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## Freakonomics

The Hidden Side of Everything

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### Vengeance Is Whose?

By [Stephen J. Dubner](#)

Here's a fascinating abstract, no comment necessary other than a little bolding for emphasis, from [a new working paper called "Vengeance"](#) by the economist **Naci Mocan** of Louisiana State University. He has done a lot of work on crime. He argues, for instance (contra *Freakonomics*) that [the death penalty has a strong deterrent effect](#) on crime. He also co-authored a paper called "[Ugly Criminals](#)" which says that physical unattractiveness makes you more prone to a life of crime.

This paper investigates the extent of vengeful feelings and their determinants using data on more than 89,000 individuals from 53 countries. Country characteristics (such as per-capita income, average education of the country, presence of an armed conflict, the extent of the rule-of-law, uninterrupted democracy, individualism) as well as personal attributes of the individuals influence vengeful feelings. **The magnitude of vengeful feelings is greater for people in low-income countries, in countries with low levels of education, low levels of the rule-of-law, in collectivist countries, and in countries that experienced an armed conflict in recent history.**

**Females, older people, working people, people who live in high-crime areas of their country, and people who are at the bottom 50 percent of their country's income distribution are more vengeful.** The intensity of vengeful feelings dies off gradually over time. The findings suggest that **vengeful feelings of people are subdued as a country develops economically and becomes more stable politically and socially** and that both country characteristics and personal attributes are important determinants of vengeance. **Poor people who live in higher-income societies that are ethno-linguistically homogeneous are as vengeful as rich people who live in low-income societies that are ethno-linguistically fragmented.** These results reinforce the idea that some puzzles about individual choice can best be explained by considering the interplay of personal and cultural factors.

In case you are in a prescriptive mood, consider the trenchant comment left behind by a reader at the Marginal Revolution blog, which [posted recently on this subject](#):

## “The bottom 50 percent — how do you get rid of that?”

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