Consequences of Inconvenient Information: Evidence from Sentencing Disparities*

Michal Šoltés†

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Abstract

Inconvenient information about the performance of public institutions may undermine public trust. In an experiment, I test how information about sentencing disparities among judges in the Czech Republic affects respondents' perception of the judicial system. I find no effect on respondents' declared institutional trust and willingness to rely on the formal judicial system. Instead, the information marginally increased respondents' policy involvement: They became more likely to: (i) sign a petition that invites politicians to address the underlying issue, and (ii) consider fairness of the judicial system a more important policy issue. The increased interest in the petition was driven by mothers, who are arguably more sensitive to the particular treatment information in the presented case of a failure to pay alimony.

JEL Codes: H11, H40, D02, D83, K40.
Keywords: information disclosure, institutional trust, performance of public institutions, sentencing disparities

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†Email address: msoltes@cerge-ei.cz; CERGE-EI, a joint workplace of Charles University and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Politických vězňů 7, 111 21 Prague, Czech Republic.; Charles University, Faculty of Law, nám. Curieových 901/7, 116 40 Prague, Czech Republic.