

Sentenced to Death Without Execution

Why capital punishment has not yet been abolished in
the Eastern Caribbean and Barbados

Media Briefing Pack

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In collaboration with:



**The University of
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(Cave Hill)**



**Greater
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**St Vincent & the
Grenadines Human
Rights Association**



**World Coalition
Against the Death
Penalty**

Research Overview

Six independent nations in the Eastern Caribbean – Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines, all members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) – and Barbados, retain the death penalty for murder. Most of these countries have not executed anyone sentenced to death for at least ten years with the vast majority not carrying out an execution for more than twenty years.

This independent empirical study, which presents the views of 100 ‘opinion formers’, drawn from the seven jurisdictions, aims to shed light on why these countries hang on to capital punishment and what are the barriers to complete abolition of the death penalty in these nations. The respondents were asked about their knowledge of the use of capital punishment in their respective countries and the extent to which, and why, they either supported the policy of retaining the death penalty or were in favour of its abolition, as well as the factors, beliefs, and assumptions that appeared to account for their government’s unwillingness to embrace complete abolition.

Key findings:

Why did retentionists and abolitionists hold different opinions?

Across these seven nations, 48 of the informants interviewed favoured retention of the death penalty (18 of them strongly) and 52 were in favour of its abolition (30 of them strongly).

Eighty-four per cent of those who favoured retention chose a retributive response as their main reason (to show that murder is the very worst crime/and some deserve to be executed) but only 10% chose deterrence (that murders would increase as a result of abolition) and none chose public opinion as their main reason.

Two-thirds of those who favoured abolition chose as their main reason that the death penalty had no extra deterrent effect, or it was an abuse of human rights or because of the possibility of wrongful conviction and execution. Only 8% chose as their main reason the fact that the death penalty served no purpose because no executions were being carried out.

Why had their governments failed to support abolition of capital punishment?

The majority of the respondents thought that their government had not supported abolition because they believed the majority of citizens were in favour of retention and/or that it was a necessary deterrent.

Were those who favoured retention of the death penalty strongly opposed to its abolition?

The findings suggest that only a minority were committed to retaining capital punishment. and would vigorously oppose its abolition:

Only 10 of the 48 who favoured retention said they would ‘strongly oppose an Act of Parliament to completely abolish the death by definitely voting against it’.

Only 18 of the 100 respondents favoured any expansion in the use of the death penalty or in the number of executions.

Only 10 of the 100 respondents (six retentionists and four abolitionists) endorsed ‘more executions’ as likely to be effective in reducing the incidence of serious violent crime leading to death.

Only one in five (19), including only a quarter of the retentionists, thought there would be demonstrations of strong public dissatisfaction in the media and elsewhere, and repeated calls for its reinstatement if the death penalty were to be abolished.

What did those who favoured abolition think would be the best strategy to persuade government to embrace this reform?

The most favoured strategies were: 'through creating an influential civil society pressure group 'Citizens Against the Death Penalty'; by 'mounting a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the death penalty'; or by 'persuading the government to establish a high-level commission to report on the subject'.

FAQs

Who are 'Opinion Formers' and who were interviewed for this research study?

'Opinion Formers' are individuals who are considered knowledgeable in their fields derived from their qualifications or first-hand experience. They are trendsetters whose actions, attitudes, and pronouncements generally exert direct and indirect influence on others. The interviewees were selected from four areas of public life: politics and the higher civil service; criminal justice and legal practice; religious leaders; and well-regarded and influential members of civil society.

Why was the study conducted?

The mandatory death penalty has been abolished in all Eastern Caribbean States and most recently in Barbados in 2018. However, governments have not shown any commitment towards the complete abolition of the death penalty. In general, there haven't been any political initiatives to raise the issue of abolition, and governments continue to rely on perceived obstacles in order to maintain the status quo, such as apparent public support for capital punishment and the deterrent effect of the death penalty. This study was conducted to gain an insight into the views and attitudes of opinion leaders on the death penalty and to identify the barriers to reform in the seven nations.

What are the regional and global developments on the death penalty?

The global context: -

Over two thirds of the world's countries (142 states) have now abolished the death penalty in law or in practice. Around 160 countries in the world have either abolished the death penalty in law, introduced a moratorium, or do not practice it. These countries are regarded as *de facto* abolitionist by the United Nations as none of them have carried out an execution in the last 10 years.

The Caribbean in regional and global context: -

All 35 independent countries of the Americas have ratified the [OAS Charter](#) and belong to the OAS. Bolivia in 2013 and Suriname in 2015 abolished the death penalty for all crimes. Guatemala abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes in 2017. Only a minority of 14 OAS states retain the death penalty of which twelve are in the English-speaking Caribbean. They are all regarded as abolitionist *de facto* by the United Nations. In 2018, only 22 countries carried out executions with the United States being the only active retentionist within the Organisation of American States (OAS).

The English-speaking Caribbean currently has a population of at least 67 persons on death row – Barbados has 10 people under sentence of death, Guyana has 15, including two women, and Trinidad has 42. Notably, Trinidad and Tobago is the only country within the region to maintain a mandatory death penalty. Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines each have one prisoner under sentence of death. There are no prisoners under sentence of death in Belize, Jamaica, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, St Lucia and St

Kitts and Nevis. The number of people on death row in the region has dropped by over 70% in the past 25 years.

Who carried out the research?

Professor Roger Hood (professor emeritus of criminology at the University of Oxford) was commissioned to devise this research study and write the report. Dr Florence Seemungal (adjunct staff member of the University of the West Indies Open Campus) was responsible for organising and carrying out the fieldwork, assisted by attorney-at-law Amaya Athill.

Who funded the research?

The report was funded by grants made to The Death Penalty Project by the European Union (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) and the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office as part of a wider collaborative project which included the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill); the local organisations Greater Caribbean for Life and the St Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association; as well as the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

What is the wider Caribbean project that this research study is part of?

The wider Caribbean project aims to build a platform for abolition of death penalty in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean countries. The overall aim is to foster collaboration between relevant stakeholders and to build a strong civil society platform promoting the abolition of the death penalty. The project also aims to provide accurate, empirical data to key stakeholders to enable an informed debate and to highlight inevitable injustices in the administration of the death penalty.

For more information on this study, or to request an interview, please contact: -

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