

Death Penalty Research Paper Example

There are vast differences in the way people view the **death penalty**. Some oppose it and some agree with it. There have been many studies trying to prove or disprove a point regarding the death penalty. Some have regarded the death penalty as a deterrent, and some have regarded it as state sanctioned murder and not civilized. The death penalty has been attributed to societies for hundreds of years. More recently, as we become more civilized, the death penalty has been questioned to be the right step towards justice. During the course of this paper I will review the pros and cons of the use of the death penalty as we, Americans, know it. The death penalty is a highly controversial subject. No one knows who's right or who's wrong—it's fifty percent speculation and fifty percent research. It's just a lot of thoughts and beliefs from people who have contributed to the death penalty hype. Who's right and who's wrong? That is the question.

First I need to highlight briefly into the history of the death penalty to fully understand why people feel the way they do about the death penalty. Almost all nations in the world have had the death sentence and had enforced it in many ways. It was used in most cases to punish those who broke the laws or standards that were expected of them. Some of the historical methods of execution were restricted only by one's imagination—they include flaying or burying alive, boiling in oil, crushing beneath the wheels of vehicles or the feet of elephants, throwing to wild beasts, forcing combat in the arena, blowing from the mouth of a cannon, impaling, piercing with javelins, starving to death, poisoning, strangling, suffocating, drowning, shooting, beheading, and more recently, electrocuting, using the gas chamber, and giving lethal injection (Silverman 73). The ancient societies had some pretty brutal methods that were just plainly inhumane. Fortunately, most of the disgraceful practices were largely unknown in Anglo-American tradition. America inherited most of its capital punishment from the United Kingdom or English laws. But not so many generations ago, in both England and America, criminals were occasionally pressed to death, drawn and quartered, and burned at the stake (Isenberg 35). Had any of these punishments survived the eighteenth century, there is little doubt that public reaction would have forced an end to capital punishment long ago (Isenberg 35). Throughout England, the rotting corpses of executed criminals specked the country, which sent out a warning to all those who dare defy the law, or otherwise acted as a deterrent. Executions were always conducted in public and often became the scene of drunken gatherings to witness the execution. It reminds me of all these horrifying blood-soaked movies we watch today. People are drawn to such spectacles, because they are not getting killed. Furthermore, death is one of the great unknowns in all of mankind. Crimes of every description against the state, against the person, against property, against public peace were made punishable by death in early English laws (Isenberg 26). It is somewhat curious that any of these horrendous and inhumane methods of execution survived as long as they did, for the English Bill of Rights of 1689 proscribed "cruel and unusual punishments" (Isenberg 27). Which is still in use today in the American Constitution. Even with fairly relaxed law enforcement after 1800, between two thousand and three thousand persons were sentenced to death each year from 1805 to 1810 (Isenberg 26). Which is a very large amount even by today's standards. Furthermore, several decisions, later on in history, handed down by the Supreme Court in the post-World War II years have had a significant effect on the effects of both proponents and opponents of capital punishment. They include *Louisiana v. Resweber* (1946)—cruelty dealing with humane ways of execution, next was *United States v. Jackson* (1967)—the provisions that dealt with kidnapping, next was *Witherspoon v. Illinois* (1968)—determined excluding juries that had a bias towards death penalties being unconstitutional, and finally *McGautha v. California* (1971)—juries discretion upon the death penalty and the fourteenth amendment's "equal protection clause" (Isenberg 23-24). All of these have impacted the nature of the death penalty, as we all know it today in the United States. These have all influenced the way people view the death penalty and help explain why some people oppose it and some impose it.

Death penalty research paper example serves as a crucial resource for understanding the multifaceted debates surrounding capital punishment. This topic elicits strong emotions and opinions, making it imperative for researchers to present well-structured arguments backed by factual data. In this article, we will explore various aspects of the death penalty, including its historical context, ethical considerations, economic implications, and the impact on society. Additionally, we will provide a comprehensive research paper example to guide those looking to delve into this sensitive subject.

Historical Context of the Death Penalty

The death penalty has a long history that varies across cultures and time periods. To understand its current status, it's essential to explore its evolution.

Ancient Practices

- Mesopotamia: One of the earliest known legal codes, the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1754 BC), prescribed the death penalty for various offenses.
- Greece and Rome: Both societies utilized capital punishment for crimes ranging from murder to treason. In Rome, execution methods included crucifixion and throwing criminals to wild beasts.

Medieval Europe

- Feudal System: The death penalty was prevalent in medieval Europe, often meted out in public executions as a deterrent against crime.
- The Inquisition: The Catholic Church employed capital punishment for heresy and witchcraft, leading to numerous executions.

Modern Era Developments

- Abolition Movements: The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed significant movements aimed at abolishing the death penalty, influenced by Enlightenment thinkers who argued against its morality.
- Recent Trends: In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many countries have abolished the death penalty, while others have reinstated it amid debates over its effectiveness in deterring crime.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of the death penalty are a central theme in debates surrounding its legality and morality.

