts, emerging even when agents violated the law unintentionally, when laws were imposed by a totalitarian government, and when actions were described as socially accepted by the majority of local residents. At the same time, legality exerted a stronger influence when it aligned with prevailing social norms and among participants who more strongly endorsed respect for authority as a moral good. We propose that people commonly use legality as a heuristic cue when evaluating the morality of actions and actors. Together, these findings suggest that legal frameworks not only reflect public opinion but also shape how people judge the morality of actions and those who perform them.

Can the law shape what people see as morally wrong? Legal systems do more than regulate conduct; they define what is legally permissible, prohibited, and punishable. In many ways, laws can be seen as society's attempt to codify moral principles in service of order, justice, and well-being. Thus, to understand whether legality shapes moral judgment, it is useful to first consider the alternative direction of influence: the ways in which prevailing moral beliefs shape the law. Indeed, prior work reveals that legal outcomes often mirror the moral *zeitgeist* to maintain public support, with many landmark Supreme Court rulings serving as examples of this alignment (Brace & Boyea, 2008; McGuire & Stimson, 2004). These findings suggest that a legal system's legitimacy hinges, at least in part, on its congruence with prevailing moral sentiments (Casillas et al., 2010; Durr et al., 2000). When legal decisions contradict the moral beliefs of the public, the legitimacy of the law can be challenged (Skitka et al., 2009). According to Klarman (2004), judges “rarely hold views that deviate far from dominant public opinion” (p. 6). Consistent with this claim, changes in public opinion have been shown to influence Supreme Court rulings in both the short- and long-term, even when controlling for the impact of broadly influential social forces (e.g., the current political climate; Casillas et al., 2010). Thus, people's moral beliefs may not only guide legal judgments, but serve as a benchmark against which the law's legitimacy is measured.

This alignment between law and morality is also reflected in research on lay legal judgments. People typically follow retributive principles, which track moral culpability, intentionality, and deservingness—rather than just deterrence or other utilitarian considerations—when determining how someone should be punished (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). People's opinions about when a step toward a crime should be considered criminal are linked to their intuitions about liability and punishment, and they frequently assume that the law will follow these intuitions (Darley et al., 1996). In other words, people expect legal rules and punishments to track morally relevant distinctions.

Nevertheless, the relationship between law and morality may also run in the other direction. Beyond reflecting popular moral sentiment, legal rulings may provide information that shapes individuals' moral evaluations. This possibility becomes especially important when legal judgments diverge from prevailing moral beliefs. For example, most Americans (57%) disagreed with the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (Pew Research Center, 2022a), with 61% of Americans stating that abortion should be legal in all or most cases immediately prior to this landmark ruling (Pew Research Center, 2022b). Such cases raise the question of whether legal judgments can shape moral evaluation, including in cases where they do not reflect prevailing public sentiment.

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1. Legal status as a cue to moral evaluation

Legal status can be established through multiple institutional routes. In the United States, for example, legal status is shaped by both legislatures and courts. Congress can enact laws that permit or prohibit actions, while courts can interpret those laws and determine whether they are constitutionally valid. Thus, Supreme Court decisions provide one important context for studying the relation between law and morality, but legislation can also determine whether contested practices are treated as legal or illegal.

Of course, the relation between legality and morality is not limited to the U.S. Supreme Court or to contemporary American law. Across cultural contexts and historical periods, practices once legally tolerated have later become widely condemned. For example, physical violence within families was historically treated differently from otherwise comparable forms of violence, but has increasingly been brought within the scope of criminal law. Similarly, some forms of animal experimentation that were once subject to relatively few constraints are now more explicitly regulated in light of changing welfare standards. These examples suggest that law and morality may shift together over time, raising the question of whether legal change merely reflects moral change or can also help shape it.

Empirical research on whether legal decisions shape public opinion and moral judgment has produced mixed findings. Studies examining Supreme Court decisions have found that legal rulings sometimes shift attitudes in the direction of the decision, sometimes have no effect, and sometimes produce more complex or opposing patterns (Christenson & Glick, 2015; Clark et al., 2024; Egan & Citrin, 2011; Marshall, 1987; Tankard & Paluck, 2017; Unger, 2008). For example, Unger (2008) found that knowledge of a Supreme Court decision shifted people's attitudes in a direction consistent with the Court's decision in one case but in the opposite direction in another. Tankard and Paluck (2017) showed that the Court's 2015 decision supporting same-sex marriage altered perceptions of social norms in line with the ruling, yet did not impact individuals' personal attitudes. Examining the Court's more recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Clark et al. (2024) found that the ruling shaped individuals' personal beliefs about the legality of abortion in a manner consistent with the decision, shifted perceptions of social norms away from the decision, and did not affect judgments about the morality of abortion.

One explanation for these inconsistent findings is that high-profile legal decisions are embedded in broader social contexts, including media framing, political polarization, and pre-existing moral commitments (Clawson & Waltenburg, 2003). This variability underscores the need for controlled experiments that isolate the causal impact of legal judgments on moral evaluation. Supporting this approach, Bartels and Mutz (2009) demonstrated that participants informed of the Supreme Court's endorsement of a policy position reported stronger endorsement-consistent attitudes than those who were not shown this message. More directly, Mentovich and Zeev-Wolf (2018) found that people's moral judgments of the same conduct shifted depending on whether it resulted in indictment, conviction, exoneration, or case closure without charges. Similarly, Zeev-Wolf and Mentovich (2021) found that people judged the same conduct more favourably when it was legally permitted than legally prohibited, and that this effect emerged for both legislative and judicial decisions. Together, these studies suggest that legal information has the potential to shape moral evaluations.

How might legal decisions shape moral judgments? To the extent that people view legal institutions as legitimate, an act's legal status may serve as a heuristic cue guiding the evaluation of morally ambiguous behaviour. By describing legality as a heuristic, we mean that individuals may substitute the more complex and uncertain question of "is this act morally wrong?" with the simpler, binary question of "is this act illegal?" (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Stanovich, 2018). Many actions are not universally moralized; they may be ambiguous or culturally contested, making direct moral evaluation challenging and effortful. In

such cases, an act's legal status offers a cognitively efficient, easily accessible cue, allowing individuals to rely on the judgments of legal decision-makers when forming their own moral evaluations. Consistent with this theorized influence of act legality on moral evaluation, Barbosa and Jiménez-Leal (2017) found that participants judged actions taken in sacrificial dilemmas as less moral when they were described as having significant legal consequences compared to when unaccompanied by such consequences. More broadly, work on punishment suggests that people can infer an action's wrongness from authority-linked sanctions, particularly when the authority is perceived as legitimate (Radkani & Saxe, 2023).

2. The present research

Previous research examining the influence of legal decisions on moral attitudes has produced mixed results. Notably, Zeev-Wolf and Mentovich (2021) demonstrated that legal permission and prohibition can shift moral judgment in the direction of the law, whether the legal determination came from Congress or the courts. They also found that this effect was not moderated by the perceived legitimacy of Congress and was partly explained by changes in perceived social norms. Building on this body of work, the present research examines the scope and robustness of the relationship between act legality and moral evaluation across four tightly controlled experiments.

