



GA6

Issue 1

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Introduction

Crime is a common issue in all countries around the world whether that occurs in high rates or low. This can range from robbery to murder and although these are reported in all countries, the way that they are dealt with are what separates many countries. While murders and other serious crimes are usually dealt through sentences to life or sometimes less, some countries have other and more “equal” punishments to extreme crimes called the death penalty.

The death penalty or the capital punishment takes the defendant’s life as a punishment towards their crimes and is still implemented in 55 countries with the most being sentenced in China followed by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the USA. Some methods of capital punishment include hanging as in Japan, lethal injection as in the USA and China, shooting as in Afghanistan, and even beheading as used in Saudi Arabia (World Coalition against the death penalty, 2022). However, this method of punishment is quite controversial with many perspectives showing their resentment or encouraging its worldwide usage.

A few arguments against its usage are the fact that it costs more than life imprisonment and how it goes against one’s right to live however, it can be argued that the death penalty is the fairest justice against taking one’s life seeing as it is an equal punishment and goes for an “eye to eye” moral. In the end, many political, economic, and social perspectives can be seen to promote or disrupt the death penalty usage however, many also use religious and cultural reasonings.

Across the world, there are countless religions and cultures of which there are divided views on the death penalty. For example, followers of the Catholic Church used this punishment against those who were 100% guilty however, nowadays believe that only God has the power to take life as it gave life (BBC Bitesize, N/A). However, the Sharia law of the Islam and some Asian cultures from Japan and China do support the death penalty.

Key Terms

Capital Punishment

A punishment in which the defendant's life is taken as a result of the crime that the defendant committed, usually an extreme crime such as an act of terrorism, murder, rape, etc.

Retribution

A term describing the equal justice to a crime which essentially means that crimes deserves an equally and proportionally harsh punishment. This can be used in the case of murder because those who take some else's life, will get their life taken from them.

Deterrence

The idea that the use of the death penalty will result in the decline of crime as a way of scaring or spreading fear towards committing crimes due to what the consequences will be. There is not official evidence of this ideology working however, it is used as a justification.

Lethal Injection

A series of drugs administered to someone on the death row as a more "humane" way of implementing the death sentence as opposed to the electric chair, hanging, and decapitation.

Taboos

An act or saying considered offensive and heinous in one's culture or religion which results in the committing of a sin and can be a reason for conviction or in some countries like Saudi Arabia, the death sentence.

Cultural Evolution

This term refers to the reform of a culture of the change in morals or values after a significant event or over a time period in which opinions of believer's or followers of the culture changes regarding a specific topic which can be seen with the death penalty in Christianity.

General Overview

As previously mentioned, the death penalty is when the defendant's life is taken from them because of an extreme crime committed which can either be a form of terrorism, or murders, rapes, and torturous acts depending on a few factors such as how the crime was committed, why it was committed, and some background on the defendant and their past or what psychological factors could have influenced such activity (Amnesty International, N/A).

History of the death penalty

Although nowadays the death penalty is a punishment in which many regulatory processes are gone through to make sure that only the 100% guilty are punished, this has not always been the case. Being implemented since the 18th century BCE, the death penalty has been prevalent across world for many centuries. While before it used to occur in more gruesome and torturous methods, this all reduced towards the beginning of the 19th century AC when people started to see the ethical implications of finding pleasure in seeing others perish (Death penalty information centre, N/A).

Current relations between the death penalty and culture

The reason for why there is a divide between many cultures and religions as well as their views on the death penalty is due to their cultural values regarding human rights and the value of a life. The main cultures that tend to support the death penalty would be the authoritarian and retributive cultures which follows such justices. For example, the USA has an "eye for an eye" belief where those that commit crimes deserve a proportional punishment while Saudi Arabia where the Sharia law is followed, use it to deter crime. On the contrary, there is also cultures like Buddhism or Hinduism where the death penalty is not completely banned but is used under extremely strict measures as their cultures promote rehabilitation and human peace.

Worldwide, there are not many countries that use religion or culture as a direct justification for the death penalty as the cultural sector and the judicial systems are not often linked.

However, countries like Afghanistan who are led by the terrorist group; Taliban do use it as a reference to the sharia law however, this is only one of the limited cases which follow the judicial system based on their culture and religion (Gul. Ayaz, 2024).

Perspectives of the death penalty

Seeing as there are many different factors that are considered when thinking about the death penalty, a heavily debated topic with many perspectives adding to the question of whether it should be implemented and by what measures?

A few arguments from abolitionists regarding capital punishment would be that it is irreversible and if one was to be killed before having been proved innocent, there is no compensation available to the defendant. Additionally, it has been shown to have no crime deterrence since those countries that have the death penalty have higher crime rates. Lastly, it costs more than life sentences due to the long processes and documentations (amnesty international, N/A). On the contrary retentionists can argue that it provides the families of the victim's closure and is the only morally correct way to punish someone who did an extreme crime. Additionally, it does not deter crime on a population scale however, it deters crime for the defendant since there have been reported crimes where a criminal commits a crime, is let go for "moral second chances" and then commits crimes that are worse (ProCon, 2025).