Arguments For the Death Penalty

1. Retribution: Many proponents argue that capital punishment serves as a just retribution for heinous crimes.
2. Deterrence: Some believe that the death penalty deters future crimes, as the fear of execution may prevent potential offenders.
3. Closure for Victims' Families: The execution of a convicted murderer can provide a sense of closure and justice to the victims' families.

Arguments Against the Death Penalty

1. Moral Objections: Opponents argue that taking a life is inherently wrong, regardless of the circumstances.
2. Risk of Wrongful Convictions: There have been numerous cases where innocent individuals were sentenced to death, raising concerns about the infallibility of the justice system.
3. Disproportionate Impact: Studies indicate that the death penalty is applied disproportionately to marginalized groups, raising issues of systemic bias and inequality.

Economic Implications

The financial aspects of the death penalty are often overlooked in debates but are significant.

Costs Involved in Capital Punishment

- Trial Costs: Capital cases often require more extensive legal representation and longer trials, leading to increased costs.
- Appeals: The lengthy appeal processes associated with death penalty cases can significantly inflate expenses.
- Incarceration Costs: Inmates on death row often require higher levels of security and longer incarceration periods, contributing to overall costs.

Comparative Costs

- Death Penalty vs. Life Imprisonment: Studies show that life imprisonment without parole can be less expensive than carrying out a death sentence due to the high costs associated with capital trials and appeals.
- State Budgets: States that maintain the death penalty often allocate substantial portions of their budgets to cover the costs associated with capital punishment, diverting funds from other critical areas such as education and public safety.

Impact on Society

The societal implications of the death penalty are profound and far-reaching.

Public Opinion

- Changing Attitudes: Public support for the death penalty has fluctuated over the years. While some polls indicate a majority in favor, growing awareness of wrongful convictions and ethical concerns has led to declining support.

- Influence of Media: The portrayal of capital punishment in media can shape public perceptions, sometimes glamorizing violence or oversimplifying complex legal issues.

Effects on Crime Rates

- Deterrence vs. Reality: Research remains inconclusive regarding whether the death penalty effectively deters violent crime. Some studies suggest that states with capital punishment do not have significantly lower crime rates than those without it.
- Alternative Solutions: Advocates for reform often argue that addressing underlying social issues, such as poverty and education, may be more effective in reducing crime rates than implementing the death penalty.

Research Paper Example

To provide a clearer understanding of how to structure a research paper on the death penalty, here is an example outline:

Title: The Death Penalty: A Comprehensive Analysis of Its Ethical, Economic, and Societal Implications

1. Introduction

- Define the death penalty and its relevance in contemporary society.
- Present the thesis statement outlining the main arguments.

2. Historical Context

- Overview of the death penalty's evolution through different eras.
- Discuss significant milestones in abolition movements.

3. Ethical Considerations

- Present arguments for and against the death penalty.
- Analyze moral implications and philosophical perspectives.

4. Economic Implications

- Compare the costs associated with capital punishment versus life imprisonment.
- Discuss the financial impact on state budgets and public resources.

5. Impact on Society

- Examine public opinion trends regarding the death penalty.
- Analyze the relationship between the death penalty and crime rates.

6. Conclusion

- Summarize key findings and arguments presented in the paper.
- Discuss the future of the death penalty and potential areas for reform.

Conclusion

The death penalty research paper example presented in this article serves as a foundation for exploring one of the most contentious issues in modern society. By examining its historical context, ethical considerations, economic implications, and societal impacts, researchers can cultivate a nuanced understanding of capital punishment. As debates continue, it is essential for scholars, policymakers, and the public to engage with this complex topic thoughtfully and compassionately while striving for a more just legal system.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key components to include in a death penalty research paper example?

A death penalty research paper should include an introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis of data, discussion of ethical implications, case studies, and a conclusion summarizing findings.

How can one structure a death penalty research paper effectively?

A typical structure includes an introduction stating the thesis, a literature review discussing previous research, a methodology section explaining how data was gathered, results presenting the findings, and a conclusion reflecting on the implications of the research.

What are some common arguments for and against the death penalty that can be explored in research?

Common arguments for the death penalty include deterrence of crime and justice for victims, while arguments against it often involve moral objections, the risk of wrongful convictions, and concerns about its effectiveness in reducing crime rates.

What types of data are useful when writing a death penalty research paper?

Useful data includes statistical information on crime rates, execution rates, public opinion surveys, case studies of death row inmates, and analyses of legal precedents related to capital punishment.

What ethical considerations should be addressed in a death penalty research paper?

Ethical considerations include the morality of capital punishment, the potential for racial and socioeconomic bias in sentencing, the psychological impact on those involved in executions, and the human rights implications of the death penalty.

How can one incorporate case studies into a death penalty research paper?

Case studies can be incorporated by analyzing specific instances of death penalty cases, examining the legal processes, outcomes, and the individuals involved, providing real-world context to the research findings.

What are some recent trends in death penalty research that could be included in a paper?

Recent trends include the examination of wrongful convictions, the impact of race and socioeconomic status on sentencing, the use of lethal injection versus other methods, and shifts in public opinion regarding capital punishment.

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