Across experiments, participants read descriptions of ten morally relevant actions (see Table 1) performed by a person in a fictitious nation where the action was either legal or illegal. For each action, participants judged both the wrongness of the action and the moral character of the person performing it. Experiment 1 tested whether legality shapes moral evaluations of actions and actors. Given the central role of intentionality in both legal and moral judgment (Cushman, 2008; Fletcher, 1978; Hart & Honoré, 1985; Malle et al., 2014; Young & Saxe, 2011), Experiment 2 examined whether negative moral evaluations of illegal actions depend on individuals' intentionally breaking the law. Experiment 3 tested whether the effect of legality differs depending on whether laws were enacted by a democratic or totalitarian government,

Table 1
Vignettes Presented in Experiments 1–4.

1.	A person goes to the nation of Costaguana. During their time there, this person attends festivities and enjoys smoking a joint.
2.	A person goes to the nation of Laputa, and during a conversation, speaks profanely about God.
3.	A person goes swimming in a public pool while on vacation in the nation of Ambrosia and urinates in the pool during their swim.
4.	A person takes a trip to the nation of Angria and partakes in weeklong protests. One night, they burn the flag of Angria.
5.	A person goes to the nation of Tazbekistan for vacation. While there, they have sex with someone they newly meet.
6.	A person goes to the nation of Erehwon. While there, this person refers to someone by a racial slur.
7.	A person goes to the nation of Avalen to hunt deer, which are abundant in the country.
8.	A person and their newborn child go to the nation of Zembla. While at a public park, this person breastfeeds their baby.
9.	A person goes to the nation of Yejano. When visiting a religious temple, this person dresses provocatively.
10.	A person takes a trip to the nation of Tanbourg and goes grocery shopping to buy snacks. When finished, they abandon the shopping cart on the street, halfway between the store and their hotel.

Note. Vignettes described actions that could plausibly be deemed legal or illegal in a variety of countries. An item characterization pilot study ($n = 94$) revealed that actions described in these vignettes were perceived as violating a variety of moral concerns, particularly those related to the moral foundations of harm, respect for authority, and purity (see Part C of the supplementary materials). Within each experiment, we manipulated the legal status of actions and had participants judge the morality of actions and the individuals performing them. Note, all nations implicated in these vignettes were fictitious to avoid preconceived notions about a country and their laws.

thereby assessing whether the influence of legality varies based on the perceived legitimacy of the lawmaking process. Finally, Experiment 4 examined whether legality influences moral evaluation above and beyond information about social norms (i.e., the social acceptability of an action). One possibility is that people treat legality as diagnostic of an action's morality because they believe laws reflect the moral beliefs of those they govern. Accordingly, we examined the independent and joint effects of legality and social acceptability on moral judgments, including cases in which social norms aligned with an act's legal status and those in which they were in conflict. Across all experiments, we also tested whether the effect of legality varied as a function of participants' endorsement of respect for authority as a moral virtue (Graham et al., 2011), assessing whether the influence of legality is strongest among individuals who view respect for authority as a moral good.

3. Experiment 1

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

For all experiments, we conducted a power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2009) to guide decisions related to sample size. To detect a small effect ($f = 0.20$) with 80% power at a significance level of 0.05, we required at least 200 participants. Across experiments, we oversampled to account for outliers and exclusions. A sample of 508 participants was recruited from a Canadian university's psychology research participant pool. Consistent with our pre-registered intent, we excluded participants ($n = 231$) who failed to correctly respond to a comprehension check question. Notably, this exclusion criterion did not change the interpretation of any significance tests.¹ An additional 49 participants did not provide any responses in one or both experimental blocks and thus could not be included in analyses. Following exclusions, our final sample consisted of 228 participants (80% Female, $M_{age} = 20.25$, $SD_{age} = 3.61$; 43% White/Caucasian). Sensitivity power analyses indicated that this sample provided 80% power to detect a small effect ($d = 0.19$) for the conducted paired-samples t -tests ($\alpha = 0.05$).

3.1.2. Materials and measures

We generated 10 vignettes, each of which described an individual performing a morally relevant action within a fictitious nation (see Table 1). We referred to fictitious nations to avoid biases about existing countries and their laws. These vignettes were used across all four experiments. An item characterization pilot study revealed that the presented vignettes described actions that violated a variety of moral concerns (e.g., harm-, authority-, and purity-based concerns, see Part C of the supplementary materials). In Experiment 1, each vignette included a statement that described the legality of an action (e.g., "Law: Burning the national flag is [illegal/not illegal] in Angria"), constituting our manipulation of each action's legal status. For each presented vignette, participants made two judgments: one regarding the morality of the action described and the other regarding the moral character of the person performing it. Specifically, participants were asked "how morally wrong is this act?" and responded on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (Not at all wrong) to 7 (Very wrong). Likewise, participants were asked "how would you judge this person's moral character?", responding to this question using a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (Extremely immoral) to 7 (Extremely moral).

3.1.3. Moral foundations questionnaire

Participants completed the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ;

¹ For example, legal status was shown to impact moral evaluations of both actions ($t(417) = 11.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$, 95% CI [0.48, 0.69]) and people ($t(417) = 7.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.47]) when including participants who failed the comprehension check in our analyses.

Graham et al., 2011), a 30-item measure assessing five domains of moral concern: harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. Given our focus on act legality, we centered our analyses on the authority domain. Within this domain, participants rated the moral relevance of three items (e.g., "Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority") on a scale from 1 (not at all relevant) to 6 (extremely relevant) and indicated their agreement with three statements (e.g., "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn") on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Responses to these six items were averaged to create each participant's *Authority* score, with higher values indicating a stronger belief that respect for authority is a moral virtue.

3.1.4. Design and procedure

Experiment 1 used a within-subject design whereby participants completed two experimental blocks: One presenting five vignettes describing actions that were said to be legal and another presenting five vignettes describing actions that were said to be illegal. The legal status ascribed to vignettes was randomized. The order of presentation of each block (legal first or illegal first) was counterbalanced. After providing two moral judgments (see *Measures*) to all ten vignettes, participants concluded Experiment 1 by completing the MFQ and answering six demographic questions (age, sex, ethnicity, religion, ideology [social], ideology [economic]).

3.2. Results and discussion

The legal status of actions shaped moral judgments (see Fig. 1). Participants viewed actions as less morally wrong when they were performed in a country in which they were legal ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.00$) as opposed to illegal ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(227) = 8.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$, 95% CI [0.44, 0.72].² Furthermore, the influence of legal status was not constrained to judgments of actions, but also guided moral evaluations of the individuals performing them. That is, despite being described as performing the same act, agents were judged to possess a more favourable moral character when the action they performed was legal ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.74$) compared to illegal ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.86$), $t(227) = 4.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.45]. In sum, Experiment 1 provides initial evidence that legal status shapes how people evaluate the morality of actions and the individuals engaging in them.³

3.2.1. Respect for authority moderates the influence of act legality on moral evaluations

We next examined whether individual differences in respect for authority, as measured by MFQ items, moderated the effect of an action's legal status on moral evaluations. We conducted mixed-effects models with legality (0 = Legal, 1 = Illegal), MFQ authority score, and their interaction as predictors, including random intercepts for subject and vignette to capture baseline differences in moral evaluations across participants and items. These analyses revealed a legality by authority interaction for judgments of actions, $\beta = 0.11$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.17], $t(1726) = 3.33$, $p < .001$, *Marginal R*² = 0.073, but not the agents performing them, $\beta = -0.04$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.03], $t(1726) = -1.18$, $p = .238$, *Marginal R*² = 0.021. These findings suggest that act legality does not shape the moral evaluations of all individuals equally, with the

² This effect was consistent at the item-level: each action was judged as less moral when described as illegal rather than legal, with differences reaching statistical significance for 8 out of 10 items (items 4 and 6 from Table 1 did not show a statistically significant effect of legality; see Part D of the Supplementary Materials for a full report of item-level analyses for Experiments 1–4).

