

Attitudes Toward Capital Punishment in America: *An Analysis of Survey Data*

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Research Question

“What accounts for differences in attitudes among Americans concerning capital punishment?”



Background:

Capital Punishment: Ever present institution since America's inception

In the 20th Century debates about the legality of the capital punishment were taken to the Supreme Court

1972: *Furman v. Georgia* struck down capital punishment statutes

1976: *Gregg v. Georgia* reaffirmed capital punishment

There are currently 2738 death row inmates in the United States.

48 executions were carried out between 2017 and 2018



MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

- Wide Difference in Attitudes
- Both retentionists and abolitionists' have developed ritualistic arguments on the key issues of the controversy.
- Confusion has resulted from this ensuing debate.



METHODOLOGY

- Type: Quantitative, Empirical Secondary Analysis
- Source: MicroCase (2013), GSS (2006) File and GSS (2008) File
- Type of Data: Individual Data, Survey Research
- No. of Cases: 4510 (GSS 2006 File), 3559 (GSS 2008 File)
- Period: 2006-2008
- Statistical Significance: $p < 0.05$
- Measures of Association: Gamma and Cramer's V



DEPENDENT VARIABLE

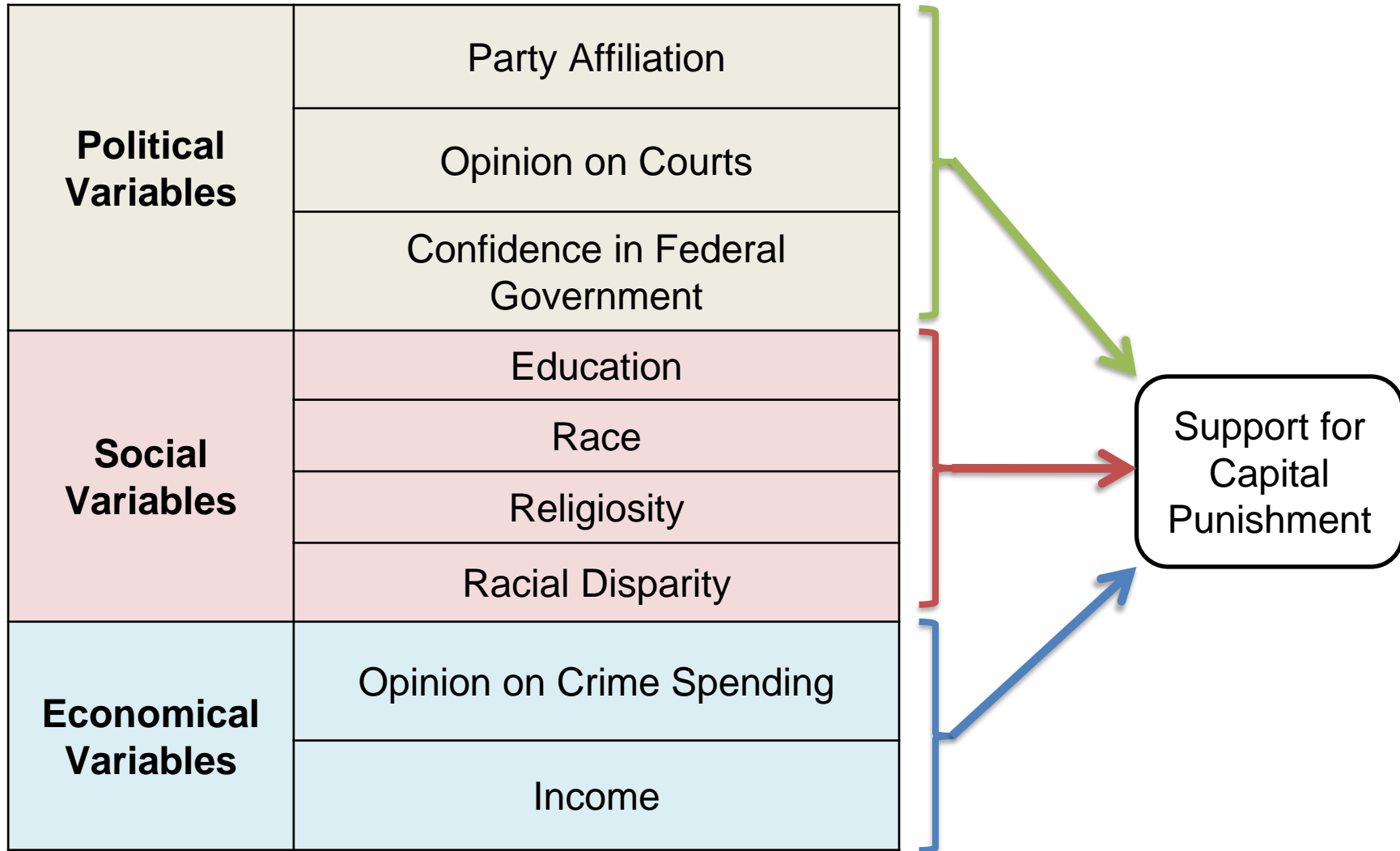
Support for Capital Punishment

107) EXECUTE? (GSS 2006) and 106) EXECUTE? (GSS 2008) from
MicroCase Software

“Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?”

1. Oppose
2. Favor

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES



H1: Those who are affiliated to Republicans have greater support for capital punishment.

Support for Capital Punishment	Political Parties					
		Democrat	Independent	Republican	Missing	Total
