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EXPLORING SUPPORT FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: ANALYSIS OF
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ABSTRACT

The death penalty is one of the most controversial pieces of legislation in United States history. There are a variety of ways in which to study capital punishment, but one aspect that has seen much growth over the last half-century is public opinion research. There is now a vast amount of research that investigates attitudes toward capital punishment. However, much of this literature fails to explore how the specifics of support for the death penalty vary by wording of the questions. Typically, previous studies fail to ask questions that allow respondents to choose from a list of alternatives to the death penalty. Furthermore, very few studies ask respondents how strong their attitudes are for this punishment. As a result, a critical aspect of vital information is missing from research that has contributed to the decisions behind abolishing and reinstating the most severe form of punishment possible. Also, previous studies that examine race and death penalty support have only done so among two major groups: Blacks and Whites. The current study investigates such attitudes with nationally-representative data that were structured with the objective of gauging the full scope of public opinion on capital punishment in America. Expounding upon prior research results, I found nuances in the relationship between public opinion and two of the most salient predictors of death penalty support: authoritarianism and race (including others), as well as other significant controls. Furthermore, support for the death penalty as well as predictors of that support vary according to how the questions are worded. Policy implications and directions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Justification for Research

The death penalty remains one of the most controversial issues in United States legislation. The decision of whether to take one's life for acts of wrongdoing has been widely debated for nearly a century, with the bulk of the argument coming within the last fifty years. There are a myriad of factors that play into for support for or opposition to capital punishment, including religious beliefs (specifically denomination and literal interpretation of the bible), political views, gender, race, income, education level, marital status, and, important to the current study, race. In the midst of support and opposition to the death penalty, one of the consistent issues as to why capital punishment should be abolished is the particularly pressing issue of racial disparities and/or discrimination.

To be sure, disparity refers to numerical differences based on some characteristic, which in this case tends to be race not necessarily due to unequal treatment (Bohm, 2007). However, considerable research demonstrates that the race, class, and gender of the victim are frequently associated with sentencing disparity (Holcomb, Williams & Demuth, 2004). Many studies have also shown that race is a significant predictor of receiving the death penalty, with Blacks being treated more unfairly than Whites (Dambrun, 2007). About thirty-four percent of those executed in the United States after 1976 have been African-American, in

spite of the fact that this minority makes up only twelve percent of the United States population (Adams, 2005). Similarly, the “mass market racial disparity” argument is that the criminal justice system is harsher toward Blacks in comparison to Whites, and is more apt to execute African Americans than Whites (McAdams, 1998). Considering the difficult history of race relations in America’s past, it is no surprise that the issue of race is an overwhelming focus of research in this area (Williams, Demuth & Holcomb, 2007).

Additionally, many claim such disparities in sentencing to be unconstitutional, adding to the debate surrounding capital punishment. Race is one of the strongest predictors of support for the death penalty, with Whites being far more likely to support capital punishment than other races. Even more important to consider is why a racial divide exists in attitudes towards capital punishment. Several theorists and scholars have asserted that such a position is the result of various forms of racial prejudice; whereas others contend that another variable, authoritarianism, may be more salient of a predictor than racial prejudice. In the current study, I explore this issue in greater depth, examining how race interacts with authoritarian personality in predicting death penalty support.

America’s love of the death penalty is not shared by all nations. According to Soss, Langbein, and Metelko (2003), there are currently 109 countries who oppose capital punishment in law or practice, whereas 86 still have and use it (most of which do not use it regularly). Furthermore, the United States stands virtually alone among Western industrialized countries that use capital punishment. Support

for the death penalty in the United States is important because of its impact on policy. There is a general consensus that public opinion can influence public policy in many ways. Burstein (2003) studied the impact that public opinion can have on a variety of policies, and ultimately concluded that attitudes affect policy approximately 75 percent of the time, and this effect remains significant when a number of factors are taken into consideration. With this being noted, public opinion can have a great impact on the existence of the death penalty in many jurisdictions. To be sure, the U.S. Supreme Court even acknowledges public opinion as a legitimate reason for ruling on the constitutional grounds of the death penalty under the Eighth Amendment (Finckenauer, 1988; *Furman v. Georgia*, 1972; *Gregg v. Georgia*, 1976; *Roper v. Simmons*, 2005).

If public opinion can have a strong effect on public policy, then having a situation where individuals support a policy without knowing the true picture of its strengths and shortcomings can lead, by extension, to higher correctional administrative costs, the execution of innocent people, and other devastating outcomes. Thus, more public opinion research is necessary to prevent the further dissemination of misinformation. To clarify, deception is one of many reasons why I pursued this line of research. Misunderstandings about the costs and advantages of death penalty have led many to falsely support capital punishment. To illustrate, many studies have shown that with education and information regarding the death penalty, some proponents have changed their views to those less in favor of the policy (Bohm, 2007). Moreover, how questions are asked and how much

information is gathered will impact the overall picture of attitudes on the issue. Therefore, insufficient measures of public opinion research will continue to affect the status of the death penalty - and by extension, our justice system - until more research can decisively show the true representation of how Americans feel with regards to capital punishment.

In the current study, I explore how wording of the questions, authoritarianism and race impact support for the death penalty. Although the data used are limited by the very small sample sizes for minority races, such as African Americans and others (Hispanics/Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, biracial and multiracial categories), there are some interesting and meaningful findings that are distinct from prior research and adds to the literature greatly. A question asking about death penalty attitudes with alternatives available shows racial differences that are important to note. Most importantly, differences by racial groups for reasons for supporting or not supporting the death penalty are analyzed, and ultimately, this added measure provides a solid pathway for future research to expound upon with samples that have better racial heterogeneity and more respondents.

History of the Death Penalty in the U.S.

The history of the death penalty in the United States is extensive. In the early years (dating back to 1608), there were a total of 12 death-eligible crimes - including witchcraft, poisoning, sodomy, and adultery – carried out by the Puritans

during the colonial times (Banner, 2002; Bohm, 2007). The Bible was typically the justification for such punishment. At the other end of the spectrum, the Quakers didn't have the death penalty until 1682, and only for crimes of treason and murder. Executions largely served the purpose of retribution and general deterrence during colonial times (Bohm, 2007). Even in early times, there were opposing viewpoints about whether the death penalty should exist. A strong contingent of early settlers always supported executions, while the Quakers' abolitionist efforts were strongly embedded in Pennsylvania's existence as a state. Such differing viewpoints remained rather constant over the course of the developing U.S., with certain states enabling statutes to allow discretionary application of the death penalty, while other states began efforts to abolish the death penalty in as early as 1846 (Michigan, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin) (Bohm, 2007; DPIC).

The early nineteenth century period initially saw an increase in the number of states who had abolished the death penalty, but this period was short-lived. With the perils of the Great Depression and the lingering effects of World War I, the 1930s saw more executions than any other decade in American History (Bohm, 2007; DPIC). After this period of markedly high executions (and death penalty support), death sentences began to decline at a rapid pace from the 1940s through 1960s. Starting in the late 1960s, scholars began to challenge the constitutionality of the death penalty. Several cases between 1968 and 1972 impacted what would become known as the *Furman* era (*U.S. v Jackson*, 1968; *Witherspoon v Illinois*, 1968; *Crampton v Ohio/McGautha v California*, 1971; *Furman v Georgia*, 1972).

In the *Furman* decision, the Supreme Court – by a vote of 5 to 4 – held that the death penalty could be arbitrary in its application, thus violating the Eighth Amendment as “cruel and unusual” and the Fourteenth Amendment requiring “equal protection under the law” (*Furman v Georgia*, 1972). This era led to a wave of death penalty statute revisions designed to answer the problems cited under *Furman*, namely sentencing guidelines for the judge and jury, in a number of states. This eventually led to the *Gregg* decision (*Gregg v Georgia*, 1976), where the Supreme Court held that the death penalty itself was constitutional. It is important to note that in both *Furman* and *Gregg*, public opinion was cited as a justification for the decisions made by the Court justice (less support in *Furman*, and majority support in *Gregg*).

Post-*Gregg*, the U.S. has seen an overall decline in the number of death penalty cases. Other issues regarding the constitutionality and efficacy of the death penalty have surfaced since, including racial discrimination, juvenile death penalty, mental retardation, as well as innocence. More important to this study, public opinion regarding the death penalty has fluctuated over the years, with an all-time low level of death penalty support in 1966 (42 percent) (Bohm, 2007; DPIC, 2008). From here, support for the penalty would increase to level of 80 percent in 1994. However, an important addendum surfaced with regard to public support for capital punishment during this time period. More and more Americans began to favor alternative punishments to the death penalty, namely life without the possibility of parole. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the position of the United States as a

Western democracy powerhouse became singular with the law and practice of capital punishment (Zimring, 2003). As distinguished death penalty scholar Franklin Zimring (2003) has pointed out, a death sentence is a perplexing and contradictory result given the extensive review and procedural process that characterizes the criminal justice system present in the U.S. By the year 2000, the amount of executions by American states had rose to levels similar to those of the 1950s. Since that peak period, executions have steadily declined to a low of 43 – the lowest since 1996 (DPIC, 2012). Modern day U.S. society is characterized by the majority of states still having death penalty statutes, but with the majority of executions coming from a handful of states.

There have been a few detailed studies that have taken a global perspective on capital punishment, with the spotlight on America. Roger Hood (2001), a professor from the University of Oxford in England, best summarized the state of death penalty in democratic countries as follows:

... a more utilitarian or practical argument is that there is no convincing evidence that the rate of murder (or any other crime threatened with the death penalty) is consistently lower when the death penalty is on the statute book and enforced by executions. When all the circumstances surrounding the way in which capital punishment is used in democratic states and under the rule of law are taken into account, it has not proved to be a more effective deterrent than the alternative sanction of long-term imprisonment. It is therefore a useless burden on the administration of a rational system of criminal justice. (pp. 331-332).

Hood gave credence to the notion that when public opinion is provoked by reports of heinous murders, it is difficult to see the United States as a whole join the

abolitionist movement. He concludes his excerpt by suggesting that pressure from European countries may affect US consciousness, but only when politicians in both the state and federal government reject populism as the sole basis for determining this dispute will Americans will cooperatively decide to end the use of the death sentence in our nation (Hood, 2001). Unnever (2010) also focused on global support for the death penalty as a way to examine whether there are fundamental differences between Americans and other countries in their views. The results from study support the notion of “American exceptionalism,” which suggests that Americans may be culturally distinct from the rest of the world given their significantly higher likelihood to support the death penalty compared to those living in the nearly sixty other countries included in the analysis (Unnever, 2010). Such a conclusion warrants the further study of factors that impact social attitudes, particularly as they pertain to capital punishment.

