

Interrogational torture: Effective or purely sadistic?

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While government officials have argued that "enhanced interrogation techniques" are necessary to protect American citizens, the effectiveness of such techniques has been debated. According to a recent study, when torture is used to elicit information, it is likely to be unexpectedly harsh yet ineffective. This study was published in a new article in *Political Research Quarterly (PRQ)* published by SAGE on behalf of the Western Political Science Association.

John W. Schiemann, author of the study and a [political scientist](#) at Fairleigh Dickinson University, found that information gleaned from interrogational torture is very likely to be unreliable, and when torture techniques are employed, they are likely to be used too frequently and too harshly. Furthermore, he found that for torture to generate even small amounts of valuable information in practice, the State must make the rational calculation to torture innocent detainees for telling the truth in order to maintain torture as a threat against those who withhold information.

Schiemann wrote, "Interrogators will continue to use torture and to increase its intensity in an attempt to ensure the detainee's threshold is low enough to make him talk."

In order to assess the effectiveness of interrogational torture, Schiemann's study employed [game theory](#), a widely-accepted [theoretical approach](#) in the social sciences to modeling [social behavior](#). He then compared the outcomes generated by the model to the standards of

success set forth by torture proponents in terms of the reliability of information and the frequency and severity of the torture used to get it.

Schiemann stated that while many believe that interrogational torture cannot be justified under any circumstances, those who do advocate for it claim that at times it is the only way gain critical information. He found, however, that under realistic circumstances interrogational torture is far more likely to produce ambiguous and false, rather than clear and reliable, information. "The use of torture makes it possible to extract both real and false confessions and no ability by the state to distinguish the two," wrote the author.

"The question as to whether—in reality—interrogational torture actually provides us with vital information we otherwise would not get—and at what human cost—is one of the pressing moral questions of our time," wrote Schiemann. "The debate over this question suggests that this reality needs probing, and the probing offered here suggests that torture games have no winners."

More information: Find out more by reading the article, "Interrogational Torture: Or How Good Guys Get Bad Information with Ugly Methods" by John W. Schiemann in *Political Research Quarterly*. The article is available free for a limited time at: prq.sagepub.com/content/65/1/3.full.pdf+html

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