	Oppose	43.7% (709)	32.3% (156)	17.8% (210)	25	32.7% 1075
	Favor	56.3% (913)	67.7% (327)	82.2% (971)	50	67.3% (2211)
	Missing	86	55	48	8	197
Total	100.0% (1622)	100.0% (482)	100.0% (1182)	84	3286	
P=0.00		Gamma=0.453				

- Strong Gamma
- Hypothesis Supported

H2: Those who think courts in the area deals too harsh with criminals are less likely to support capital punishment

Support for Capital Punishment	Opinion on Courts Handling of Criminal Cases				
		Harsh	Right	Not Enough	Missing
Oppose	56.8% (227)	24.9% (527)	37.4% (238)	108	31.5% (993)
Favor	43.2% (173)	75.1% (1590)	62.6% (397)	101	68.5% (2160)
Missing	12	112	41	32	197
Total	100.0% (400)	100.0% (2117)	100.0% (635)	241	3153
P=0.001		Gamma= 0.129			

- Weak Gamma
- Hypothesis Supported

H3: People with great deal of confidence in the federal government have greater support for capital punishment.

Support for Capital Punishment	Confidence in Federal Government					
		Great Deal	Only Some	Hardly Any	Missing	Total
	Oppose	25.1% (75)	29.0% (248)	37.8% (267)	280	31.8% (590)
	Favor	74.9% (223)	71.0% (605)	62.2% (440)	677	68.2% (1268)
	Missing	16	46	38	1596	1696
	Total	100.0% (297)	100.0% (853)	100.0% (707)	2553	1857
P=0.00		Gamma= 0.2				

- Moderate Gamma
- Hypothesis Supported

H4: Those with higher education are more likely to oppose the death penalty.

Support for Capital Punishment	Level of Education				
		No High School Degree	High School Degree	College Graduate	Missing
Oppose	39.8% (219)	24.8% (223)	34.4% (657)	2	32.7% (1098)
Favor	60.2% (331)	75.2% (676)	65.6% (1253)	2	67.3% (2259)
Missing	35	48	112	2	197
Total	100.0% (549)	100.0% (898)	100.0% (1910)	7	3357
P=0.476		Gamma= 0.024			

- Not Statistically Significant
- Very Weak Gamma
- Hypothesis not supported

H5: Whites have greater support for capital punishment than African Americans.