The existence of the death penalty has been thoroughly debated over the last several decades, yet the majority of jurisdictions in America still have the policy. This begs the question: why do the majority of U.S. states keep a law in place that is seldom used? Implications for this question and more will be discussed throughout the entirety of this dissertation. Moreover, death penalty public opinion has been inconsistent over the years, which suggests an investigation into the ways in which better measures and a greater variety of questions may help capture the true picture of such views in the United States. This project aims to address such a phenomenon by evaluating the state of death penalty opinion in the United States,

as well as the analysis of which categories of Americans seek alternatives to the death penalty. In the current study, I will examine the role of race in death penalty support, focusing on both how authoritarian personality may interact with race and whether the effects of race and authoritarian personality remain constant when other options (such as life without parole) are available when other variables (such as political views, age, income, education, gender, and region of country) are controlled.

Capital Punishment in the Contemporary United States

The United States has seen the majority of its states since the reinstating of the death penalty in the Supreme Court case of *Gregg v. Georgia* resume a death penalty statute. According to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), a national non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment, there are currently thirty-three states with the death penalty. Most notably, Texas, Virginia, Oklahoma, Florida, and Missouri all have the death penalty and sentence at a much higher rate than the majority of other states with this punishment. Additional states include: Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, and North and South Carolina, as well as the U.S. government and the U.S. military. An important discernment is that although California overwhelmingly leads all states by number of death row inmates (724), they actually carry out executions at a much *lower* rate compared to the rest of states with capital punishment. This may explain their budgetary crises that have

distinguished them as a state with the most criminal justice and correctional budget problems (DPIC, 2012).

States without the death penalty include: Michigan – which has essentially never had it, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota. Connecticut and New Mexico are two states who have recently abolished the death penalty but still have inmates on death row. Something important to explain is the actual executions by region of country. As previously shown, the South overwhelmingly has more states with the death penalty, and more states that sentence people to death (DPIC, 2012). Subsequently, there are a vastly greater number of executions in the South (1066) compared to the Midwest (151), West, (80), and Northeast (4). What is more intriguing is that Texas and Virginia combine for 591 executions, almost half the number of the entire South. This suggests that these two states are the capitols of the death penalty in the United States.

More important to the current study, there are noteworthy differences by race in regards to the death penalty. Recent studies have shown that race of the victim matters in death penalty sentencing. For example, in Louisiana, the likelihood of a death sentence was 97 percent higher for those whose victim was White than for those whose victim was Black. This suggests partly that the lives of Whites are more highly valued than are Blacks when it comes to sentencing and justice. By the same token, for persons convicted for interracial murders, Black defendants who kill a White victim were executed 255 times, compared to only 18 times for White defendants who kill Black victims (DPIC, 2012).

There also exists a staunch racial disparity in death row inmates by race. According to DPIC in 2012, death row inmates by race were distributed as follows: 43 percent White, 42 percent Black, 12 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Other. This is a major cause for concern considering many scholars have suggested that Blacks only account anywhere from 12 to 14 percent of the entire population. With these numbers, it is no surprising that a majority of African Americans oppose the death penalty at greater rates; there is a great sense of injustice tied to the most severe form of punishment that exists. Additional research into the existing racial disparities is needed to push for legislative change.

In summary, the above statistics and information demonstrates the state of death penalty in the United States from early on to the present. There are many problems that exist with who gets a death sentence and why, and public opinion is a dimension of research that can help us understand why individuals feel that the death penalty should or should not be utilized. The rest of this project is designed to analyze how public opinion impacts death penalty legislation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Opinion and the Death Penalty

Public opinion polls have been instrumental in terms of showing the American majority's support for capital punishment (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000). Despite Justice Scalia's arguments to the contrary in the *Roper v. Simmons* (2005) decision to ban juvenile executions, public opinion research has been cited by others as an influential factor in interpreting the evolving standards of decency within contemporary United States society (Bowers, 1993; *In re Stanford*). This line of research is of critical importance because such views, above all other factors, likely accounts for the continued existence and use of the death penalty in the majority of jurisdictions across America (Bowers, 1993; Cullen, Fisher & Applegate, 2000; Jones, 1994). More and more research has shown the connection between support for punitive legislation and a myriad of social psychological, demographic, and cognitive factors (Johnson, 2009).

Attitudinal surveys (which typically have conventional, single-item measures) show that a majority of the adult American population supports capital punishment (Cullen, Fisher & Applegate, 2000; Jones, 2002; Lambert, Clarke & Lambert, 2004; Murray, 2003; O'Neil, Patry, & Penrod, 2004; Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2007a, 2007b). Common reasons for such support include the belief that the death penalty is cheaper and has a deterrent effect

(Bohm, 2007), emotions (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Johnson, 2009), the retributive nature of the death penalty (Finckenauer, 1988), the desire for law and order (Lambert et al., 2004), and the belief that the death penalty prevents recidivism (O'Neil et al., 2004). Moreover, those who express anger about crime are more likely to support such punitive policies (Johnson, 2009). Further studies examine whether the policies advocated by the general public are generally retributive or rehabilitative in nature. For example, Payne, Gainey, Triplett, and Danner (2004) found that even with a sample from Virginia (which is considered to be a politically conservative state), that individuals can be best characterized as mixed between retributive and rehabilitative in their justifications for punishment.

True support for capital punishment, however, continues to be studied. There is a fundamental problem that exists among most public opinion research regarding the death penalty: typical survey questions are too simple and, therefore, are misleading (Bohm, 2007; Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Jones, 1994). To be sure, the common justifications for handing out a death sentence may rely on oversimplified notions (as measured in polls) of opinions of the death penalty and its application (Murray, 2003). On the other hand, when surveys are more methodologically refined, the public's seemingly strong pro-death penalty stance for those convicted of murder wanes. As a result of this dilemma, many scholars question whether true public beliefs on appropriate punishments for murder and other crimes are being accurately studied.

According to Vollum, Longmire & Buffington-Vollum (2004), many individuals who lack confidence in a death sentence and support a moratorium on its use still favor the use of the death penalty. This, in large part, suggests that death penalty support may be largely “value expressive,” which suggests that there are more categories of death penalty support that should be further explored. On the other hand, Unnever et al. (2005) make an effort to show that there is a contingent of people (nearly 33 percent) who do not strongly support the death penalty, in addition to others who have weakly-held views that are supportive of a capital sentence. The authors also suggest that future research offer respondents a choice between selecting a death sentence and a plausible sentencing alternative, such as life without parole.

A number of scholars have argued that public opinion can indeed have an effect on public policy. Burstein (2003) was able to conclude through a hybrid hypothesis testing of previous studies that public opinion affects policy approximately 75 percent of the time its impact is gauged, with a substantial policy effect at least 33 percent of the time. Although this concept is difficult to study, several suggestions are made, including having a sound methodological agenda and improving the measurement of policy by focusing more on the determinants of policy change. Similarly, Unnever and Cullen (2005) make a concerted effort to point out the policy implications of public opinion research. The authors conclude that those who tenuously oppose the death penalty may change their views when learning of the possibility of innocent people being executed, particularly among

African Americans, and that the challenge of altering those with retributive notions about the death penalty lies in focusing on wrongful convictions. This is consistent with Murray's (2003) analysis. In short, the current research could positively impact public policy with its findings on either a legal or political platform.

Phrasing of Questions

An additional aspect of research on public opinion on capital punishment should be considered. How to measure public opinion is a strong area of concern within the death penalty literature. There have been several studies that suggest that how questions are phrased in capital punishment surveys is very important to the outcomes. For example, Bohm (2007) states that support for capital punishment drops when the death penalty question is asked with a strongly punitive and meaningful alternative provided. Also, the polling firms of Greenberg/Lake and the Tarrance Group conducted a poll on support for the death penalty and revealed an increasing trend that Americans would favor certain alternative sentences over the death penalty (Dieter, 1997). To be sure, the majority of those interviewed reported support for capital punishment singularly, but that support is lessened when the sentence of life without parole with restitution (LWOP + R) is added as an option. Furthermore, Bowers (1993) carefully demonstrated results from the 1985 Amnesty International polls that showed among several notoriously punitive states (e.g., Florida, Georgia, California), death penalty support dropped

precipitously when given the life without parole plus restitution (LWOP+R) sentence alternative.

Mills and Zamble (1998) noted the importance of the presentation of details (e.g. amount and order of information) with any public opinion research project related to the death penalty. Similarly, Unnever and his co-authors (2005) argued that wording was critical to the outcome of the poll. Several scholars, including Lambert and associates (2004), Cullen and colleagues (2000), and Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts (2005) adequately demonstrated that public opinion regarding the death penalty was not simply a yes or no decision for most people. The answer to such a dilemma could be as simple as offering a range of options, such as a Likert scale, that would provide a more in-depth picture that demonstrates the distribution of strongly to weakly held views regarding the death penalty.

Additionally, polls from various U.S. states have provided additional support for the aforementioned arguments. These polls showed that when people were presented with certain alternatives to capital punishment, their support for the death penalty dropped dramatically, including some of the most notoriously faithful death penalty states such as Oklahoma, Virginia, and Georgia (Dieter, 1997). Moreover, the author stated that death penalty support dropped more with an alternative sentence of no parole for 25 years than with a sentence mandating absolutely no parole plus restitution. This demonstrated that people were not as overwhelmingly harsh as they seemed, but rather, they sought actions that attempted to restore justice and equilibrium to society.

This example and many others illustrate the need for change. If we are to use public opinion polls as a measure of whether or not to implore a sentence of death in certain states, the right questions must be asked. Although we now know much more information about yearly death penalty opinions today than at any other time in the history of death penalty public opinion polling (Bohm, 2007), future efforts must continue in the direction of more sophisticated instruments, with more refined polling options, more detailed questions, and a greater variety of respondents in order to properly assess critical issues among the public.

Race and the Death Penalty

Race is one of the most highly researched subtopics within the death penalty literature. Moreover, it is one of the foremost predictors of attitudes toward capital punishment (Unnever, Cullen & Jonson, 2008). There tend to be differences by race, in which African Americans have opposed capital punishment at significantly higher rates than Whites (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; Unnever & Cullen, 2007a, 2007b; Unnever, Cullen & Jonson, 2008). To be sure, one study shows that almost 36 percent of Whites polled in 2000 expressed strong support for capital punishment, whereas approximately 34 percent of African Americans were strongly opposed to such policy (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Aside from the statistics, there are multiple reasons for assuming race is linked to public opinion. One reason is that racial attitudes (including stereotypes) influence policy attitudes and outcomes on otherwise “race-neutral”

issues such as welfare (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). Consequently, although the death penalty is supposedly a race-neutral policy, it has a disproportionate effect on black citizens, as recognized by the Supreme Court (Clawson, Kegler & Waltenburg, 2003).

It is important to note certain correlations in support of capital punishment, including race and political affiliation. There is empirical support for both political and racial differences in capital punishment support. Interestingly, these two factors may be linked in several ways. Many studies have confirmed that there are differences in African Americans' and Whites' attitudes toward capital punishment, with the former consistently holding less punitive views (Baker, Lambert, & Jenkins, 2005; Bobo & Johnson, 2007; Bohm, 1991; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Lynch & Haney, 2000; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002; Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2007a, 2007b).