³ Exploratory analyses including data from an item characterization pilot study revealed that the effect of legality on moral evaluations was stronger in the case of less serious moral infractions (see Part C of the Supplementary Materials).

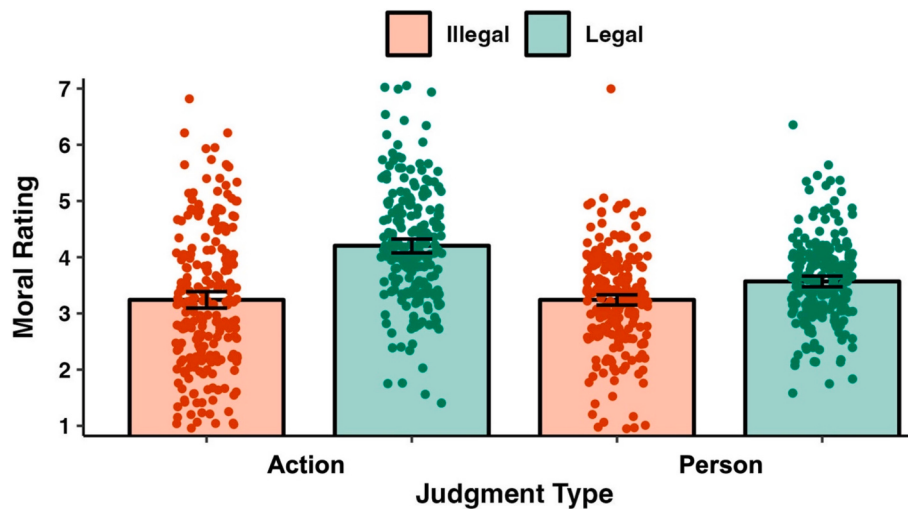


Fig. 1. Experiment 1: Moral evaluations by legal status note. Bars illustrate the mean moral evaluations of participants for actions described as illegal (red) or not illegal (green). Judgment Type indicates whether the moral evaluation was directed at the action or the person performing it. Action judgments were reverse coded so that higher scores represent greater perceived morality across both judgment types. Dots indicate the mean moral evaluations for individual participants. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

difference between judgments of legal and illegal actions increasing as participants' respect for authority grew (see Fig. 2).

4. Experiment 2

Experiment 1 demonstrated that legality influences moral evaluations. In a second experiment, we aimed to replicate and extend this finding by manipulating not only the legal status of actions but also the intent behind agents' law-breaking. Intentionality plays a central role in both legal and moral judgment (Cushman, 2008; Young & Saxe, 2011). For example, the distinction between murder and manslaughter is based on whether the perpetrator intended to cause severe harm. Accordingly, in Experiment 2, we examined whether the effect of illegality on moral judgment depends on whether an individual intentionally violated the law. Additionally, whereas Experiment 1 employed a within-subjects design in which participants evaluated both legal and illegal actions, Experiment 2 used a between-subjects design. This design reduced the salience of the legality manipulation, providing a more stringent test of whether legality influences moral evaluations.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

A sample of 352 participants was recruited from a Canadian university's psychology research participant pool. Consistent with pre-registered exclusion criterion, we excluded data from 100 participants who failed a comprehension check question. These exclusions did not alter the interpretation of any significance tests, with one exception: agents who unintentionally broke the law were no longer judged as possessing a worse moral character than those performing the same actions in a nation where the actions were legal. Two participants did not respond to experimental trials and thus could not be included in analyses. Following exclusions, the final sample included 250 participants (77% Female, $M_{age} = 20.16$, $SD_{age} = 3.59$; 38% White/Caucasian). Sensitivity power analyses indicated that this sample provided 80% power to detect a small effect ($f = 0.20$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$) for the conducted one-way ANOVA ($\alpha = 0.05$) and a small-to-medium effect ($d = 0.44$) for follow-up independent-samples t -tests.

4.1.2. Materials and measures

The materials and measures used in Experiment 2 were identical to those used in Experiment 1 with one exception: actions that were

described as illegal were now accompanied by an additional statement that described the intentionality of the individual breaking the law (e.g., "assume this person broke the law [intentionally/unintentionally]"). No such statement accompanied actions that were said to be legal in the nation they were performed.

4.1.3. Design and procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three between-subject conditions (Legal, Intentional, Unintentional). In the Legal condition, actions described in each vignette were accompanied by an explicit statement indicating that they were "not illegal" in the nation in which they were performed. Conversely, in both the Intentional and Unintentional conditions, all actions were said to be illegal. However, these conditions differed with regards to whether agents were described as breaking the law intentionally or unintentionally. Regardless of condition, all participants were presented with ten vignettes in a random order and, for each vignette, judged the morality of an action and the moral character of the person performing it. Participants concluded Experiment 2 by responding to the MFQ and demographic questions.

4.2. Results and discussion

There was a main effect of condition on participants' action judgments, $F(2, 247) = 30.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.199$ (see Fig. 3). Consistent with Experiment 1, illegal actions were judged as more morally wrong than legal actions ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.83$), regardless of whether the agent performing the action was described as intentionally ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.98$), $t(159) = 8.00$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.26$, 95% CI [0.92, 1.60], or unintentionally ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(166) = 4.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$, 95% CI [0.41, 1.04], breaking the law.⁴ Nevertheless, intentionality did influence judgments of moral wrongness: actions were seen as more morally wrong when agents intentionally broke the law compared to

⁴ This effect was again evident at the item level. For example, across all vignettes, actions were judged as less moral when agents broke the law intentionally than when the same actions were described as "not illegal," with differences reaching statistical significance for 7 of the 10 actions. Although comparisons between legal actions and unintentional illegal actions were somewhat less consistent, this pattern was not driven by a small subset of items, with significant differences being observed for 5 of the 10 actions (see Part D of the Supplementary Materials).

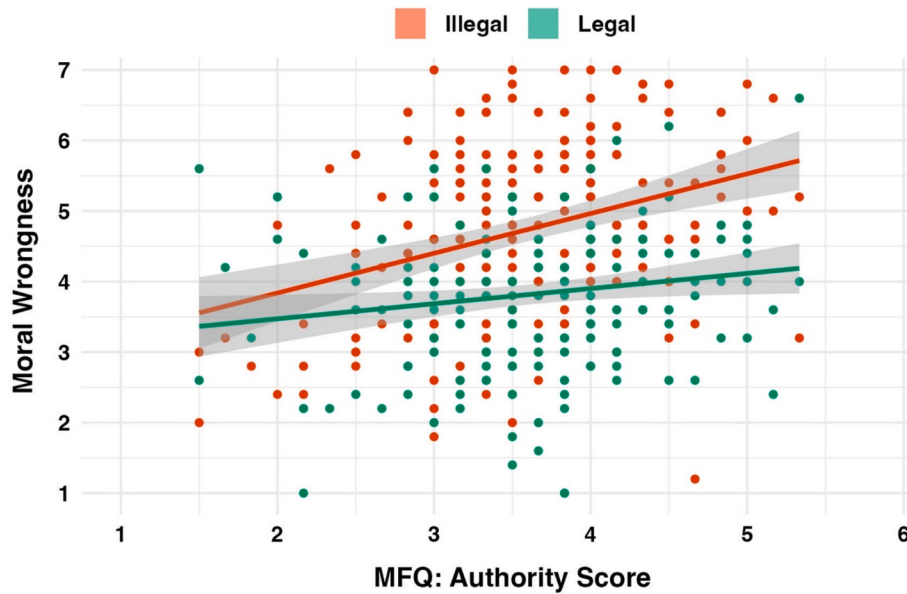


Fig. 2. Experiment 1: Legality by authority interaction note. Figure depicts the linear relationship between participants' Authority score on the MFQ and their judgments of moral wrongness for illegal (red) and legal (green) actions. Dots represent the Authority score and mean moral wrongness judgments of individual participants. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