Support for Capital Punishment	Race				
		White	Black	Other	Total
	Oppose	27.8% (725)	53.5% (230)	45.4% (146)	32.7% (1100)
	Favor	72.2% (1885)	46.5% (200)	54.6% (176)	67.3% (2261)
	Missing	141	29	27	197
	Total	100.0% (2610)	100.0% (429)	100.0% (322)	3362
P=0.00		Cramer's V= 0.202			

- Moderate Cramer's V
- Hypothesis Supported

H6: Those who consider themselves very religious are more likely to support capital punishment.

Support for Capital Punishment	Level of Religiosity				
		Very Religious	Somewhat Religious	Not at All Religious	Missing
Oppose	35.2% (183)	29.0% (543)	33.9% (138)	6	30.9% (864)
Favor	64.8% (338)	71.0% (1325)	66.1% (269)	12	69.1% (1932)
Missing	44	119	14	1518	1696
Total	100.0% (521)	100.0% (1868)	100.0% (407)	1537	2796
P=0.445		Gamma= 0.030			

- Not Statistically Significant
- Too Weak Gamma
- Hypothesis not supported

H7: Those who think racial disparities exist are more likely to oppose the death penalty.

Support for Capital Punishment	Existence of Racial Disparity in America			
		Yes	No	Missing
Oppose	43.5% (263)	23.1% (270)	336	30.1% (534)
Favor	56.5% (342)	76.9% (899)	703	69.9% (1241)
Missing	51	72	1573	1696
Total	100.0% (606)	100.0% (1170)	2612	1775
P=0.00		Cramer's V= 0.210		

- Moderate Cramer's V
- Hypothesis Supported

H8: Those who oppose more spending on halting the crime rate are more likely to oppose the death penalty.

Support for Capital Punishment	Opinion on Spending Regarding Halting the Crime Rate					
		Too Little being Spent on Crime	Right Amount being Spent on Crime	Too Much being Spent on Crime	Missing	Total
	Oppose	28.0% (236)	36.1% (157)	37.5% (34)	443	31.2% (427)
	Favor	72.0% (607)	63.9% (278)	62.5% (57)	12	68.8% (942)
	Missing	37	28	4	1627	1696
	Total	100.0% (843)	100.0% (434)	100.0% (91)	3073	1369
P=0.001		Gamma= 0.176				

- Weak Gamma
- Hypothesis Supported

H9: Those with a higher income are more likely to support capital punishment.

Support for Capital Punishment	Income Category				
		Low	Middle	High	Missing
Oppose	38.6% (267)	33.2% (312)	29.3% (467)	55	32.4% (1046)
Favor	61.4% (425)	66.8% (626)	70.7% (1127)	83	67.6% (2178)
Missing	38	35	107	17	197
Total	100.0% (691)	100.0% (938)	100.0% (1594)	155	3224
P=0.00		Gamma= 0.135			

- Weak Gamma
- Hypothesis Supported



Findings and Analysis

Factors that significantly influence attitudes toward capital punishment:

1. Party Affiliation
2. Opinion on Courts
3. Confidence in Government
4. Race
5. Racial Disparity

Factors that do not significantly influence attitudes toward capital punishment:

1. Crime Spending Opinion
2. Income

Factors that do not have correlation with attitudes toward capital punishment:

1. Education
2. Religiosity



Conclusion

- Political Factors and Social Factors are most influential in considerations regarding capital punishment.
- Implications:
 1. Republicans are recommended to favor the capital punishment.
 2. Democrats are recommended to stick to two strategies:
 - (a) For the short run, try to make the system of capital punishment more fair.
 - (b) For the long run, get involved in social movements that strive to abolish capital punishment.
- For Future Research: An independent variable that checks people's emotional value to political choice could be a very strong variable, thus, helping in answering the research question in a clear way.



Q&A