More specifically, Unnever and Cullen (2007a) posit that differences in attitudes by race with regards to capital punishment result from African Americans' and Whites' different political beliefs. Along this racial-political examination, Whites tend to be more conservative in comparison to Blacks, thus justifying the differences in race and support for the death penalty (Barkan & Cohn, 1994; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; Soss et al., 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2007a, 2007b). However, there is concern that this is simply an aggregate statistic that varies depending on region of country (such as in Oklahoma, where no significant racial differences were found via public opinion analyses that focused on death penalty

attitudes for juveniles, Sharp et al. 2007). Additionally, Unnever and Cullen (2005) conclude that political ideology is a significantly influencing factor on whether one supports capital punishment or life in prison without the possibility of parole (LWOP).

In addition to political affiliation, there are a number of theories as to why Whites may support the death penalty at a greater rate than Blacks. One perspective is that if the number of executions per capita by race were closer to the proportions of race in society, we would eventually see less of a disparity in these attitudes toward capital punishment. A significant number of African Americans may either know someone affected by the criminal justice system or may believe that minorities are unfairly treated, which would lead to their rebel against the system that is disproportionately affecting them. More specifically, Soss et al. (2003) suggest that the link between race and crime could be in part due to the high rate of violence in Black neighborhoods, along with the exacerbation of such perceptions by the media. As a result, many White Americans tend to put a color on crime - a color not their own. Ultimately, Soss and colleagues (2003) conclude that no one variable can account for why most White people support the death penalty or why a dissident minority stands in opposition. This further illustrates the importance of including an array of factors into the explanatory picture of support for legalized executions.

There have been other studies that specifically examine race and public opinion. Most notably, Unnever and Cullen (2007a) follow up on their previous

work by reassessing the racial divide in capital punishment by examining two perspectives on the racial gap in support for capital punishment: the master status perspective—asserts that a gap exists between Blacks and Whites so wide that it is unbridgeable. In contrast, the spurious/social convergence thesis assumes such a divide in race is spurious and that Blacks would eventually converge with Whites in their views toward capital punishment. However, the authors find little support for the latter thesis. This could be in part due to the predictive nature and assumptions of the spurious/social convergence thesis. Unnever and Cullen (2007b) suggest that attitudes toward capital punishment may be embedded in African Americans' longtime history of racial oppression that leads to skepticism about the use of legal action by the state (for a qualitative perspective on the matter, see Cook and Powell, 2003).

Bobo and Johnson (2004), authors with a long record of scholarship on race and capital punishment, conducted a series of survey-based experiments with African American and White respondents to further assess the racial divide in support for capital punishment as well as other forms of punitive legislation. The authors found that the majority group opinion (White) was considerably less likely to be affected by the framing experiments than was Black opinion, which implies steadfastness in the opinion of Whites with regards to the death penalty compared to Blacks. In short, it may be inferred from this research that Whites support the death sentence more and are less likely to change those opinions under varying conditions.

Peffley and Hurwitz (1998) investigated how negative stereotypes of Blacks may impact the support for policies such as the death penalty. When analyzing the data, they discovered that people's perceptions of criminals were embedded in Black criminals, not White criminals, and that the subsequent negative evaluations of Black prisoners are more likely to lead to more punitive sanctions compared to negative evaluations for White prisoners. Thus, similar to results found by Bobo and Johnson (2004), Peffley and Hurwitz (2002) provide evidence that "get tough" policies contain a strong racial component: punitive crime measures appear to be strongly rooted in beliefs about Blacks. A primary implication of this research is an important contribution to the disparity in capital sentencing argument.

Lastly, Clawson and colleagues (2003) assessed the Court's effect on Black public opinion considering factors such as diffuse support for the Court, as well as group-centric attitudes. Diffuse support can be defined as a "reservoir of favorable attitudes or goodwill that will help members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their wants" (Clawson et al. 2003, p. 305). In light of this definition, the authors conclude that for Blacks who possess a great sense of racial solidarity, their in-group identification supersedes diffuse support for the Court. Otherwise, diffuse support gives legitimacy to the Court's policies. This position may help to understand the outlook of Blacks' views on death penalty legislation in the future.

One of the only studies to ask questions about reasons for support and non-support for the death penalty comes from Baker, Lambert, and Jenkins (2005).

Using a sample of students from a Midwestern university, the authors used data that asked respondents to indicate their degree of support from very strongly opposed to very strongly favor. Additionally, the questionnaire included a series of prompts that indicate reasons to support the death penalty (including several questions that indicate deterrence, retribution, law and order, and incapacitation) and reasons to oppose (morality, unfairly applied, brutalization, mercy, and innocence) using Likert responses. The results showed that there were significant differences between Whites and Blacks in reasons for support or opposition to capital punishment. Importantly, Black students were more likely to support the idea of unfair administration and innocence as reasons to oppose the death penalty (Baker et al., 2005). However, given the nonrandom convenience sampling and the focus on students, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the public.

In conclusion, the relationship between race and public opinion is intriguing. On one side of the race literature is information about racial disparities in capital sentencing, and another side focuses on why differences in attitudes exist by race and ethnicity. Scholars have overwhelmingly concluded that while race continues to be a dividing factor for public opinion, a more elaborate investigation into why such differences exist is imperative. A further exploration of these factors presented in this section will provide a better understanding of how race impacts public opinion on death penalty legislation.

Authoritarianism and Attitudes toward the Death Penalty

An emerging topic of interest within capital punishment literature is the effect of authoritarian views on support for capital punishment. Authoritarianism can be defined as “a desire for a highly structured world in which individuals know their place, conform to social conventions, obey rules, and respect officialdom” (Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003, p. 405). Moreover, Altemeyer (2006) proffers that authoritarian individuals typically support the current authorities in their communities, namely government officials and religious leaders. Further, he states that such followers have personalities that include: “a high degree of submission to the established, legitimate authorities in their society; high levels of aggression in the name of their authorities; and a high level of conventionalism” (Altemeyer, 2006, p. 9). The concept of authoritarianism was originally developed by Adorno et al. (1950) with the purpose of explaining prejudice and the oppression of out-groups. After receiving much criticism with regards to its methodology, several revisions of the theoretical background of authoritarianism have been made over the last 30 years (Altemeyer, 1988, 2006; Feldman, 2003; Stack, 2000, 2003).

According to Stack (2003), the various dimensions (sometimes referred to as symbolic orientations) of authoritarianism - rigidity, submission, conventionalism, and ethnocentrism - are interconnected. An example of how such dimensions are interconnected would be the way in which submission relates to obedience to the conventions of authorities. In other words, authoritarians would expectedly support capital punishment for homicide because the perpetrator has not

succumbed to the institutionalized laws in our civilization that forbid murder (Stack, 2003). There appears to be something about the authoritarian personality that makes him or her follow the rules in society, as set forth by the leaders, without question. Such followers also proactively support the leaders and will defend them to others who oppose or defy the authorities. Altemeyer refers to this group of people as “right-wing” authoritarians (2006, p. 9).

To clarify, everyone adheres to the rules of society in some way or another, and the vast majority of us are conformists. However, where authoritarians, particularly right-wing authoritarians, differ from others is in their submission to authority even when the rulers are crooked, unscrupulous, and perhaps even fraudulent (Altemeyer, 2006). They will also implore *you* to submit to authority in almost any circumstance. What is more interesting about these followers are their punitive mindsets regarding offenders who violate the law, yet they are less willing to hold officials responsible for their misconduct in handling law violators. For example, according to Altemeyer (2006), authoritarians hold views that are less likely to favor sanctions toward a police officer who assaults a protest demonstrator. In relation to this study, authoritarians are assumed to be in favor of capital punishment for murder because the perpetrator has not submitted to the official laws in society that forbid homicide (Stack, 2003). In short, there appear to be exceptions to the rules of society, but such exceptions only extend to the rulers of society in the eyes of authoritarians.

Houtman (2003) analyzed characteristics that were determining factors in who is likely to be authoritarian. The author primarily focused on what is known as “working-class authoritarianism.” He discussed the relationship between class, differences in education, and authoritarianism. Houtman (2003, p. 86) also stated that, “the more the operationalization of class is based upon differences in education, the stronger the observed relation between class and authoritarianism.” Further, he posited that it is primarily people with low levels of education that are authoritarian. This notion aids in the understanding of why such individuals are steadfast in their views of rules and rulers within society. Also of interest is that individuals with higher levels of education appear to be less authoritarian, have greater levels of open-mindedness to nonconformity, and tend to be less racially prejudiced than those who have lower levels of education. There is additional literature that has examined how authoritarianism is interrelated with variables such as racial prejudice and nonconformity.

First, Houtman (2003) clearly distinguished between economic liberalism and authoritarianism, as the two factors are completely independent of one another. His work was vital in shoring up Lipset’s (1959) position on working-class authoritarianism in one simple way: cultural capital is a decisive factor in the relationship between authoritarianism and intolerance in that higher levels of cultural capital indicate a greater propensity towards recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting deviant ideas and lifestyles as cultural phenomena. To summarize,

those individuals with higher education typically have more exposure to a variety of cultures, and thus are more accepting of nonconformity.

As aforementioned, there have been several studies from the mid-to-late 20th century that have incorporated authoritarianism in their framework since the original concept by Adorno and colleagues in 1950 (e.g., Feldman, 2003; Stack, 2003). These studies have linked authoritarianism to issues such as conservative values about welfare, racial prejudice, sexism, and hostility to foreigners. After the early 1980s, the measure declined in its use for analysis among social issues, but resurged beginning in the 1990s. According to Stack (2003), the authoritarian measure had not been used as a part of capital punishment literature until the time of his article. Since then, there has been a growth in the inclusion of the measure in this line of work. Authoritarian views largely shape public support for national policies (Altemeyer, 2006; Unnever and Cullen, 2007b).

Altemeyer (1988) developed a new and more reliable measure of the construct (compared to previous work) that has led to its increased applicability in the social sciences. This is in large part what has led to the resurgence of the study of authoritarianism in recent years. This simpler conceptualization by Altemeyer sees authoritarianism as a social attitude that is cultured through communication with family, peer groups, education, and the media, as well as through contact with people who have both conventional and non-conventional values and ways of life. More importantly, in order to address concerns regarding its criticism as being synonymous with politically conservative, his measure of “right-wing”

authoritarianism (named the RWA scale to denote a difference in simple conservative ideology and the more extreme end of the political spectrum) is more consistent and one-dimensional than prior measures (Altemeyer, 1998; Feldman, 2003).

Feldman (2003) elaborated on Altemeyer's revisions in a theory of authoritarianism that focuses heavily on the element of social conformity. Feldman addressed the shortcomings of the revised authoritarianism measures and conceptualizations from Altemeyer through focusing on people's social positions toward society, and, especially, clashes between individual rights and the welfare of society as a whole. Focusing primarily on the conflicting values of two factors, social conformity and autonomy, Feldman (2003) devised a continuum of sorts between such factors. He also proposed that, "people who value autonomy over social conformity should reject societal constraints on behavior, including restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly, and civil liberties; whereas the reverse should be true of people who value social conformity over autonomy—yearning to protect society from deviants through effectively punishing nonconformists and restricting their freedom" (Feldman, 2003, pp. 49-50). This is essential to the understanding of authoritarian values, as well as the conceptualization and measurement of an authoritarianism construct.