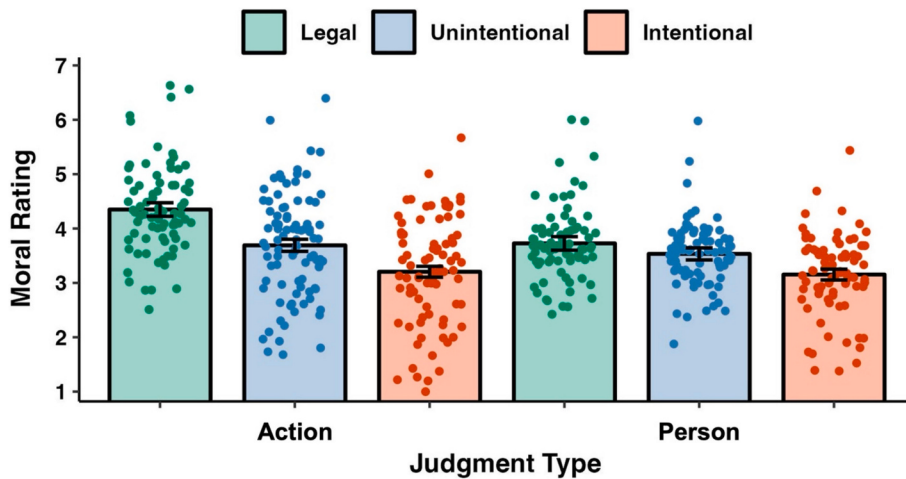


Fig. 3. Experiment 2: Moral evaluations by condition note. Bars illustrate the mean moral evaluations of participants in Legal (green), Unintentional (blue), and Intentional (red) conditions. Action judgments were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate greater perceived morality across Judgment Type. Dots represent the mean moral evaluations of individual participants. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

when they did so unintentionally, $t(169) = 3.26, p = .001, d = 0.50, 95\% CI [0.19, 0.80]$.

There was also a main effect of condition on judgments of moral character, $F(2, 247) = 15.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.112$. Agents who performed an illegal action were viewed as less moral than those performing the same action in a country where it was not illegal ($M = 3.73, SD = 0.68$), regardless of whether the agent breaking the law did so intentionally ($M = 3.15, SD = 0.73$), $t(159) = 5.15, p < .001, d = 0.81, 95\% CI [0.49, 1.13]$, or unintentionally ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.58$), $t(166) = 1.98, p = .049, d = 0.31, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.61]$. Thus, as in Experiment 1, the legal status of actions influenced how participants perceived the moral character of agents performing them. Intentionality also affected judgments of moral character: agents unintentionally breaking the law were judged as more moral than those who broke the law intentionally, $t(169) = 3.79, p < .001, d = 0.58, 95\% CI [0.27, 0.89]$. In sum, despite actions being identical across conditions, participants' moral evaluations

were shaped by both act legality and agent intentionality. Notably, even agents who broke the law unintentionally were judged as having a worse moral character than those performing the same actions in a country where they were legal, highlighting the impact of act legality on moral judgments.

4.2.1. Respect for authority moderates the influence of act legality on moral evaluations

We again examined whether individual differences in respect for authority moderated the effect of experimental condition on moral evaluations. Regression analyses featuring condition (0 = Legal, 1 = Unintentional, and 2 = Intentional), MFQ authority score, and their interaction as predictors of moral judgment revealed a significant condition (Legal vs. Intentional) by authority interaction for judgments of action wrongness, $\beta = 0.33, 95\% CI [0.07, 0.59], t(244) = 2.53, p = .012, Adjusted R^2 = 0.398$, but not agent moral character, $\beta = -0.27,$

95% *CI* $[-0.56, 0.03]$, $t(244) = -1.79$, $p = .074$, *Adjusted R*² = 0.235. Consistent with Experiment 1, the effect of condition was stronger among participants who endorsed stronger authority-related moral concerns (see Fig. 4). Thus, Experiment 2 provides further evidence that the impact of act legality on moral evaluations is most pronounced among individuals who view respect for authority as a moral good.

5. Experiment 3

The results of Experiments 1 and 2 were consistent with individuals using act legality as a heuristic cue when evaluating an action's moral wrongness and a person's moral character. However, the informativeness of an action's legal status, and consequently, its usefulness as a heuristic guide for moral evaluations, may depend on the idiosyncrasies of the law-making process. In Experiment 3, we manipulated not only the legal status of actions but also the process by which laws were created, varying whether they were enacted by democratically elected officials or imposed by a totalitarian government. This design allowed us to test whether the influence of act legality on moral evaluations is restricted to democratic contexts in which citizens contribute to the law-making process.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

A sample of 366 participants was recruited from a Canadian university's psychology research participant pool. As in Experiments 1 and 2, we excluded participants ($n = 112$) who incorrectly responded to a comprehension check question. This exclusion criterion did not change the interpretation of any significance tests. Our final sample consisted of data from 254 participants (81% Female, $M_{age} = 20.64$, $SD_{age} = 4.68$; 46% White/Caucasian). Sensitivity power analyses indicated that this sample provided 80% power to detect ($\alpha = 0.05$): (a) a small-to-medium between-subjects effect of Government ($d = 0.35$), (b) a small within-subjects effect of Legality ($d = 0.18$), and (c) a small interaction effect in the mixed ANOVA ($f = 0.18$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.031$).

5.1.2. Materials and measures

Instead of a statement describing the intentionality of individuals breaking the law (as in Experiment 2), all vignettes, both legal and illegal, were accompanied by a statement providing information about the law-making process. Specifically, participants randomly assigned to the Totalitarian condition were presented the statement "The government is **totalitarian** and power is inherited, such that people have no say in the laws" below each vignette. Conversely, those assigned to the Democratic condition read, "The government is **democratically** elected by the people it governs, giving them say over the laws." Apart from this manipulation, the methodology of Experiment 3 mirrored that of Experiment 1: participants read the same ten vignettes, experienced the same manipulation of act legality, and made the same two moral judgments.

5.1.3. Design and procedure

Experiment 3 employed a 2 (Legality: legal, illegal [within]) $\times$ 2 (Government: democratic, totalitarian [between]) mixed design. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Democratic or Totalitarian condition. Regardless of condition, all participants completed two experimental blocks: one presenting five vignettes describing legal actions and another presenting five vignettes describing illegal actions. The order of presentation of each block was counterbalanced and the legal status ascribed to each vignette was randomized. After providing two moral judgments to all ten vignettes, participants concluded Experiment 3 by responding to MFQ and demographic questions.

