

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

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Some crimes are so terrible that the only appropriate punishment is death. Furthermore, the existence of the death penalty deters violent crime. Capital punishment means condemning a criminal to death, regardless of the method of execution used. Execution by the state has a long history, and legislation around the issue is still changing.

Capital punishment was widely applied in ancient times; it can be found (c.1750 B.C.) in the Code of Hammurabi. From the fall of Rome to the beginnings of the modern era, capital punishment was practiced throughout Western Europe. The modern movement for the abolition of capital punishment began in the 18th century with the writings of Montesquieu and Voltaire, as well as Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (1764). In Great Britain, Jeremy Bentham was influential in having reduced the number of capital crimes in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of the first countries to abolish capital punishment included Venezuela (1863), San Marino (1865), and Costa Rica (1877).

Every day updates tally of countries with and without death penalty laws, also notes which countries have a moratorium on capital punishment or haven't had executions in many years. Currently, 87 countries have completely abolished the death penalty, and another 27 countries do not use capital punishment in practice. One of the earliest death penalty bans was in Venezuela in 1863. The most recent was the Philippines in June of 2006.

All European Union countries have abolished the death penalty. Any country wishing to join the Union must follow suit. Capital punishment is most often found in Asia and Africa, plus the United States. Countries and territories still using capital punishment include Afghanistan, the Bahamas, China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, North and South Korea, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Uganda, and Vietnam.

In recent years, there has been a nationwide debate over the proper application, morality and constitutionality of the death penalty. Some argue that if the death penalty can not be applied justly in all cases, it should not exist at all. Some embrace a moral concept that “respects life” in all its stages and circumstances.

On the one hand, the chief objection to capital punishment is that it is always used unfairly, in at least two major ways. First, women are rarely sentenced to death and executed, even though 20 percent of all homicides in recent years have been committed by women. Second, poor and friendless defendants, those with inexperienced or court-appointed attorney, are most likely to be sentenced to death and executed.

But on the other hand, society has the right to kill protecting its members, just as the individual may kill in self-protection. The analogy to self-protection, however, is somewhat doubtful, moreover the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent to violent crimes has not been proved.

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