In testing his conceptualization of authoritarianism, Feldman (2003) analyzed the combination of social conformity-autonomy and perceived threat as they feed into racial prejudice and intolerance. Using a sample of undergraduate

college students at a northeastern university, the author found that the effect of social conformity-autonomy on intolerance rose significantly as perceptions of threat to social cohesion increased, and such an effect decreased among those who perceived little societal threat (Feldman, 2003). Furthermore, racial prejudice, similar to intolerance, was higher among those who viewed social conformity as more important than personal autonomy, as well as in those who perceived social cohesion as threatened. In short, the social conformity-autonomy dimension, when coupled with perceived threat, was the basis of the authoritarianism spectacle. According to Feldman (2003), it was under these conditions when authoritarianism was predictive of prejudice and intolerance.

Similarly, Feldman and Stenner (1997) examined what may be perceived as consequences of authoritarianism: prejudice, punitiveness, and most importantly, societal threat. Drawing from Adorno et al.'s (1950) work and others that followed, the authors attempted to solve a quandary of the threat-authoritarianism hypothesis using individual-level data. The authors made a point to differentiate between long-term and short-term societal threat and how this impacted levels of authoritarianism. Even more important was that the authors used data from the 1992 National Election Studies pre-post-election study, the same scale construct design used in the current study. Although they were unable to directly measure intolerance or punitiveness, the authors utilized a set of variables that measured minority group attitudes, attitudes toward the use of force, and general social and political attitudes for proxy (Feldman & Stenner, 1997:746).

Overall, the authors aimed to evaluate authoritarian views with regards to a variety of attitudes and values, including the use of force (which included a question about support for the death penalty). The authors found that authoritarianism had a clear and certain influence upon intolerant and punitive attitudes. That is, authoritarian values were greatly evident when people perceived that political status and/or presidential candidates held philosophical beliefs very different from their own. These values were also strongly present when people had negative reactions to presidential candidates, or when there was a perception of a weakening national economy. Ultimately, it was perceived threat at the societal level (as opposed to the individual- or personal-level threat) that sparked the exasperation of authoritarians and magnified the impact of authoritarian stances on intolerant and punitive attitudes (Feldman & Stenner, 1997). In other words, perceived threat appeared to be essential to the stimulation of authoritarianism. Those with higher levels of authoritarianism became more punitive and ethnocentric under conditions of threat, while those low in authoritarianism become even less punitive and ethnocentric under these conditions (Feldman & Stenner, 1997:762). Otherwise, this characteristic may be dormant in its application to a wide variety of social positions. This is a critical discernment from the earlier works on authoritarianism by Adorno et al. (1950) and Altemeyer (1981, 1998).

Several other studies have examined authoritarianism as it relates to variety of other social issues and elements. Peterson, Doty, and Winter (1993) examined authoritarianism as it related to contemporary social issues such as HIV/AIDS,

drug use and the environment, particularly because they involved personalized threats to varying degrees. This study was designed to further the construct validity of authoritarianism as an establishing measurement for positions on the aforementioned critical social issues that have come to forefront in the 1990s and beyond. What is interesting to note here is that the authors predicted that authoritarian aggression, submission and conventionality would be linked to positions toward the social issues of AIDS and drugs in contrast to the environment (which is less of a personalized threat, according to the authors). In other words, it seems as though the authors were theorizing a position inverse of Feldman and Stenner's (1997) societal threat as a trigger of authoritarianism.

Peterson et al. (1993) conducted three studies, all using undergraduate student samples, which tapped into the views of authoritarians. The authors found significant results for all measures that were indicative of authoritarians' harsh and punitive viewpoints for the threat of AIDS and drugs, whereas the studies yielded insignificant outcomes for certain environment-related issues such as environmental education and the punishment of companies that deliberately polluted. However, a major shortcoming that is noteworthy in relation to this study was the use of students as the sample group. Given the literature that suggests that the working class makes up a sizable contingent of authoritarian followers, using the selected sample group may not have been appropriate in order to adequately test such viewpoints. The study did succeed in informing us which social issues were

likely to trigger authoritarian responses, however. This helps to further the understanding of authoritarian positions on issues such as the death penalty.

Authoritarianism often emerges as a way of gauging prejudice with regards to a number of social facets. For example, in Whitley's (1999) study, he suggested that examining right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) were ways in which to study individuals' various underlying forms of prejudice. Also using a sample of students, (like Peterson et al., 1993), the author sought to discover the link between RWA/SDO and prejudice towards two out-groups: African Americans and homosexuals. Using canonical correlation multiple regression analysis, Whitley (1999) found that High RWA was primarily related to the stereotypes and emotional attitudes toward homosexuals (and perhaps a secondary role in other forms of prejudice); whereas social dominance was the primary factor in the span of all the types of prejudices. Lippa and Arad (1999) came to similar conclusions regarding authoritarians' negative attitudes toward homosexuals. The authors also found differences in authoritarianism based on gender: authoritarian men appeared to be defensive, maladjusted, and troubled, whereas women in this category appeared simply prejudiced and somewhat traditional and conventional. Whitley (1999) attributed this relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice towards gays to the religious nature of authoritarians and their view that such a lifestyle violated religious teachings, which leads to the next area of study within the authoritarian literature.

Religion and racial prejudice may also be related to authoritarianism in distinct ways. Generally, some studies have found that religious persons may be more prejudiced than most. However, it is important to define religion in specific ways to draw consistent conclusions. For example, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) chose to focus on religious fundamentalism (defined as the view that there is one set of religious lessons that encompasses the basic truth about humanity and deity) as it pertains to authoritarianism and prejudice. This is a major depart from other studies that focused on intrinsic vs. extrinsic religious orientations (e.g., Allport & Ross, 1967; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004). Using a sample of university students and their parents (recruited by the students via non-random sample surveys), Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) found that Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) was highly significantly correlated with religious fundamentalism (RF), as well as with most of the prejudice measures. In short, the study showed that people who scored high on the RWA and RF scales were more submissive and more aggressive against almost all of the minority groups listed in the prejudice scale. This included a great rate of support for the arrest, torture, and execution of radicals, as well as the isolation and restriction of gays' opportunities in life.

Similarly, Laythe, Finkel and Kirkpatrick (2001) analyzed authoritarianism as it pertained to fundamentalism and two forms of prejudice: racial and homosexual prejudice. Multiple regression analyses here also showed RWA and RF to be significantly correlated. However, a major difference between this study

and the work of Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992), in addition to the use of multiple regression analysis, was that when controlling for RWA, fundamentalism was *negatively* related to racial prejudice and *positively* related to homosexual prejudice. Laythe and associates (2001) concluded that right-wing authoritarianism was a stronger construct for comprehending the relationship between certain forms of religiousness—specifically fundamentalism—but that there evidently needed to be an additional component of fundamentalism that further contributed to the prediction of prejudice. In short, multiple regression analyses can be beneficial in analyzing the relationship between authoritarianism, religiousness, and various forms of prejudice.

The interplay of race, authoritarianism, and capital punishment is as follows: Whites who hold more authoritarian values are more likely to develop anti-Black racial attitudes, which in turn leads to support for policies that would most adversely affect Blacks, such as capital punishment (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1998; Sears, van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997; Soss et al., 2003). Several other scholars have confirmed this finding in a variety of ways. Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts (2005) assessed racial resentment, one of the most consistently found predictors of death penalty support, as it pertained to the strength of attitudes toward capital punishment. This variable was measured by introducing several statements for respondents, including comparing African Americans to other racially oppressed groups who later proved to be successful, as well as other framed statements. Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts (2005) concluded that

respondents in the U.S. that hold racial resentments toward African Americans were more likely *firmly* believe in the death penalty. In other words, these individuals, in addition to authoritarians, were statistically less likely to have weakly-held views about capital punishment.

To this point, there have been several, although not enough, studies conducted that have introduced the concepts of race, authoritarianism, and capital punishment. For example, several studies in many countries have found substantial positive correlations between measures of authoritarianism and racial prejudice, and several studies have shown that authoritarianism is positively and significantly correlated with attitudes toward the death penalty (Dambrun, 2007, p. 229). Soss and colleagues (2003) and Dambrun (2007) each contribute to the findings of the three aforementioned variables.

First, Soss, Langbein, and Metelko (2003) concluded from their analysis of American death penalty support that authoritarian and individualist values both significantly enhanced support for capital punishment. To examine these issues, the authors analyzed a wide base of factors, including racial attitudes, social group differences, core values and political attitudes, and features of social context. Authoritarianism, among other factors, was found to be positively and significantly related to White support for the death penalty. More importantly, the results offered strong support for the significant effects associated with a White individual's level of racial prejudice, the racial composition of the individual's county population, and the interaction thereof. Therefore, the results of this

research suggest that more insight into the effects of trust in people and government was needed in order to fully capture the accurate picture of public opinion toward capital punishment, especially as it pertains to authoritarianism and race. In short, there is a link between White support for capital punishment in the United States and anti-Black prejudice (Soss et al., 2003).

An additional study, conducted by Dambrun (2007), focused exclusively on authoritarianism and ethnocentrism and their effects on support for the death penalty. Upon testing the racist punitive bias hypothesis, the author's findings were consistent with Soss and associates (2003) in that authoritarianism was not the strongest predictor of support for capital punishment. Racial prejudice was the strongest predictor, and thus, provided strong support for the racist punitive bias hypothesis. However, this research is largely different than previous research (especially Stack, 2000) on authoritarianism and death penalty support in four important ways. First, the studies of this research were conducted in France, and recalling Unnever and Cullen's (2010) study, we learned that there are fundamental differences between European countries and the United States with regards to attitudes and aggression (also see Zimring, 2003). Second, this study largely focused on racial prejudice against Arabs, which, although it is very interesting, is a marked departure from other studies on racial prejudice and the death penalty. Third, the authoritarian measures were constructed based on French translations of Altemeyer's (1988) Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale, which had low internal consistency. Finally, the studies conducted in this research used psychology

students as subjects, utilizing an entirely different population of individuals compared to other authoritarian works.

To summarize, authoritarianism, and capital punishment are linked in ways that are intriguing but delicate. As such, this study attempts to investigate the interactions of this measure and other variables further. The authoritarian perspective has been used to explain a variety of fascist outlooks, so it is inevitable that its relationship to attitudes about capital punishment would be discovered (Dambrun, 2007). Ultimately, this approach posits that prejudiced people are those with personalities that lend to racist or fascist ideas that are prominent in society. Therefore, race becomes a factor of scrutiny in which those possessing authoritarian values look down on minority group members – namely Blacks. Additional detailed studies can help us learn more about the complex relationships between these variables.