5.2. Results and discussion

We examined the influence of Legality and Government on judgments of action wrongness using a 2 (Legality: legal, illegal [within]) $\times$ 2 (Government: democratic, totalitarian [between]) mixed ANOVA (see Fig. 5). There was a main effect of Legality, $F(1, 252) = 105.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.295$. Replicating the results of Experiments 1 and 2, actions labeled as "illegal" ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.26$), were judged as more morally wrong than those labeled "not illegal" ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.04$).⁵ We did not observe a main effect of Government, $F(1, 252) = 0.06$, $p = .803$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.001$, nor a Legality by Government interaction, $F(1, 252) = 2.54$, $p = .113$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.010$.⁶ Illegal actions were seen as more morally wrong regardless of whether an action's legal status was determined by a democratic, $t(134) = 8.81$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.76$, 95% *CI* $[0.57, 0.95]$, or totalitarian government, $t(118) = 5.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$, 95% *CI* $[0.34, 0.73]$.

We conducted the same analyses for judgments of moral character. Again, we observed a main effect of Legality, $F(1, 252) = 31.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.110$. Agents who performed actions in countries where the action was "not illegal" were perceived as having a more favourable moral character ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.71$) than those performing the same actions in countries where the action was illegal ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.84$). There was no main effect of Government, $F(1, 252) = 0.14$, $p = .712$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$, nor a Legality by Government interaction, $F(1, 252) = 0.26$, $p = .610$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$. Agents were judged as less moral when performing actions deemed illegal regardless of whether legality was determined by a democratic, $t(134) = 4.10$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$, 95% *CI* $[0.18, 0.53]$, or totalitarian government, $t(118) = 3.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.36$, 95% *CI* $[0.17, 0.54]$. Thus, we find evidence that the legal status of actions shapes individuals' moral perceptions of both actions and people, not only in democratic countries, but also in totalitarian nations in which citizens were explicitly described as having no input in the law-making process.

5.2.1. Respect for authority and the influence of legality and government on moral evaluations

We explored whether participants' respect for authority interacted with act legality and government type to predict moral evaluations (see Fig. 6). Mixed-effects models featuring Legality (0 = Legal and 1 = Illegal), Government (0 = Democratic and 1 = Totalitarian), MFQ authority score, and their interactions as predictors, as well as random intercepts for subject and vignette, did not reveal evidence of any interactions for judgments of action wrongness or moral character (all $ps > 0.168$). Most notably, legality did not interact with participants' respect for authority to predict moral evaluations (action wrongness: $\beta = 0.05$, 95% *CI* $[-0.03, 0.12]$, $t(2273) = 1.28$, $p = .202$, *Marginal R*² = 0.082; moral character: $\beta = -0.06$, 95% *CI* $[-0.14, 0.02]$, $t(2273) = -1.38$, $p = .169$, *Marginal R*² = 0.023). Likewise, we did not observe a three-way interaction among legality, government type, and respect for authority (action wrongness: $\beta = 0.02$, 95% *CI* $[-0.09, 0.13]$, $t(2273) = 0.35$, $p = .726$; moral character: $\beta = 0.02$, 95% *CI* $[-0.10, 0.14]$, $t(2273) = 0.33$, $p = .744$). Therefore, unlike in Experiments 1 and 2, the

⁵ Again, this effect was consistently observed at the item-level. Collapsing across Government conditions, all actions were judged as less moral when labeled as "illegal" rather than "not illegal," with differences reaching statistical significance for 9 out of 10 actions (item 6 from Table 1 did not show a statistically significant effect of legality, see Part D of the Supplementary Materials).

⁶ A multi-level model assessing the influence of act legality and government type on participants' evaluations of action wrongness did reveal a Legality by Government interaction, $\beta = -0.17$, 95% *CI* $[-0.32, -0.01]$, $t(252) = -2.13$, $p = .034$, *Marginal R*² = 0.051, with act legality having a larger influence on moral judgment when laws were enacted by a democratic as opposed to totalitarian government (see Part C of the Supplementary Materials).

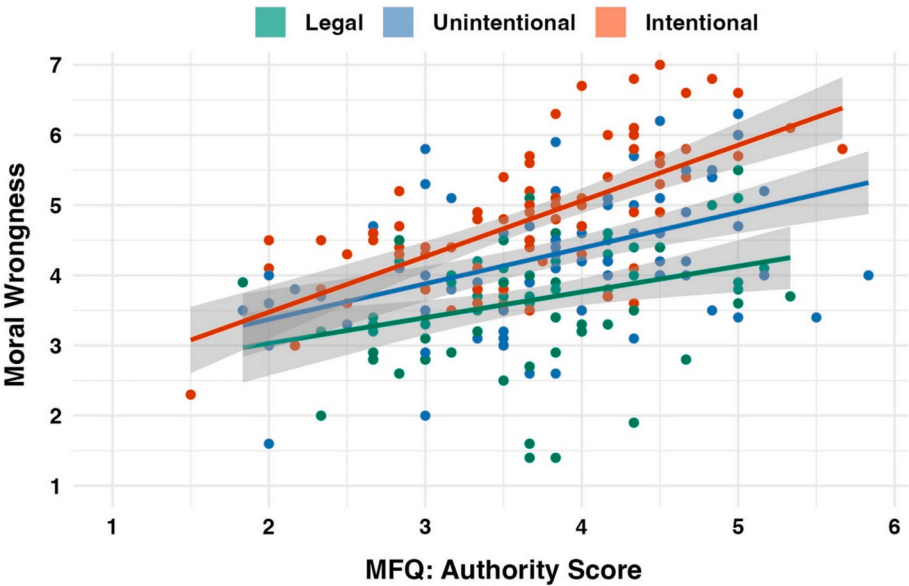


Fig. 4. Experiment 2: Condition by authority interaction note. Figure depicts the linear relationship between participants' Authority score on the MFQ and their judgments of moral wrongness within Legal (green), Unintentional (blue) and Intentional (red) conditions. Dots represent the Authority score and mean moral wrongness judgments of individual participants. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

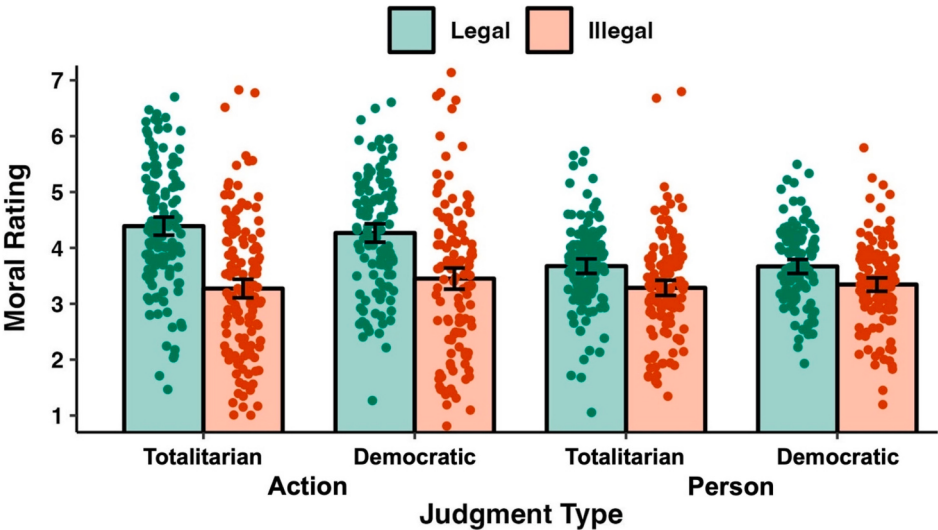


Fig. 5. Experiment 3: Moral evaluations by legality and government type note. Bars illustrate the mean moral evaluations of Legal (green) and Illegal (red) actions. Action judgments were reverse coded so that higher ratings reflected greater perceived morality across Judgment Type. Dots represent the mean moral evaluations of individual participants. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

influence of legal status on moral evaluations in Experiment 3 did not vary as a function of participants' respect for authority.

