

# Perceptions of Race Among Members of the Egyptian Diaspora in the United States

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## ABSTRACT

The Middle East and North African (MENA) region is rampant with antiblackness: there is an ongoing slave trade of sub-Saharan Africans, inhumane work programs which affect Black Africans, and unchallenged demonstrations of blackface in Egyptian media. Surprisingly no previous research has examined racial perceptions or potential biases among members of the MENA communities. This research aims to test racial perceptions and potential biases among Egyptian populations living in the United States. To test implicit racial perceptions, a vignette study was distributed to members of an Egyptian church population. In the vignette, participants are presented with a paragraph describing a man who received a shortened sentence for committing a nonviolent crime and asked follow-up questions, such as if they believe the sentence is fair. The race of the man randomly and equally alternates among White, Black, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern. Data analyses show that participants were completely unlikely to find the sentence unfair for the Middle Eastern man, and more likely to find shorter sentences to be fair if they were college-educated. Data collection is ongoing and can provide more data and potentially statistically significant correlations in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

Turn on the TV in an Egyptian country, and you will see unchallenged depictions of blackface and stereotypical portrayals of Black Africans rampant in television shows, movies, and music videos. But isn't this the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Racially prejudiced depictions of Black Africans can be traced back over one hundred years in Egyptian media, but unlike in the West, they have continued to pervade mediums of entertainment. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Egypt dominates the entertainment industry and supplies neighboring countries with television shows, movies, and music, and the influence of Egyptian cinema and art in the region cannot be understated. If disturbing depictions such as these can be widely distributed with little to no backlash, what is the state of racial perceptions in the Middle East?

When we consider the broad history of the region, prejudicial depictions are hardly surprising. The Middle East is home to a 1300-year-old slave trade, which is ongoing in the region and documented by King in "Black Arabs and African migrants: between slavery and racism in North Africa" (2019).

King describes in detail the origins of anti-blackness in the MENA region, beginning with the introduction of Black Africans as slaves (2019). Slavery is ongoing today, through the trafficking of sub-Saharan Africans (Global Slavery Index) as well as the restrictive and inhumane regulations of the kafala system, a legal sponsorship work program which employs mainly Asian and sub-Saharan women (Kakande, 1980). Bias media depictions are a side effect of a much larger, deeply-seated issue and represent the ongoing prejudices maintained against Black Africans.

## INTRODUCTION

There is an obvious need for examining racial perceptions among members of this region of the world. Without research, there is no way to measure how MENA populations feel about different races. But no research examining racial perceptions exists in the MENA region or among diaspora communities. To fill that need, this project looked at perceptions of race among members of the Egyptian diaspora living in the US.

The process of measuring implicit biases is best conducted using methods through which the respondent is not aware of the precise nature of the question. Vignette studies are one way to measure attitudes or biases by presenting participants with scenarios wherein the variable of race can be manipulated among different versions of the vignette to determine if potential biases exist, as demonstrated by Haider et al (2011).

## METHODS

Participants were recruited with the help of a gatekeeper who distributed calls for the survey among Egyptian members of a church population through email. An online survey in English and Arabic created with Qualtrics was distributed featuring a vignette. Unbeknownst to participants, the race of the person in the paragraph randomly and equally alternated among four racial categories:

**M.R., a 6'4"/1.93m, 190lb/89.8kg, 35-year-old (White/Black/Middle Eastern/Hispanic) man, was arrested for breaking into a corner store and stealing about \$2,000 in cash. M.R. was caught on security cameras entering the store after hours and removing wads of cash from the safe, which he managed to open with a crowbar. He has no prior convictions or arrests. Due to this being his first criminal charge, a judge decides to reduce the typical sentence by 6 months in a county jail.**

Participants were asked if they found the sentence fair and asked to elaborate on why or why not. They also provided information on factors they believed should be the most important in a judge's decision, if they had been victims of property crime, and if they were aware of crimes against members of their community.

Data collection is ongoing, but responses received so far have been uploaded into SPSS for analysis. Crosstabs and a Chi Square test were conducted to determine possible correlations among responses.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

At this point in the study, 74 partial responses were recorded. Ages ranged from 18 to 87, and the average age was 44 while the median was 43. Most respondents were college-educated, with 40% having completed a bachelor's degree, 18.5% a masters, 18.5% a professional degree, 12.3% a doctoral degree, 6.2% some college but no degree, and 4.6% high school graduates. Males made up 43.8% or 28 respondents, females 56.3% or 36, and nonbinary 0.

## RESULTS

Most respondents were not victims of property crime (67.7%) but 32.3% were victims. About 23.4% said there was an event where an Egyptian was a victim of a crime which impacted their perceptions or crime, and 76.6% did not.