The measure of authoritarianism is important to include in the study of death penalty attitudes much in the same way one would study how racial prejudice is related to the death penalty and other punitive sanctions; it is an additional (and, arguably sounder) way of categorizing a body of people that are steadfast in their position towards the most punitive policy that exists in modern day society, all out of deference to order, authority, and rules. Isolating and explaining authoritarians' support for capital punishment will enable a clearer picture of the other majority of Americans who do not fall in that category, and who will, in theory, be less firm in

their commitment to a policy that has a history of discrimination and misinformation once clarity is present and alternatives are in place.

When it comes to what authoritarianism means to a variety of social issues (especially views on capital punishment), Altemeyer (2006) said it best:

“If being prejudiced makes it easier to commit atrocities, high RWAs rank among the most prejudiced people in the country...If illogical thinking, highly compartmentalized ideas, double standards, and hypocrisy help one to be brutally unfair to others, high RWAs have extra helpings in all of those respects (p.237).”

In other words, authoritarians do not care if there is racial discrimination in the application of the death penalty, nor are they cognizant of the other myriad of problems associated with receiving and serving a capital sentence. Therefore, they need to be identified among the sample population just as many other control variables are. Without including as many factors as possible that have an impact on the results, true public opinion will not be adequately studied. This research allows for a fuller picture of a continuum of death penalty attitudes than previous literature.

Additional Significant Factors that Impact Support for the Death Penalty

Religion and Attitudes toward the Death Penalty

The relationship between religion and support for capital punishment has been studied in a variety of ways, including measures of church attendance, political views, religious affiliation and denomination, biblical literalism, salience of religion in everyday life, religious ideology, and religious fundamentalism (Britt, 1998). Most often, research has investigated the influence of fundamentalist religious membership or beliefs, arguing that they increase support for the death penalty. However, specifying this influence has proved to be a challenge. There is evidence that offers support to the thesis that fundamentalism, especially a literal interpretation of the Bible, fosters endorsement of the death penalty. The current research studied the effects of biblical literalism, which is a part of how some previous authors have defined as fundamentalism (Applegate et al., 2000; Britt, 1998; Cullen et al., 2000; Grasmick et al., 1992).

Borg (1997) contributed to the literature on religion and death penalty support by considering regional variation (with a specific interest in the South) with other known predictors of death penalty support. Specifically, the author analyzed region, fundamentalism, and support for capital punishment. The author concluded that region of country highly impacted whether fundamentalism was significantly associated with attitudes toward the death penalty. It was not until region was added as an interaction term that such a relationship significantly existed. To be

sure, non-Southern fundamentalist church members are *less* likely to advocate the death penalty, compared to Southern fundamentalists, who were *more* likely to endorse capital punishment (Borg 1997, p. 40).

Another substantial study in the field of religion and correctional punishment was that of Applegate and colleagues (2000). The authors found that those who held fundamentalist views toward religion were inconsistently associated with attitudes toward punitive sanctions for offenders. More importantly, those respondents who were more forgiving were less punitive with regard to attitudes about capital punishment. However, as consistent with aforementioned studies, biblical literalists and those who viewed God as punitive were harsher in their attitudes toward punitive sanctions. Similarly, Unnever and Cullen (2006) found that Christian fundamentalist attitudes alone were not significantly associated to support for the death penalty. Thus, disentangling Christian fundamentalist views by categories of race, biblical literalism, and perceptions of God would prove fruitful in assessing the relationship between those two variables.

Using a slightly different approach, the focus of Unnever, Cullen, and Bartkowski (2006) was primarily on the respondent's nature and closeness with a loving God and how that relationship impacted support for the death penalty. Although they used measures of religion similar to Britt (1998), the authors also used a scale that was constructed to convey a measure of "Personal Loving God." They concluded that Americans who identified as having a close and personal

loving relationship with God were significantly less likely to be in favor of capital punishment, which may be more indicative of characteristics such as empathy.

A number of studies have considered the effects of race and religion on support for capital punishment. Eisenberg, Garvey, and Wells (2001) examined jurors' likelihood to cast death verdicts in capital cases. In addition to racial differences (in which Black jurors were considerably more likely to vote for life instead of death on the first ballot), religion was important in that jurors who self-identified as Southern Baptists were far more likely to have cast their first ballot as a death verdict. Indeed, close to 80 percent of those who identified as Southern Baptists cast their first vote as a verdict of capital punishment as compared to only 50 percent of jurors of other religious denominations.

One of the foremost studies on the joint issues of race and religion as they pertain to public support for the death penalty was that of Britt (1998). There is a conundrum of sorts within this literature in that Blacks tend to identify similarly with Christian fundamentalist ideals yet still are less likely to support capital punishment. Using the 1991 General Social Survey data, Britt (1998) measured three components of religion: religious affiliation, the salience of religion, and religious ideology. First, religious affiliation pertained to categories of fundamentalist (indicating the most strict category), moderate, or liberal denominations. Second, the salience of religion was measured by three items that asked the respondents about their frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of participation in religious activities other than attending services, and

how often one prayed. Lastly, religious ideology was measured by biblical literalism, perceptions of human nature, and conservative theology.

Results of the study indicated that Black fundamentalists were least likely to support capital punishment, followed by Black and White non-fundamentalists. Not surprisingly, White fundamentalists were most likely to support the death penalty (Britt, 1998; see also Young, 1992). Black fundamentalists scored highest on religious salience, and were more likely to be biblical literalists. In sum, religious association with respect to attitudes toward the death penalty is indeed confounded by race. The current study investigates the relationship between biblical literalism, race, and support for the death penalty further.

Gender and Attitudes toward the Death Penalty

Many studies include sex or gender as an independent or control variable when studying support for capital punishment (Applegate et al., 2000; Unnever & Cullen, 2005; Unnever & Cullen, 2006; Unnever, Cullen, & Bartkowski, 2006; Young, 1992, and others). Several studies have found significant differences in gender as it pertains to attitudes toward the death penalty. For example, Applegate and colleagues (2000), Carroll (2004), Unnever and Cullen (2005), and Young (1992) all found significant gender differences in support for capital punishment; men tend to be more supportive of the death penalty than women. However, gender is not always a significant predictor in attitudes toward capital punishment. To clarify, the focus of the study has a great impact on the results of death penalty

support by gender. For example, in a study of the racial divide in support for capital punishment by measure of racism, Unnever and Cullen (2007b) failed to yield a significant difference in gender. Similarly, Borg (1997) did not find a significant difference in gender in her study of regional variations in the support of capital punishment, nor did Britt's (1998) study. Thus, such differences in gender may be limited to how the measure interacts with other variables.

Stack (2000) conducted one of the first studies that utilized a gender-specific model. Three variable sets that included measures of political conservatism, authoritarianism, victimization, and fear were explored. Interestingly, in separate analyses, both racial prejudice and authoritarianism were significantly associated with death penalty support for both men and women. However, once authoritarianism was controlled for, racial prejudice was no longer a significant factor, suggesting that authoritarianism may be a more powerful predictor of death penalty support (Stack, 2000). This could mean that authoritarianism encompasses racial prejudice in some way. Another interesting point is that political conservatism had a direct impact on support for capital punishment for men and women. Alternatively, authoritarianism only directly impacted women's death penalty support in this study. Whitehead and Blankenship (2000) also found important differences by gender in attitudes towards capital punishment. Using a sample from the state of Tennessee, the authors note a gap in views, where women were less likely to support the death penalty and were

more in favor of life without parole than men. A gender gap existed for both support for and opposition to a death sentence for murderers.

Political Orientation

The measure of political views has been used widely in public opinion research as a control variable. It is one of the most fundamentally predictive factors of death penalty support. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of studies indicate that those who were politically conservative were more likely to support capital punishment (Applegate et al., 2000; Borg, 1997; Stack, 2000, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2005; Unnever & Cullen, 2006; Unnever, Cullen, & Bartkowski, 2006; Young, 1992, and others). Other studies explore politics further by probing respondents for more background information that indicates strength of conservatism or liberalism on a larger scale (e.g. Stack, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2006). Many scholars question whether authoritarianism is a proxy measure for political views, but no definitive answer has been provided for the quandary. As a result, many recent studies continue to include both authoritarianism and political views in their analyses.

Region of Country

Finally, region of country has become a significant factor in determining support for the death penalty. Despite Tuch and Hughes' (1996) viewpoint that region of country is not an important determinant of Whites' policy preferences,

scholars have begun to consistently add a measure of South to the list of independent variables or controls. This is largely due to the theoretical notion that southerners, specifically White southerners, continue to be the most antagonistic toward racial equality, a regional difference that is facilitated by southerners' greater denial of racial discrimination and other unfavorable racial attitudes (Sears & Jessor, 1996). As previously mentioned in the religion section, Borg (1997) analyzed region as it relates to attitudes toward capital punishment and concluded that region of country highly impacted whether fundamentalism was significantly associated with attitudes toward the death penalty. It was not until region was added as an interaction term that such a relationship significantly existed. This is consistent with other scholars' recent methodology and conclusions, including Unnever and Cullen (2005, 2007a, 2007b). Several scholars (Borg, 1997; Unnever & Cullen, 2005) have reported regional differences in such views, with African Americans living in the South being less likely and Southern Whites being more likely to support capital punishment. Another element to consider is how being a Southerner interacts with Christian fundamentalism to create a Southern fundamentalist profile that is consistent with high levels of death penalty support (Unnever & Cullen, 2005). In Barkan and Cohn's (2010) analysis of regional differences in support for the death penalty by whites, Southern whites were found to be more likely than non-Southern whites to favor the death penalty in every issue of the General Social Survey (GSS) except for 2004.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As aforementioned, previous death penalty literature regarding public opinion has established a number of demographic variables to be positively associated with death penalty support, including race, gender, education, income, political views, and others. However, much of this research has been fundamentally limited in its methodology, primarily in how questions are framed. Because no prior research has comprehensively asked a variety of punitive-based questions in this manner, this research is the first of its kind. Based on the review of the literature, the goal of this dissertation project will be to address two fundamental research questions and several hypotheses. Both research questions aim to address the extent to which Americans support for capital punishment, and more importantly, whether that support remains in the majority when including other alternatives. In the end, limitations aside, this research will provide the fullest picture of death penalty public opinion research with the widest variety of questions and analyses to date. This study will be the first of its kind that uses this particular set of questions, while also demonstrating how race and authoritarianism interact to predict support for capital punishment. It should have a profound impact on future capital sentencing and legislation in that there are a myriad of other factors to consider before when gauging public opinion on this matter.

Research Question One

There is a large amount of literature that has concluded that a majority of individuals support the death penalty. However, there are a number of variations in these findings. Factors such as how the questions are phrased, the simplicity or complexity of the questions, and whether the respondent is asked about death penalty for murder compared to other crimes all impact the results of this quandary. The resulting research question is as follows: Do the majority of Americans support capital punishment for persons convicted of murder? If so, how does support vary on a continuum of strongly support to strongly against the death penalty?