6. Experiment 4

Experiment 3 revealed that legality influenced moral evaluations even when laws were enacted by a totalitarian government. Thus, even in the absence of a democratic lawmaking process, participants continued to treat an action's legal status as diagnostic of its morality. One possibility is that, regardless of the lawmaking process, people assume that laws generally reflect prevailing social norms and are therefore a useful heuristic cue for moral judgment. Experiment 4 tested this possibility by examining the influence of legality when legal status

aligned with prevailing social norms, conflicted with prevailing social norms, or when no information about social norms was provided. Therefore, this design allowed us to assess whether the influence of legality on moral evaluations depends on its correspondence with the social acceptability of an action.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

We recruited a sample of 333 Canadian residents from the online research platform Prolific. Participants were required to possess a Prolific approval rating of at least 95% and correctly respond to two human verification items before proceeding to the experiment. Consistent with

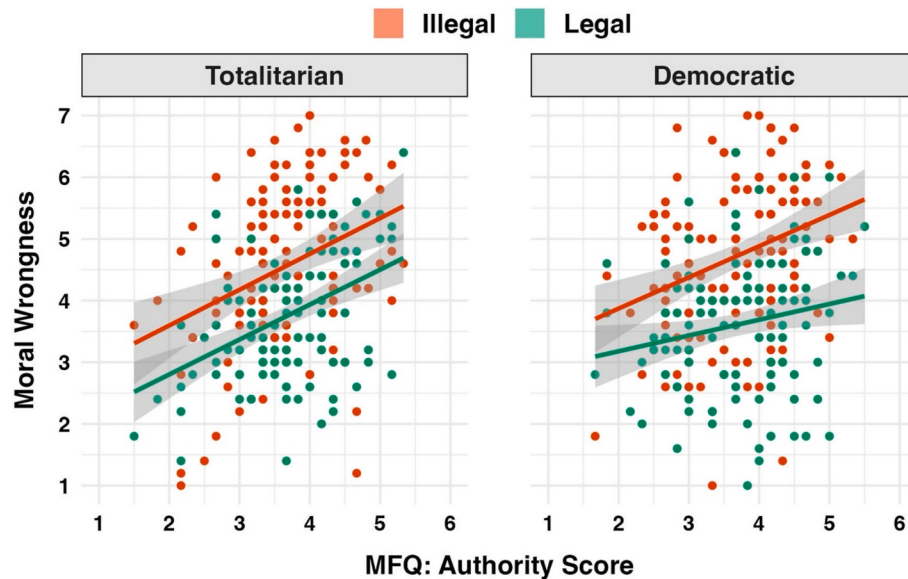


Fig. 6. Experiment 3: Legality by government by authority interaction note. Figure depicts the linear relationship between participants' Authority score on the MFQ and their judgments of moral wrongness for Legal (green) and Illegal (red) actions within Totalitarian (left panel) and Democratic (right panel) conditions. Dots represent the Authority score and mean moral wrongness judgments of individual participants. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

our pre-registered intent, we excluded participants ($n = 12$) who self-reported engaging in inattentive responding. These exclusions did not change the interpretation of any significance tests. Following these exclusions, we retained a sample of 321 participants (51% Female, $M_{age} = 35.82$, $SD_{age} = 11.82$; 47% White/Caucasian). Sensitivity power analyses indicated that this sample provided 80% power to detect ($\alpha = 0.05$): (a) a small-to-medium between-subjects effect of Social Norm condition ($f = 0.17$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.028$), (b) a small within-subjects effect of Legality ($d = 0.16$), and (c) a small interaction effect in the mixed ANOVA ($f = 0.09$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.008$).

6.1.2. Materials and measures

Experiment 4 used the same ten vignettes and the same manipulation of act legality as Experiments 1–3. Unlike these experiments, each vignette in Experiment 4 was accompanied by information about the social acceptability of the described action in the country it was performed. That is, below each vignette, participants were told that “Most people in [country] find this behaviour to be socially [acceptable/unacceptable],” depending on the Social Norm condition they were assigned. Thus, those in the Social Acceptance condition learned that the action described was consistent with prevailing social norms, while those in the Social Disapproval condition learned that a majority of local residents found the action to be socially unacceptable. Participants assigned to the Control condition did not receive any information about the social acceptability of the action performed. Following the presentation of each vignette and accompanying statements describing an act's legality and level of social acceptability, participants were asked to judge the morality of the action (“how morally wrong is this act?”) and the moral character of the individual performing it (“how would you judge this person's moral character?”) as in Experiments 1–3.

6.1.3. Design and procedure

Experiment 4 featured a 2 (Legality: legal, illegal [within]) $\times$ 3 (Social Norm Condition: social acceptance, social disapproval, control [between]) mixed design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three Social Norm conditions. All participants evaluated five vignettes describing legal actions and five vignettes describing illegal actions. The legal status ascribed to each vignette was randomized, as was the order of presentation. After providing moral judgments to all ten vignettes,

participants responded to three items assessing their beliefs about the relationship between act legality, social norms, and moral wrongness. Participants concluded Experiment 4 by completing the MFQ, responding to six demographic questions, and stating whether or not they engaged in inattentive responding.

6.2. Results and discussion

A 2 (Legality: legal, illegal) by 3 (Social Norm Condition: social acceptance, social disapproval, control) mixed ANOVA was used to examine the influence of legality and social norm information on judgments of action wrongness (see Fig. 7). This analysis revealed a main effect of Legality, $F(1, 318) = 180.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.362$. As in Experiments 1–3, participants judged actions as more morally wrong when they were illegal ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.25$) as opposed to “not illegal” ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.20$).⁷ This effect of legality was observed in each social norm condition (all $ps < 0.001$), including in the Control condition in which no social norm information was provided, $t(105) = 7.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$, 95% CI [0.51, 0.94]. We also observed a main effect of Social Norm Condition, $F(2, 318) = 18.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.105$. Participants judged actions to be more morally wrong when informed that they were viewed as socially unacceptable by the majority of local residents ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.23$) compared to when no social norm information was provided ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(211) = 3.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.24, 0.78]. Likewise, participants judged actions to be less morally wrong when told that a majority of people deemed them socially acceptable ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.28$) compared to when no social norm information was provided, $t(212) = 2.33$, $p = .021$, $d = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.59]. We did not observe a Legality by Social Norm Condition interaction, $F(2, 318) = 0.53$, $p = .588$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.003$, suggesting that the influence of legality was not moderated by general social approval or

⁷ This effect was again consistently observed at the item-level. Collapsing across Social Norm condition, all actions were judged as more morally wrong when labeled as “illegal” rather than “not illegal,” with statistically significant differences being observed for 9 out of 10 actions (item 4 from Table 1 showed only a marginally significant ($p = .052$) effect of legality, see Part D of the Supplementary Materials).