### Analyses

Crosstabs analyses were conducted comparing various variables, such as the race of the man in the vignette and the decision the respondent made (Figure 1). Chi square analyses were conducted to determine if the findings were statistically significant. Notable results include:

- Every respondent answered that the Middle Eastern man should receive the shorter sentence, a statistically significant correlation ( $\chi^2 = 6.498, p < .10$ ) which did not occur in any other racial group (Figure 1).

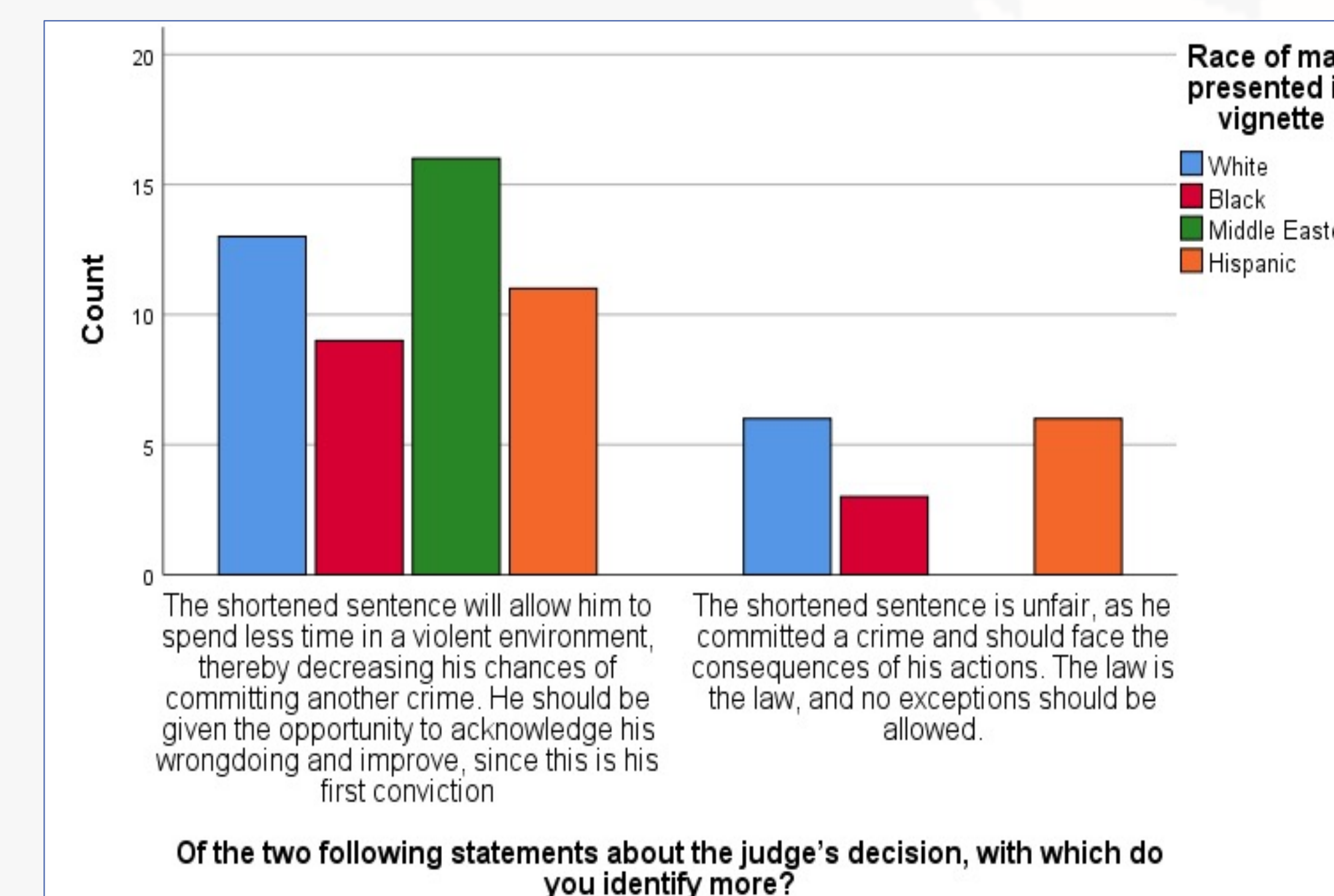


Figure 1: Frequency of Sentence Perception Based on Race Note:  $\chi^2 = 6.498, p < .10$

- Participants were more likely to say that the White or Hispanic man should have a longer sentence than the Black man, a statistically significant correlation ( $\chi^2 = 6.498, p < .10$ ).
- The more college educated a participant was, the more likely he/she was to select that the shorter sentence is fair, a statistically significant correlation ( $\chi^2 = 8.867, p < .10$ ) illustrated in Figure 2.
- Participants were more likely to select the presence or absence of violence as the primary deciding factor for the Black man above any other race, although the Chi square for this crosstabs analysis was not significant.
- Gender, political affiliation, and knowledge of crimes against the Egyptian community also provided no statistical correlation that influenced participant responses.
- In written responses, there was one reference to the White man potentially receiving a shorter sentence due to racial privilege.
- There was also a written response which stated that crimes in which Arabs are perpetrators are "thrown under the umbrella of racism."

