

## Does capital punishment have any place in the 21st century?

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Wednesday 25 June 2014



CACorrections

The United States views itself as one of the most advanced countries in the world. It is a leading global and economic power, but there is an area where it remains noticeably behind: its stance on capital punishment.

The United Nations issued a moratorium in 2007 against capital punishment, a non-legally-binding call for it to be halted, with the eventual view to abolishment. It was reaffirmed in two further resolutions in 2008 and 2010, with increasing majorities each time, having approximately twice as many supporters as opponents.

Fifty eight countries still employ the death sentence, against ninety eight who do not, the latter including all nations in the EU, where it is universally banned. In the G8, only the USA and Japan use the punishment; however, Japan's rate is far lower. In 2012, the US gave the fifth highest number of death penalties in the world – 43 – against Japan's 7.

In fact, some states within the USA itself do not execute. Michigan outlawed it in 1846, and some have followed since. It was even suspended throughout the States from 1972-76, and again for seven months 2007-8. However, today it is legal in 32 states, and support for the act remains over 60%. Despite the international decline, the USA retains its practise.

The debate on capital punishment is part of the debate on the purpose of the judicial system. It is intended as a deterrent to would-be criminals, and a punishment to those who commit crimes regardless. However, the right to life is enshrined as a basic human right in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Killing a murderer, whilst seeming an apt punishment for the deserving, prevents rehabilitation, which has been proven possible. No other offence is met with such an 'eye for an eye' approach.

The victims and those affected by murders may be opposed to the sentence. It is possible, though unverifiable, that some victims are wrongly sentenced. An execution is actually several thousand dollars more expensive than life without parole, a sentence that continues to prevent reoffending, while giving a second chance to those wrongly convicted.

Most worryingly, there is evidence that the system is broken. Sentencing is biased against ethnic minorities and those with worse socioeconomic backgrounds. Amnesty International also found that the death penalty is most likely to be given for murdering white victims. 77% of executions have been for white victims 1977-1990, as opposed to 15% for African-American. However, about half of all homicides have African-American victims; the racial bias in the system is unmistakable. This, at the very least, should be addressed and amended before such a final sentence can be handed out.

In this year so far, 20 people have been executed in the US. It is a contentious issue worldwide, but the ultimate purpose of a law should be to protect, not to punish, and this is achieved just as effectively by a life sentence.



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