In conclusion, there are many different cultural and judicial opinions regarding the death penalty and many different arguments from all sides showcasing whether it should be imposed which proves how complicated this matter is, representing its significance.

Major Parties Involved

China

China is a major party involved in the death penalty issue seeing as it is the country with the most recorded death sentences and executions. In 2023 alone, it had double the execution numbers than the country with the second highest death penalty and many of their cases occur under secrecy.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is an international organization which fights for exposing injustices in society and trying to bring reform to the way that people think in society but also to the way systems work. This can be shown with trying to abolish death penalty as they have published many articles talking about the reasons for why they believe this.

World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty is another organization which focuses on abolishing the death penalty. Consisting up of 189 members, this organization is joined by countries and other organizations who together hope to demolish this punishment and restore peace in the world.

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is a supranational group of 27 European countries who together, focus on improving the overall well-being of the countries and they gather to discuss topics such as the death penalty.

USA

USA is another retentionist country who supports the “eye for an eye” mindset and are supporters of retribution towards guilty defendants seeing as they have one of the longest death rows.

Timeline of Key Events

1847	Michigan becomes the first state to abolish the death penalty almost completely, except for cases of treason
1907-1917	Nine American states pose strict limitations on the death penalty of abolish it completely.
1924	The mean of execution through the use of cyanide gas, which restricts a person's ability to breathe oxygen, is introduced for the death penalty.
1930's	Death penalties reach the highest they have ever been in American history, with an average of 167 executions per year.
1948	United Nation's General Assembly adopt the UDHR, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and affirms the right to human life.
1972	Furman v. Georgia established by the Supreme Court of the United States suspends the death penalty in the country.
2005	Roper V. Simmons by the Supreme Court of the United States abolishes the death penalty for anyone who committed the crime while being under 18 years old.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

The UN has taken a variety of initiatives in the past to restrict or abolish the use of the death penalty, focusing primarily on a human's right perspective. Among the many listed below, some resolutions affirm the right to human life, liberty, and security of a person. This does not abolish the death penalty, it emphasizes the right of living to any human including those awaiting the death penalty (Amnesty International, 2024). The documents also state that under the protection of the law, every human being has the inherent right to life and how to execute this in a healthy political manner.

- Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, Article 3
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966, Article 6
- Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, 1989
- Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty, December 18 2007 (A/RES/62/149)
- Moratorium on the use of the death penalty, May 21 2010 (A/RES/65/206)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981): The African Charter on Human and People's Rights is a human rights treaty which includes a set of rules called 'articles' that guarantees and highlights the right to life, although not specifically banning the death penalty. This human rights treaty has been signed and agreed upon by all 53 members of the African Union (AU), however it is still important to note that although nations may agree with the articles stated by the treaty, they are not obligated to specifically abolish the death penalty (Amnesty International, 2006).

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950) Protocol No. 13 (2003): The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), established in 1950, protects the right to life, security, freedom of thoughts and expression, and specifically abolishes the death penalty as well as discrimination, torture, and slavery. In 2003, protocol No. 13 was put in place which abolishes the death penalty under all circumstances. Since then, the protocol has been signed by all members of the European Council excluding Azerbaijan which has not given their formal consent, making it not officially apply to the nation. The last country to sign it was Armenia, in October 2023 (Council of Europe, 2025).

Roper v. Simmons (2005): On March 1st, 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the death penalty should not be put in use towards anyone who committed the crime while younger than 18 years old. This provides juvenile security and ensures no execution can occur if the criminal was under the adult legal age while committing the crime. It was also ruled out as "cruel and unusual punishment", which went against the Eighth Amendment (American Psychological Association, 2005).

Possible Solutions

When combatting an issue that has been at hand for so many centuries, we must look at why it has not been resolved yet and adjust our proposed solutions accordingly. Two main solutions will be discussed in this section, this being a nations involvement with international norms and cultural recognition and implications. Firstly, a country signing onto international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) would be a step forward to overcoming the issue as well as aligning with policies of many other nations. Also joining international organizations such as Amnesty International and World Coalition Against the Death Penalty would be a great step forward for the same reasons, since these organizations specifically focus on the death penalty. However, some of these such as Amnesty international indirectly solve the issue since they focus on the broader topic of human right, which would be more fitting for nations whose cultural implications and values make it hard to completely abolish the death penalty. Other such as the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty directly target the issue and are even better to join if a countries culture does not have a great impact on its politics.

Secondly to focus on the cultural factor of this issue, implementing ethical review boards or institutional review boards (IRB's) is an effective solution for countries where the culture aspect is more influential on politics. IBR's are administrative bodies made up of cultural historians and legal experts that review social implications to try and overcome them or find a way around them. These can be applicable to a wider range of nations than the first solution since it also considers the ones where the cultural values call for the death penalty to be present. Specifically, nations in Africa and the Middle East could benefit from such a solution moving forward. For the countries that need to justify why they are in favor of the death penalty however, things like cultural sensitivity training and programs would be encouraged to justify their cultural relevance to the death penalty.

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Appendix

- Amnesty International, [Amnesty International](#)
- World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, [World Coalition](#)
- Death Penalty Information Center, [Death Penalty Info](#)
- United Nations Human Rights, [United Nations](#)