## RESULTS

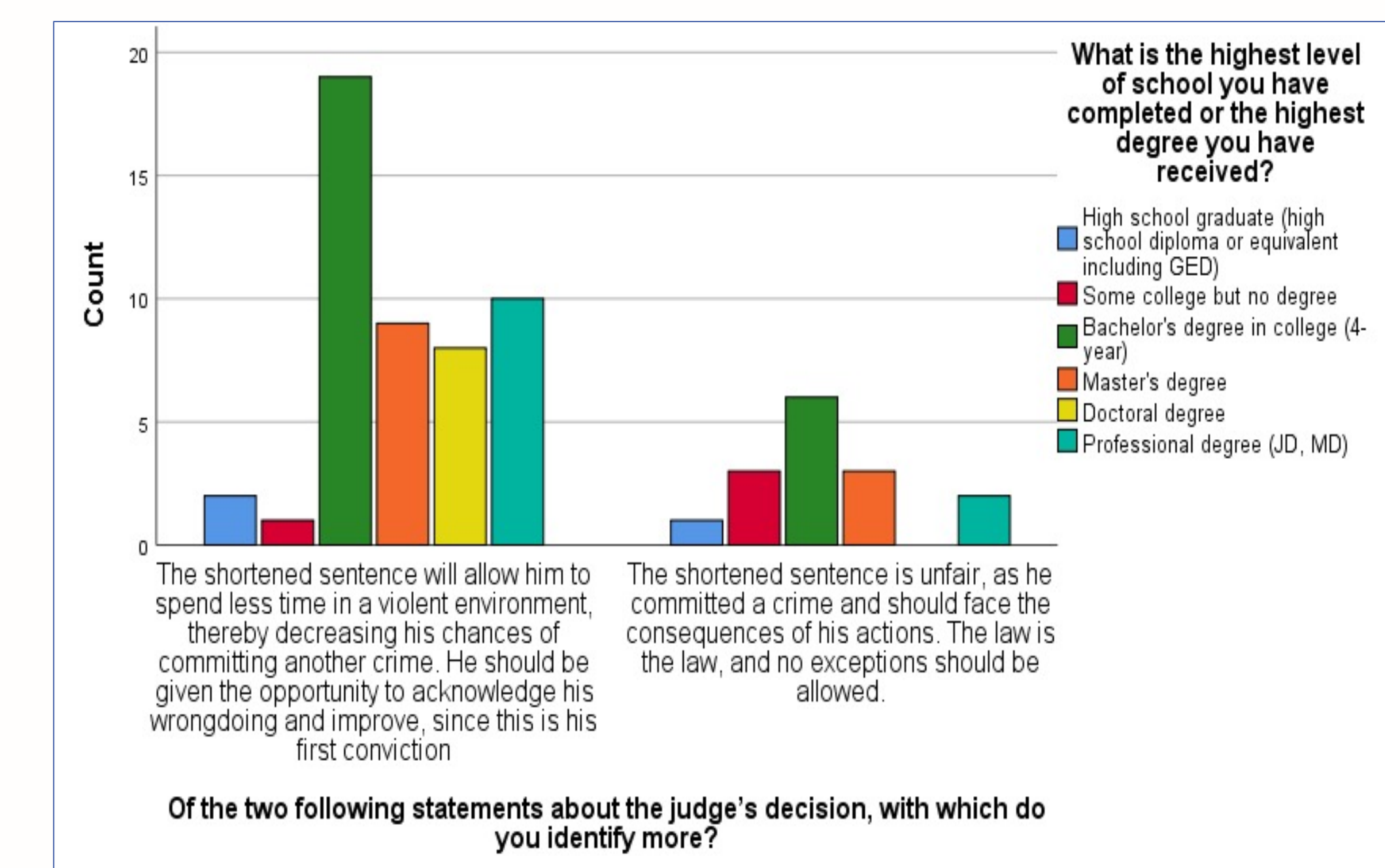


Figure 2: Frequency of Sentence Perception Based on Education Note:  $\chi^2 = 8.867, p < .10$

## CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the current data, there is a statistically significant correlation that Egyptians seem to be most sympathetic with a Middle Eastern subject in the vignette, as no responses indicated he should receive a longer sentence. In general, for all four races, college-educated participants were more likely to favor shorter sentences. Written responses indicate that two participants reference race: there is an indication of awareness of racially bias perceptions of Middle Easterners in crime reports and that White preparators may receive shorter sentences that perpetrators of other races would not. Data collection for this project is ongoing and receiving more responses can provide new insights into perceptions of race among the Egyptian diaspora and more significant correlations.

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