

Description of Baldus Death Penalty Data

POL SCI 363

These data are from a study by David Baldus, Charles Pulaski, and George Woodworth on the potential disparity in the imposition of the death sentence in Georgia based on the race of the murder victim and the race of the defendant. The Baldus study was cited in the US Supreme Court in *McClesky v. Kemp* (1987), in which a black defendant (McClesky) was sentenced to death for killing a white police officer in Georgia. The central argument was that the sentence violated the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment, since statistically he stood was more likely to get the death penalty since the victim was white. Ultimately, in a 5-4 decision, the court rejected this argument on the basis that the statistical trends could not prove discrimination in his particular case.

The data contain a large number of variables, including legal background, crime description, and demographics. For the first classroom exercise, I have reduced the data to include only a few variables, which are described below, but the larger dataset will also be made available.

These data include only three variables:

- `def.race`: The race of the defendant (black or white)
- `vict.race`: The race of the victim (black or white)
- `sentence`: The sentence given to the defendant (life sentence or the death penalty)