

The Death Penalty

Capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is when a government or state executes someone, usually because they have committed a serious crime. A crime that can be punished with the death penalty is called a capital crime or a capital offense. Executions in most countries have become rarer in recent centuries. The death penalty is a controversial topic.

About one third of the countries in the world allow the death penalty. The United States, China, Japan, and Iran are examples of countries that have death penalty. Canada, Australia, Mexico and all members of the EU are examples of countries that have abolished the death penalty. 75 countries have abolished the capital punishment for all crimes. Another 20 countries have retained the death penalty in law but have not had any executions for the past 10 years or more.

Most of the countries that have the death penalty use it on murderers, and for other serious crimes such as rape or terrorism. Other countries, however, also use it for smaller crimes like theft, drugs, or for making political statements against the government.

Many people say the death penalty is reasonable because it is a deterrent against people doing things that are illegal. However, others say there is a potential of executing an innocent person.

Throughout human history, governments have used many methods to execute people such as crucifixion and hanging. Some methods like crucifixion are no longer used by governments because people think that these methods of killing are too cruel. The gas chamber was found unconstitutional in the United States (that is: against the United States constitution not allowing "cruel and unusual punishments") and is no longer used. The EU has also abolished the death penalty completely.

The following forms of execution are still used today:

- **Electric chair:** The prisoner is killed by a strong source of electricity attached to their head and leg.
- **Lethal injection:** The prisoner is poisoned with a mix of chemicals that are injected into their body. Some countries use chemicals that are controversial. This is now the most commonly used method in the United States.
- **Firing squad:** A prisoner is killed with a rifle. Firing squads are often used for soldiers during wars. One or more of those firing may have false ammunition that does not kill so that no one knows which person fired the shot that killed. A firing squad is a traditional military execution.
- **Hanging:** The prisoner has a rope tied around their neck. They are then dropped from a tall height. The person can die from their neck being broken. They also might die from asphyxiation. Japan, India, and some former British colonies use hanging.
- **Stoning:** Stones are thrown at the prisoner until they die. Stoning is still used in some Middle Eastern countries.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What is a capital crime/offense?
- 2) How many countries still have the death penalty?
- 3) What are examples of countries that do/don't have the death penalty?
- 4) What does the phrase "retain the death penalty in law" mean?

Discussion Questions

- 5) Do you think some methods of execution are more humane than others? Why or why not?
- 6) Do you think Korea should have the death penalty? Why or why not?
- 7) Do you believe the death penalty is an effective deterrent? Why or why not?

Arguments For/Against the Death Penalty (You may need to use the internet to research these answers.

You do NOT need to cite your sources.)

- 8) What are 3 arguments for the death penalty?
- 9) What are 3 arguments against the death penalty?

Homework: Write answers in MS-Word for Questions 5-9 only. Answers should be full sentences and be thoughtful and substantive.