Hypothesis One

The majority of Americans support capital punishment for persons convicted of murder.

Hypothesis Two

The majority of Americans, however, do not *strongly* support capital punishment. The largest statistical category of support will be somewhat in favor of capital punishment. This is a primary discernment from death penalty research that only employs a yes or no response. Two statements make this hypothesis important for policy implications: 1) public opinion influences public policy; and 2) the more salient an issue is to the public, the stronger the relationship is likely to be (Burstein, 2003.) Therefore, by saying that most individuals do not strongly

support the death penalty, it can be inferred that this is not as salient an issue to the public as simple polls may demonstrate, which may be grounds for amending or removing death penalty legislation in certain jurisdictions.

Research Question Two

There is a substantial amount of literature as of late that implores the addition of alternatives to a death sentence in attitudinal surveys when inquiring about death penalty support. Such alternatives include a sentence of life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), life with the possibility of parole (LWOP), or other punishments which may include paying restitution to the victim's loved ones. Do the majority of Americans support capital punishment when other alternatives to a death sentence are present? Furthermore, how do specific variables such as authoritarianism, race and the combination thereof, as well as other control variables impact this relationship?

Hypothesis Three

Death penalty support will change and decrease once alternatives to death are added as options.

Hypothesis Four

Authoritarianism will emerge as a significant predictor of death penalty support: authoritarians are more likely than non-authoritarians to support capital punishment

even when alternatives are offered, indicating that the authoritarian, hard-core death penalty supporters tend to have values that are largely different from the general population across a wide variety of factors.

Hypothesis Five

Authoritarianism and race combine for an interaction effect that explains away other significant factors in death penalty support. Race will no longer be a significant predictor, whereas authoritarianism will explain a greater portion of the variation in support for capital punishment.

Hypothesis Six

Males will be more likely to support the death penalty than females. Also, males will be more strongly in favor of the death penalty than females.

Hypothesis Seven

There is an inverse relationship between education and support for capital punishment. In other words, as the level of education increases, support for the death penalty decreases.

Hypothesis Eight

According to research presented by Baumer, Messner, and Rosenfeld (2003) as well as Unnever and Cullen (2007a), income is a positive predictor of death penalty

support across all models. As such, the following hypothesis is deduced: the greater amount of income a person has, the more in favor he or she will be of a death sentence for murderers.

Hypothesis Nine

Political affiliation will have an impact on death penalty attitudes. Those who identify as politically conservative will be more in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder.

Hypothesis Ten

Religious fundamentalists, as measured by biblical literalism, will be more likely to support capital punishment.

Hypothesis Eleven

Geographic location of the respondents will significantly impact the results of the study. Those who classify themselves as a resident of a state in the South will be more in favor of the death penalty than those from other regions of the country.

Hypothesis Twelve

Whites are more likely than Blacks and others to support capital punishment when controlling for a number of factors. The racial gap will widen when analyzing reasons for support or non-support of a capital sentence for murder. This is

consistent with the previous literature (e.g., Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Bohm, 2003; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Unnever, Cullen & Jonson, 2008) that have attempted to explain the racial gap in support for the death penalty.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this dissertation, I examined the status of death penalty support using a nationally-representative dataset. To investigate, I utilized a series of questions that probe into the nature of death penalty support. This project is fundamentally distinguished from many other projects in that 1) the phrasing of the questions in the dataset allows for the study of how strength of individuals' support for capital punishment varies; 2) the survey asks what the respondents' primary reasons for supporting or not support the death penalty, which most prior studies failed to do; and 3) it includes several alternatives to the death penalty for the respondents. Moreover, I was able to study the nature of attitudes toward capital punishment more in depth by creating a scale of authoritarianism that allows for the discernment of authoritarians and non-authoritarians, which is a key component of interest in many death penalty scholarly works. This variable, among others, may explain a greater proportion of the difference in levels of support for capital punishment. Also, differences by race and other control factors are assessed for the sample as well.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of issues surrounding public opinion research on capital punishment. I then discuss the data used for this research, followed by a detailed description of the sample characteristics. Next, I compare this sample to other nationally-representative death penalty research, and I

discuss the similarities and differences among them. Finally, I end the chapter by outlining the dependent and independent variables. In Chapters Four and Five, I discuss the statistical analyses and results for my research questions and hypotheses.

Death Penalty Public Opinion Research

There are two fundamental issues related to this field of research that are critical to review. First, as emphasized by a number of scholars, public opinion polls are often utilized to demonstrate that legislative and judicial decision making is based largely on consensual public opinion. However, a number of studies have questioned the validity of such polls as measures of attitudes on this issue, and rightfully so. The early works of Bowers (1993), Jones (1994) and Sandys and McGarrell (1994, 1995) established that question form and public opinion on the death penalty must be revised in order to capture the true picture of such beliefs. We are otherwise misconstruing poll information in a fundamental way by using a standard question format. In short, it is not what you ask; it is the way you ask it (Jones, 1994). Very few works in the twenty-first century have capitalized on this advice, using General Social Survey data that utilized a dichotomous question format to investigate death penalty attitudes until 2008. Consequently, this research aims to demonstrate the necessity and validity of phrasing questions in a more eloquent and meaningful way, in addition to providing additional information

or alternatives. Using a Likert scale type of format that gauges strength of attitudes (as opposed to the dichotomous format) helps to achieve this goal.

Secondly, previous research studies have reported findings on attitudes toward capital punishment without including enough variables to better explain the picture of this relationship. The current research overcomes this flaw through the use of options for justification for both support and non-support of capital sentencing for murder. This is demonstrated through the opportunity to select a chief and secondary rationale behind the respondent's decision that is essentially completely exhaustive. Thus, the combination of a better question structure and more complete options make this one of the most salient questionnaire and research designs in the death penalty literature to date.

Current Study

This dissertation project uses data that are unique from previous studies. It is most similar to Soss, Langbein, and Metelko's (2003) study (that uses data from ANES) with regards to its ordinal dependent variable on death penalty support as well as an additive index of items that measure authoritarianism. However, a primary discernment between that study and this one is the former's focus on explaining why White Americans support the death penalty. The current study seeks to compare multiple race/ethnicity categories, following up on a number of established differences in public opinion views, especially among Whites and African Americans. Soss and colleagues used measures such as prejudice,

individualism and trust in government; whereas the current study has a different focus, with interest centered on the variations of support by all races/ethnicities and with other punitive alternatives available to respondents.

Participants and Procedure

Data used for this dissertation project come from the 2008 Death Penalty Social Survey Questionnaire, collected via telephone interviews by employees of the University of Oklahoma Public Opinion Learning Laboratory (OU POLL) in May, June, and July of 2008. The questionnaire was developed comprehensively based on a number of previous studies that examine public opinion on capital punishment. The study was designed to measure the attitudes of residents living in the 48 adjoining states plus the District of Columbia about appropriate punishments for persons convicted of murder. This survey is based on a random sample of the adult population (age 18 and up) in the United States, stratified by age and sex. A final sample size of 524 respondents was obtained after approximately 22,900 calls and 5,203 records used to complete the survey.

There was a very high response rate for this study of 65 percent (compared to typical telephone interviews), as well as a cooperation rate of 76 percent. Random digit dialing was used to achieve this sample. The average call time was 7.7 minutes per complete survey, and 4.5 minutes per dropout, which is important considering some of the most important questions in the study were asked successfully in a short amount of time. As a result, this speaks to the reliability of

the data and methods used for this project. Finally, the questionnaire included a variety of demographic questions, as well as questions about fear of crime, authoritarianism, biblical literalism, support for the death penalty (including if given the possibility of parole and other options), reasons for supporting or not supporting the death penalty (top two reasons), and innocence as it relates to the death penalty.

Interviewers went through a project briefing, discussing all aspects of the project and reviewing the questionnaire fully, before making any calls. Additionally, training protocol for interviewers included practicing mock interviews with fellow employees prior to the commencement of calls made for data collection. The interviews were conducted between late May and mid-July of 2008. Interviews took place Monday and Thursday between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Additional survey times were on Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and on Sunday from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Also, some afternoon interviews were conducted between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. on various days of the week. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed in Table 1. As previously mentioned, a total of 524 respondents were interviewed. *Age* was created from the question: How old were you on your birthday? A numerical

response was inputted by the interviewer. The sample had a mean age of 51.14, with self-reported ages ranging from 18 to 92. Age was controlled because it has been hypothesized to positively predict support for the death penalty (Stack, 2000). However, few death penalty studies have found significant results for this factor.

Gender was determined by the interviewer interpreting the respondent's gender without asking. This category was made into a dummy variable, where males were coded as 1 and were the comparison group, and females were coded as 0. There were more female participants (309, or 61.4 %) in the study than there were males (194, or 38.6 %). This is not surprising given that the likelihood of participation in telephone survey research is generally higher for women than for men (Dillman et al., 2009). An extensive amount of research has concluded that sex or gender is significantly related to death penalty attitudes, with men being much more likely to support the sentence than women (Applegate et al., 2000; Unnever & Cullen, 2005; Whitehead & Blankenship, 2000).

Education was created from the question: Which of the following best describes the formal education you have completed? Responses include: less than high school (1); high school (2); some college (3); Associate degree (4); Bachelor's degree (5); or Postgraduate degree (MA, PhD, JD, MD) (6). The education level among respondents in the sample was fairly evenly distributed. Only 15 (3.0 %) of respondents have less than high school education, whereas 101 (20.1 %) have completed high school, 139 (27.6 % - the largest category of the sample) have completed some college, 50 (9.9 %) have finished an Associate's degree, 102 (20.3

%) have completed a Bachelor's degree, and 95 (18.9 %) have a postgraduate degree. Only one person refused to answer. A number of studies have demonstrated that education negatively predicts support for capital punishment (Britt, 1998; Halim & Stiles, 2001; Payne et al. 2004; Unnever & Cullen, 2010; and Young, 1992).

Income was created from the question: "Now I am going to read you a series of income ranges. Please stop me when I read the amount that best describes your total household income, before taxes, in 2007." Responses include: (1) Less than \$25,000; (2) \$25,001 to \$50,000; (3) \$50,001 to \$100,000; (4) \$100,001 to 150,000; and (5) more than \$150,000. Fifty-seven individuals (12.8 %) claimed a total household income bracket of less than \$25,000, 114 (25.5 %) are in the \$25,001 to \$50,000 range, and 164 (36.7 %) answered \$50,001 to \$100,000. Seventy-eight respondents (17.4 %) identified themselves as in the \$100,001 to \$150,000 range, whereas only 34 (7.6 %) claimed the highest income bracket of more than \$150,000. Responses of don't know and no answer were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. Although much of the research has produced null results for income as a predictor of death penalty support, some researchers have reasoned that combined household income should negatively impact support because low-income individuals have more contact with the costs of punitive sentences (Soss et al., 2003).