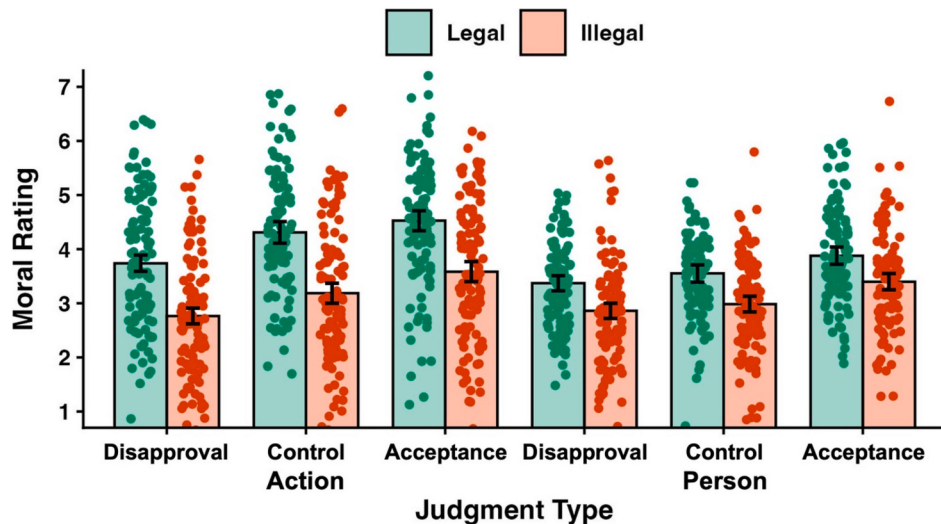


Fig. 7. Experiment 4: Moral evaluations by legality and social norm condition note. Bars illustrate the mean moral evaluations of Legal (green) and Illegal (red) actions. Action judgments were reverse coded so that higher ratings reflect greater perceived morality across Judgment Type. Dots represent the mean moral evaluations of individual participants. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

disapproval. However, act legality was shown to have a larger impact on judgments of act wrongness on trials where social norm information aligned with act legality (i.e., social acceptance for legal actions and social disapproval for illegal actions). A linear mixed-effects model, excluding data from participants in the Control condition, revealed a significant Legality by Congruency interaction, $\beta = -0.78$, 95% CI $[-1.03, -0.53]$, $t(213) = -6.07$, $p < .001$, *Marginal R*² = 0.084. Simple effects analyses revealed that while legality influenced judgments of moral wrongness when aligned with prevailing social norms, $b = 1.71$, 95% CI $[1.28, 2.15]$, $t(26) = 8.10$, $p < .001$, no such effect was observed when legality conflicted with social norms, $b = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.33, 0.54]$, $t(26) = 0.48$, $p = .634$.

Next, we examined whether act legality and social norm information similarly shaped judgments of moral character. A mixed ANOVA again revealed a main effect of Legality, $F(1, 318) = 80.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.201$. Despite performing the same action, individuals were perceived as possessing a superior moral character when the action they performed was legal ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.85$) rather than illegal ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.95$). We also observed a main effect of Social Norm Condition, $F(2, 318) = 15.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.089$. Participants judged individuals' moral character more positively when their actions were deemed socially acceptable by the majority ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.95$), compared to when they were deemed socially unacceptable ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(213) = 5.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$, 95% CI $[0.42, 0.97]$, or when the social acceptability of their actions were unknown ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(202) = 3.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$, 95% CI $[0.26, 0.81]$. Judgments of moral character did not differ between social disapproval and control conditions, $t(204) = 1.66$, $p = .099$, $d = 0.23$, 95% CI $[-0.04, 0.50]$. We did not observe a Legality by Social Norm Condition interaction, $F(2, 318) = 0.20$, $p = .820$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$. However, as in the case of judgments of act wrongness, we did observe a significant Legality by Congruency interaction, $\beta = 0.65$, 95% CI $[0.40, 0.90]$, $t(213) = 5.06$, $p < .001$, *Marginal R*² = 0.046. While act legality influenced judgments of moral character when aligned with prevailing social norms, $b = 0.98$, 95% CI $[0.67, 1.29]$, $t(34) = 6.46$, $p < .001$, no such effect was observed when social norm information contradicted an act's legal status, $b = -0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.37, 0.25]$, $t(34) = -0.39$, $p = .696$. Taken together, we find that both legality and social acceptability shape the degree to which actions and the individuals performing them are viewed as morally wrong. Moreover, the influence of legality was again observed in the absence of social norm information, and was more pronounced when

prevailing social norms were congruent with an act's legal status.

6.2.1. Respect for authority and the influence of legality and social norm information on moral evaluations

Consistent with Experiments 1–3, we examined whether participants' respect for authority interacted with act legality and social norm information to predict moral judgments (see Fig. 8). Specifically, we conducted mixed-effects models featuring Legality (0 = Legal and 1 = Illegal), Social Norm Condition (0 = Control, 1 = Oppose, 2 = Support), MFQ authority score, and their interactions as predictors, and random intercepts for subject and vignette for both judgments of act wrongness and moral character. These analyses revealed significant Legality by MFQ authority score interactions for both judgments (act wrongness: $\beta = 0.11$, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.19]$, $t(2874) = 2.48$, $p = .013$, *Marginal R*² = 0.130; moral character: $\beta = -0.19$, 95% CI $[-0.28, -0.09]$, $t(2874) = -3.99$, $p < .001$, *Marginal R*² = 0.060). As in Experiments 1 and 2, act legality was shown to be more influential among participants who more strongly endorsed respect for authority as a moral virtue, again suggesting that laws do not shape the moral evaluations of all individuals equally. All other interactions, including the assessed Legality by Social Norm Condition by MFQ authority 3-way interactions, were not statistically significant (all $ps > 0.103$).

7. General discussion

Can the law shape what people perceive as morally wrong? Prior work shows that people's moral beliefs influence the lawmaking process (Casillas et al., 2010), yet evidence for the influence of legal judgments on moral attitudes is mixed, and based largely on observational studies examining shifts in public opinion following high-profile Supreme Court decisions (Brickman & Peterson, 2006; Christenson & Glick, 2015; Clark et al., 2024; Marshall, 1987, 1989; Persily et al., 2008; Unger, 2008; although see Barbosa & Jiménez-Leal, 2017; Bartels & Mutz, 2009). The present research addresses this important yet understudied question by experimentally manipulating legality and demonstrating its consistent impact on moral evaluation. Across four experiments, simply labeling an action as illegal—as opposed to “not illegal”—led participants to judge it as more morally wrong. This effect emerged regardless of whether agents were described as breaking the law intentionally, whether the lawmaking process was democratic or totalitarian, and whether actions were described as socially acceptable or unacceptable by the majority.