The distribution of political views among the respondents was somewhat expected. The variable *Conservatism* was created from the question: "We hear a

lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. On most political issues, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?” For only those who identified as liberal, a sub-question of “is that extremely liberal or somewhat liberal?” was asked. For responses of conservative, a sub-question of “is that extremely conservative or somewhat conservative?” was asked. Another response choice included moderate. This single-item measure is similar to extensive studies that have used a five-item scale for measuring political ideology (Unnever & Cullen, 2005).

Only 94 (19.6 %) respondents identified as liberal. Of those 94, 20 (21.3 %) identified as extremely liberal, while 73 (77.7 %) said they were somewhat liberal. One respondent didn’t know. The largest category of respondents in the sample identified as moderate (199, or 41.5 %). The remaining valid responses came from those who identified as conservative (186, or 38.8 %). Of those 199, only 40 (21.5 %) said they were extremely conservative; whereas 139 (74.7 %) identified as somewhat conservative. Seven participants said they didn’t know or refused (3.8 %). Responses of don’t know and no answer were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. The existing research on death penalty attitudes has repeatedly found those persons who have conservative political views are more likely to support capital punishment (Applegate et al., 2000; Borg, 1997; Stack, 2000, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2005, 2006; Young, 1992

Table 1. Demographic Variables

	N	Percent
Gender		
Male	194	38.6%
Female	309	61.4%
	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Age	18-92	51.14
Education		
Less than high school	15	3.0%
High school	101	20.1%
Some college	139	27.7%
Associate's degree	50	10.0%
Bachelor's degree	102	20.3%
Postgraduate degree	95	18.9%
Income		
Less than \$25,000	57	12.8%
\$25,001 to \$50,000	114	25.5%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	164	36.7%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	78	17.4%
More than \$150,000	34	7.6%
Political Views		
Liberal	94	18.7%
Moderate	199	39.6%
Conservative	186	37.0%
<i>Liberal</i>		
<i>Extremely Liberal</i>	20	21.5%
<i>Somewhat Liberal</i>	73	78.5%
<i>Conservative</i>		
<i>Extremely Conservative</i>	40	22.3%
<i>Somewhat Conservative</i>	139	77.7%
Total	524	100.0%

*Race is shown in Table 4 on page 67 as a key independent variable.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this study were opinions about capital sentencing as a punishment for murderers. Some studies have examined attitudes regarding the death penalty for other serious but non-fatal crimes such as rape and sex offending, but those studies are few and far between and typically truncate less significant results. The two dependent variables for this study are discussed below.

Support for the death penalty (DPS) was created from the question: “What is your opinion of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? Are you...?” As shown in Table 2, value codes and responses are as follows: strongly in favor of it (coded 4, with 203 respondents for 40.5 %); somewhat in favor of it (coded as 3, 167, 33.3 %); it depends (coded as 2.5, 15, 3 %); somewhat against it (coded as 2, 68, 13.6 %); and strongly against it (coded as 1, 48, 9.6 %). Responses of don’t know, refused, and drop-out were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. This question structure is identical to that of the 1992 American National Election Study (ANES) (Miller et al., 1992). Soss et al. (2003) also used the data from that study, and utilized a similar coding strategy. This is an improvement from the vast majority of studies that utilize a dichotomous “yes” or “no” question format, as found in surveys such as the Gallup poll and the GSS prior to 2008 (Applegate et al., 2000; Barkan & Cohn, 2010; Stack, 2000, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2005, 2006, 2007a, 2011). These are some of the most reputable death penalty studies to date, but this faulty measure questions to validity of the results.

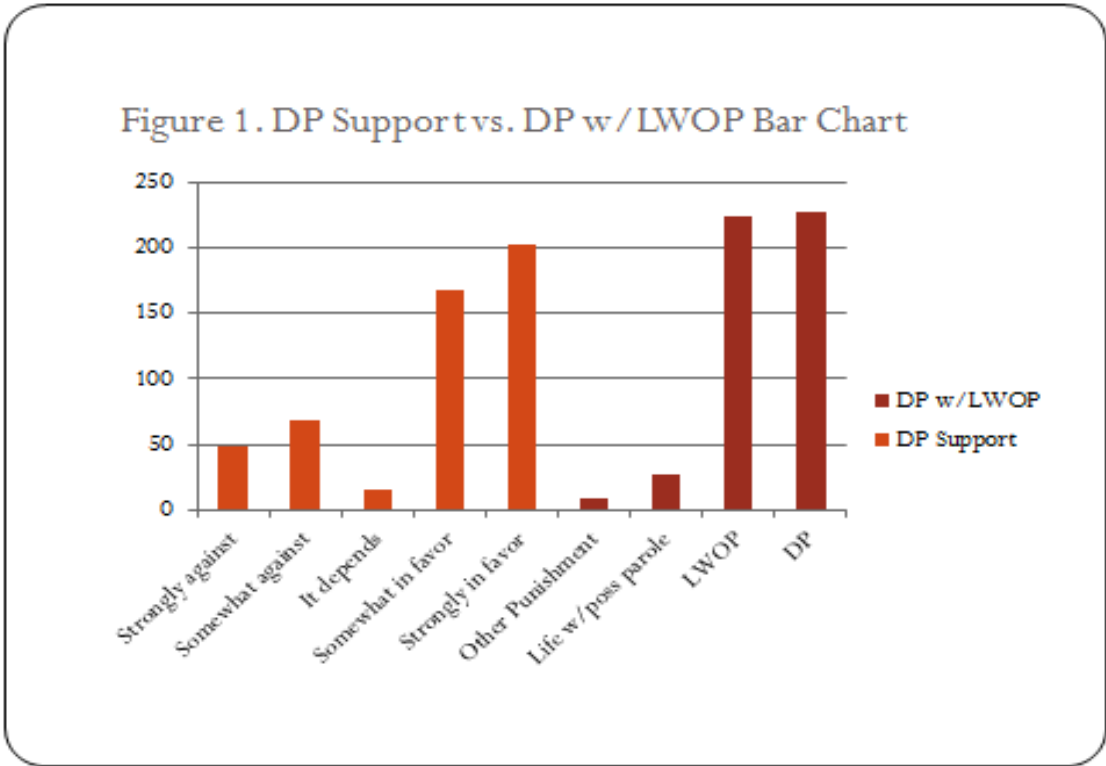
It will be important to compare findings with these studies to see if the differences are partially attributable to question phrasing.

In addition to this original measure, a dummy variable (*DPS dummy*) was created that collapsed strongly and somewhat in favor of the death penalty to make support for death penalty as the comparison group (370, 73.9%, coded 1), while responses of it depends, somewhat against it, and strongly against it combine to make up non-support (131, 26.1%) and was coded as 0. Ultimately, this allows for the comparison between those that support and do not support the death penalty, regardless of strength of opinion.

Death penalty with LWOP (LWOP) was created from the question: “If given the possibility of life without parole, which of the following punishments would you most favor for someone convicted of capital murder?” Responses and frequencies include: Death penalty (227, 46.6 %); Life without the possibility of parole (224, 46.0 %); Life with the possibility of parole (27, 5.5 %); and other punishment (9, 1.8 %). Responses of don’t know, refused, and drop-out were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. A dummy variable was then created that lists death penalty as the primary group (227, 46.6%, coded 1), and all other categories were coded 0 (260, 54.4%). As previously mentioned, a bevy of research recommends the use of alternatives to the death penalty in survey instruments, with significant results showing that more individuals support alternate sentences such as LWOP (Applegate et al., 2000; Cullen et al., 2000; Unnever & Cullen, 2005; and others).

Table 2. Dependent Variables: Support for Death Penalty, Dummy, and LWOP

	N	Percent
Support for the Death Penalty (no alternatives)		
Strongly against it	48	9.6%
Somewhat against it	68	13.6%
It depends	15	3.0%
Somewhat in favor of it	167	33.3%
Strongly in favor of it	203	40.5%
Support for the Death Penalty-Dummy (no alternatives)		
In favor of it	370	73.9%
Against it	131	26.1%
Support for the Death Penalty with alternatives		
Other punishment	9	1.8%
Life with the possibility of parole	27	5.5%
Life without the possibility of parole	224	46.0%
Death Penalty	227	46.6%
Support for the Death Penalty Dummy with LWOP		
Death Penalty	227	46.6%
Other alternatives	260	54.4%
Total	524	100.0%



Key Independent Variables

Authoritarianism is a scale comprised of prompts that gauge authoritarian views. Earlier studies primarily use the National Election Study (NES, 1992) data that asks a range of twenty questions designed to assess level of authoritarianism (Feldman, 1988; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001). However, later studies only use a subset of these questions (Barker & Tinnick, 2006; Soss et al. 2003). Specifically, Soss and colleagues (2003) and Unnever, Cullen and Roberts (2005) use an additive index based on four items. The current study mirrors those questions. The four options were based on the following statement: “Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that

some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities. For each pair, please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have.” Responses include: **a)** Independence or respect for elders? **b)** Self-reliance or obedience? **c)** Curiosity or good manners? **d)** Well-behaved or considerate? A high score indicates greater importance for authoritarian values (respect, obedience, manners, and behavior). Respondents who volunteered an answer of “both” were coded as 2, while the first response in the pair was coded as 1, while the latter response was coded as 3. Responses of don’t know, refused, and drop-out were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis.

The measures were originally combined to create an authoritarian scale (shown in Table 3), ranging in value from 4 (indicating low authoritarianism) – 12 (indicating high authoritarianism). However, the original Cronbach’s Alpha with all four items was .583. By dropping the fourth item (well-behaved), the alpha score improved to .601. Although the projected internal consistency is somewhat lower than desired, several past studies also had issues with alpha scores. Soss and associates (2003) had an alpha score of .66. Similarly, Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts (2005) had an alpha score of .65, while other earlier studies had even lower alpha reliability coefficients of .35 (Tyler & Weber, 1982), and .37 (Stack, 2000). Therefore, only the first three items are used in the scale (with a range from 3 to 9) were used to best explore the relationship between authoritarianism and a number of other factors.

Table 3. Authoritarianism Measures and Frequency Distribution

	N	Percent
1) Independence	75	15.3%
Both (volunteered)	28	5.5%
Respect for elders	406	79.2%
2) Self-reliance	205	40.4%
Both (volunteered)	29	5.7%
Obedience	274	53.9%
3) Curiosity	134	26.3%
Both (volunteered)	34	6.7%
Good manners	342	67.0%
4) Considerate	273	53.9%
Both (volunteered)	64	12.6%
Well-behaved	170	33.5%
Total	524	100.0%

The measure of race was created from the question: What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself? Responses include: Caucasian/white; African American/black; Hispanic/Latino; Asian/Pacific Islander; American Indian/Native American; Biracial or multiracial; and other. In regards to race, the majority of respondents in the sample identified as *White* (403, or 83.6 %). Thirty-five respondents (7.3 %) identified as African American or Black, which was the single largest minority category. Other races/ethnicities, including Hispanic/Latino,

Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native American, Biracial or multiracial, or others, and combined for a total of 44 respondents (9.1 %). Nineteen individuals answered don't know or refused, and were excluded from the analysis. Three dummy variables were created from this measure. In the first, *Whites* were coded 1, and all other values were coded as 0. In the second, *Blacks* were coded 1, and all other values (Whites and others) were coded as 0. Responses of don't know, refused, and drop-out were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. Finally, *Others* were coded as 1 in the last dummy variable, while Blacks and Whites were coded as 0. Because a primary focus of this research is on race/ethnicity, it is important to see how other racial/ethnic categories compare to Blacks and Whites. The majority of research has neglected to take this additional step. In the regression analyses that follow, *Whites* were the omitted variable.