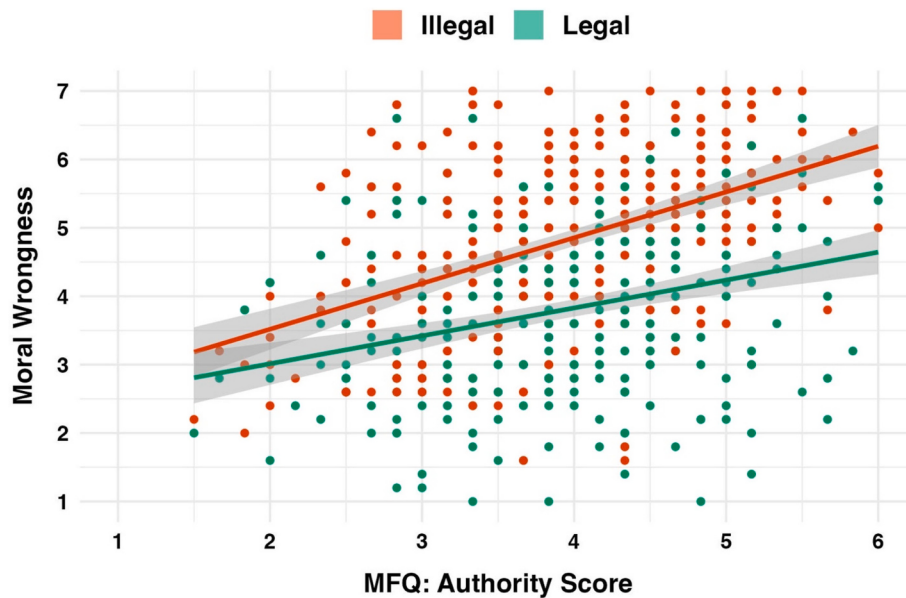


Fig. 8. Experiment 4: Legality by authority interaction note. Figure depicts the linear relationship between participants' Authority score on the MFQ and their judgments of moral wrongness for illegal (red) and legal (green) actions. Dots represent the Authority score and mean moral wrongness judgments of individual participants. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Furthermore, the influence of legality was robust across both within- and between-subjects designs and was not limited to judgments of actions but also extended to perceptions of agents' moral character. Taken together, these findings suggest that legal frameworks not only reflect people's moral attitudes but can also shape them.

Why might legality guide moral judgment? One possibility is that legal status functions as an authority-linked cue to an act's moral status. This interpretation is consistent with Radkani and Saxe's (2023) account of how people learn from punishment. They argue that observers jointly infer from punishment both the wrongness of an act and the motives of the authority imposing punishment. Applied to the present studies, illegality may signal that an authority has classified an act as sanction-worthy. Likewise, illegality may signal that an act is widely regarded as socially unacceptable. To the extent that people believe laws reflect prevailing social and moral norms, they may view an act's legal status as diagnostic of its morality. Whether signalling the moral judgment of an authority or the moral attitudes of the majority, individuals may come to use legality as a heuristic cue for moral evaluation. Thus, when evaluating morally ambiguous actions, people may rely on an act's legal status to quickly and efficiently judge its morality, avoiding more effortful reflective processes (Stanovich, 2018). Of course, we use the term *heuristic* conceptually rather than mechanistically, as we did not directly test implicated cognitive processes (e.g., response time)—an important direction for future research.

According to this account, the influence of legality should depend, at least in part, on the perceived legitimacy of the lawmaking process and the extent to which legal frameworks reflect the moral views of the majority. That is, laws enacted by illegitimate authorities or contradicted by prevailing social norms may be viewed as less diagnostic of an act's morality and therefore less useful as a heuristic cue for moral judgment. Consistent with this account, the influence of legality on moral evaluation was stronger when legal status aligned with prevailing social norms (Experiment 4). This finding is consistent with prior work suggesting that legal decisions can alter moral judgment, in part, by changing perceptions of what others approve or disapprove of (Zeev-Wolf & Mentovich, 2021). However, providing participants with social norm information did not eliminate the influence of legality: legality continued to influence moral judgments in both social acceptance and social disapproval conditions. Thus, although the influence of legality

may be attributable in part to what it signals about prevailing social norms, the present findings suggest that legal status carries moral weight independent of such norms.

In Experiment 3 we examined whether the influence of legality varied depending on whether laws were enacted by a democratic or totalitarian government. Here, the effect of legality did not appear to be sensitive to the type of lawmaking process. Even when laws were enacted by a totalitarian government, participants' moral evaluations were shaped by an act's legal status. Of course, despite the lack of democratic participation, it is possible that participants did not view this lawmaking process as entirely illegitimate or unrepresentative of local norms. Future work could directly measure perceptions of the legitimacy of legal authorities and examine the extent to which these beliefs moderate the influence of legality on moral evaluation.

The present findings also provide insight into for whom legality is most likely to influence moral evaluation. In three of the four experiments, the influence of legality was amplified among individuals who more strongly endorsed respect for authority as a moral virtue. Individuals who place greater moral value on respecting authority may be more likely to view the law as a legitimate source of moral guidance and, consequently, rely more heavily on legal status when evaluating the morality of actions. The present findings also provide initial insight into the types of actions for which legality is most likely to shape moral evaluations. In three of the four experiments, the effect of legality was stronger for actions that participants in an item characterization study judged to be less morally wrong. Thus, legal status may exert relatively little influence when people evaluate actions widely regarded as clear moral violations, instead serving as a more influential cue when the moral status of an action is less certain.

8. Limitations and future directions

Although the present findings were replicated across four experiments, the samples were drawn exclusively from Canadian participants, with Experiments 1–3 relying on undergraduate samples and Experiment 4 using a Canadian Prolific sample. As such, the generalizability of these findings, particularly to non-Western or non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations, remains an open question. Given that moral and legal attitudes are likely to vary

across cultural, political, and legal contexts, future research should examine whether the present findings generalize across cultural and political settings. Additionally, although we used fictitious country names, this approach may not have fully prevented participants from projecting pre-existing beliefs or associations onto these nations.

An interesting direction for future research would be to examine whether intentionality influences moral evaluations of legal actions as it does illegal actions—for example, whether individuals who intentionally comply with the law are judged differently from those whose lawful behaviour is merely coincidental. Furthermore, to more directly assess the role of legal status as a heuristic cue, future research could manipulate or measure individuals' capacity for deliberative moral reasoning (Paxton et al., 2012; Pennycook et al., 2014). Consistent with the proposed framework, we predict that the influence of legality on moral judgments will be amplified when participants are required to make quick, intuitive moral decisions. Future studies could directly test this hypothesis.

9. Conclusion

Across four experiments, we found that legality reliably shaped moral evaluations: actions described as illegal were judged as more wrong, and the people who performed them were judged as less moral. This influence persisted even when laws were broken unintentionally, when they were imposed by a totalitarian regime, and when actions were described as socially acceptable, underscoring the robustness of legality as a cue for moral judgment. At the same time, this effect was strongest among individuals who endorsed respect for authority as a moral virtue, demonstrating that not all people weigh legality equally in their moral reasoning. Together, these findings suggest that legal status shapes how people evaluate both actions and the individuals who perform them. In this sense, the law functions not merely as an enforcement mechanism but as an ongoing influence on moral judgment itself.

10. Open practices

For all experiments, we collected the full sample prior to data analyses and report all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures used. All data and analyses scripts have been made publicly available at the following link: <https://osf.io/f54ya>. Study materials for each experiment can be viewed in the supplementary materials (Part A). All experiments were preregistered through Open Science Framework. These pre-registrations can be viewed via the following links: [Experiment 1](#); [Experiment 2](#); [Experiment 3](#); [Experiment 4](#). There were minor deviations from the preregistrations of Experiments 1–3, which are described in the supplementary materials (Part B).

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Mane Kara-Yakoubian: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jonathan A. Fugelsang:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Alexander C. Walker:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgements

We have no conflicts of interests to disclose. All data, analyses scripts, and study materials have been made available at the following link: <https://osf.io/f54ya>

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2026.104984>.

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