To be sure, the extant literature on race and attitudes toward the death penalty has overwhelmingly focused on Whites, African Americans, or both (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Soss et al., 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2011). As such, I can expect to find that there will be significant differences between Whites and Blacks, with the former being more likely to support the death penalty. Less is known about how the other races compare to Whites, so this study will add to our knowledge of how this group compares.

Table 4. Categories of Race and Frequency Distribution

	N	Percent
Caucasian/White	403	83.6%
African American/Black	35	7.3%
Hispanic/Latino	20	4.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	1.2%
American Indian/Native American	7	1.5%
Biracial or Multiracial	6	1.2%
Other	5	1.1%
<i>Final Race Categories</i>		
Caucasian/White	403	83.6%
African American/Black	35	7.3%
Other	44	9.1%
Total	482	100.0%

Other Independent Variables

Biblical literalism was created from the question, “How strongly do you agree with the following statement: ‘The Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally, word for word.’” Responses range on a Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Responses of don’t know and no answer were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. The distribution of the sample is as follows: 82 respondents (16.5 %) strongly disagreed, 95 (19.1 %) somewhat disagreed, 48 (9.6 %) neither agreed nor disagreed, 115 (23.1 %) somewhat agreed, and 158 (31.7 %) strongly agreed. As previously mentioned, there is evidence that a literal interpretation of the Bible fosters support of the death penalty (Applegate et al., 2000; Borg, 1997; Britt, 1998; Unnever & Cullen, 2006; Young, 1992).

Finally, region of country (*South*) assessed whether the respondents resided in the South when the interview was conducted. It was determined by asking the question: “In which state do you live?” Respondents answered freely, choosing one of the 48 states plus the District of Columbia for a total of 49 options. From there, states were collapsed of South and non-South. States included in the south region are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The number of respondents from the South was 159 (30.3 %), whereas the rest of sample came from areas outside of the South region (365, or 69.7%). This categorization is based on Borg (1997) and Unnever and Cullen’s (2005)

research that looked at how being from the South region positively predicts support for capital punishment. Additional studies have controlled for region of country, with most finding significant results, including (Barkan & Cohn, 2010; Jessor, 1988; Stack, 2000, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2011; Unnever, Cullen & Fisher, 2005; Unnever et al., 2006).

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Other Independent Variables

	N	Percent
Biblical Literalism		
Strongly disagree	82	16.5%
Somewhat disagree	95	19.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	48	9.6%
Somewhat agree	115	23.1%
Strongly agree	158	31.7%
Total	498	100.0%
Region of Country		
South	159	30.3%
Non-South	365	69.7%
Total	524	100.0%

Other Variables

Reason for Death Penalty Support was asked only to the respondents who reported support for the death penalty (392 respondents, 74.8 % of sample). The measure was created from the question: “Which of the following best describes your most important reason for supporting the death penalty?” Responses and values include: they deserve it (28, 7.7 %), the punishment should fit the crime (Just Deserts, 181, 49.5 %), it will give the victim’s family closure (15, 4.1 %), to keep the offender from committing additional crimes (Specific Deterrence) (48, 13.1 %), to set an example to others who think of committing the same crime (General Deterrence) (36, 9.8 %), some criminals just can’t be rehabilitated (25, 6.8 %), help relieve prison overcrowding (1, 0.3 %), the Bible says it is right (12, 3.3 %), save taxpayer money (17, 4.6 %), or other (only if volunteered – 3, 0.8 %). Respondents were asked to indicate their *most* important reason for death penalty support. Responses of other, don’t know, no answer, and doesn’t apply to me were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. A series of dummy variables was created with each answer coded as 1, all others coded as 0.

Reason for No Death Penalty Support (NO DP) was asked only to the respondents who *did not* support the death penalty (115, 21.9 %), and it was created from the question: “Which of the following describes your most important reason for not supporting the death penalty?” Responses and sample distribution include: doubt about whether the right person was convicted (Wrongful Convictions) (29, 26.4 %), it’s wrong to take a life (Sanctity of Life) (26, 23.6 %), life in prison

without parole is a better punishment (16, 14.5 %), death is not harsh enough for some criminals (3, 2.7 %), the criminal could be rehabilitated (2, 1.8 %), the death penalty is not a deterrent (10, 9.1 %), religious beliefs (10, 9.1 %), the death penalty is not applied to equally among different groups (5, 4.5 %), I believe the current method of execution is cruel and unusual (9, 8.2 %), or other (only if volunteered). Respondents were asked to indicate their *most* important reason for not supporting the death penalty. Responses of don't know, no answer, and doesn't apply to me were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. A series of dummy variables was created with each answer coded as 1, all others coded as 0.

For the purpose of this study, I was only interested in looking at the primary difference between reason for support and non-support. As such, only the most important or primary reasons for each category are analyzed. This questioning is a primary discernment from the vast majority of death penalty studies that do not ask why respondents reported what they did.

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Reasons for Death Penalty Support and Non-Support

	N	Percent
Reason for Death Penalty Support		
They deserve it	28	7.7%
The punishment should fit the crime	181	49.5%
It will give the victim's family closure	15	4.1%
Specific deterrence	48	13.1%
General deterrence	36	9.8%
Some criminals just can't be rehabilitated	25	6.8%
Help relieve prison overcrowding	1	0.3%
The Bible says it is right	12	3.3%
Save taxpayer money	17	4.6%
Other	3	0.8%
Total	366	100.0%
Reason for No Death Penalty Support		
Wrongful convictions	29	25.7%
It's wrong to take a life	36	23.6%
LWOP is a better punishment	16	14.2%
Death is not harsh enough for some criminals	3	2.7%
The criminal could be rehabilitated	2	1.8%
The death penalty is not a deterrent	10	8.8%
Religious beliefs	10	8.8%
The death penalty is not applied equally...	5	4.4%
Method of execution is cruel and unusual	9	8.0%
Other	3	2.7%
Total	113	100.0%

Summary

The dataset used in this dissertation, “University of Oklahoma POLL: 2008 Death Penalty Support Survey,” is unique due to the phrasing and scope of the questions. The vast majority of surveys use a dichotomous question for measuring support for capital punishment, despite evidence that suggests the results to be highly skewed. Additionally, very few studies have used data that asks for the first and second reason for support and non-support. To my knowledge, there are no other studies that have used data that are this comprehensive with regards to general death penalty public opinion.

Based on several bodies of literature, I created measures that were used in the following analyses to determine the relationship between authoritarianism, race, and support for the death penalty, while controlling for other variables. Chapter Four presents the analysis that compares the difference between the attitudes toward the death penalty when asked on a continuum versus when alternatives are in place. In the middle of the chapter, there is a focus on the interaction between authoritarianism and race, using interaction terms to see what the racial gap is like with regards to attitudes toward capital sentencing. The chapter ends by examining Chi-square results for reasons for death penalty support and non-support by race. The results are intriguing.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the analyses described in Chapter 3. Previous research has overwhelmingly concluded that the majority of Americans are in support of the death penalty. However, most surveys have achieved this result by asking respondents to choose from only two options: yes or no. As a result, level of support has not been adequately studied. The current research will fulfill this paucity in the literature, while also controlling for various factors, such as race, authoritarianism, political views, biblical literalism, education, and other projected significant influences. Additionally, research shows that giving respondents alternatives from which to choose in survey instruments significantly lessens support for the death penalty. The corresponding research questions and hypotheses will be explored to see what findings result.

Comparison of Means

The first step in the analysis of death penalty support is to compare means of some of the key dependent and independent variables by categories of Race and Authoritarianism. Using Britt's (1998) article as a framework, I used the dummy variables for *Blacks*, *Other Race*, and *Whites* to see differences in a variety of factors by race, and I also created a dummy variable for *Authoritarianism* where the comparison group is the scores of 2 and 3, which symbolizes high authoritarianism, and scores of 0 and 1 were coded as 0, indicating low authoritarianism. As shown

in Table 7, the results for variables by race produced very few significantly meaningful results, while results for authoritarianism were highly significant.

There are some noticeable differences among the race categories. First, *Blacks* report lower support for the death penalty compared to *Whites* across all three question formats. Similarly, *Whites* support for the death penalty is higher than *Blacks* and *Other Race* categories. The *Other Race* category results are interesting. When asking about death support with no options in the Likert scale format, *Others*' support is similar to *Whites* in that individuals of races other than African American or Caucasian are much more in favor of capital punishment compared to *Blacks*. When a dummy variable for death penalty support with no options is created, death penalty is low for *Others* and is very much similar to *Blacks*. Similarly, when the death penalty support with LWOP dummy is run, support is lowest for *Others* and *Blacks*. This may suggest, in part, that individuals of other races and ethnicities may be less strongly in favor of the death penalty and that they prefer alternatives to the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. This is a finding that may not have shown up in other studies as a result of excluding this category. However, given the relatively low racial heterogeneity in the sample, these results should be taken with caution. More insight on this issue will be discussed in the limitations section.

Interestingly, *Blacks* scored higher as biblical literalists than *Whites* or *Others*. This is consistent with previous literature (e.g. Britt, 1998; Unnever & Cullen, 2006, 2007a). *Blacks* were also significantly less likely to identify as

conservative compared to both *Whites* and *Others*. Although statistically insignificant, *Others* had the highest mean value for *Conservatism* (2.300) compared to *Whites* (2.210) and *Blacks* (1.930). Lastly with regards to race, *Blacks* had the highest mean value of *South*, suggesting that a greater proportion of *Blacks* in the sample come from the South (0.429) compared to *Others* (0.341) and *Whites* (0.310).

The results for authoritarianism were highly significant and intriguing. First, Figure 2 shows mean levels of death penalty support by low authoritarians versus high authoritarians. This figure is based on the four-item authoritarianism measure (including the being considerate/well-behaved pairing). The numbers are based on the first death penalty question with the Likert scale from strongly against it (1) to strongly in favor of it (4). It depends was coded as 2.5. Second, Table 7 shows results from a variety of questions. Those who scored highly on the three-item authoritarian scale were significantly more likely to support the death penalty both with and without alternative sentence options. Additionally, based on the mean values, high authoritarians were more likely to interpret the Bible literally (3.700) compared to low authoritarians (2.480); high authoritarians were more likely to identify as conservative (2.300) compared to low authoritarians (1.940); and high authoritarians were more likely to be from the South (0.348) than were low authoritarians (0.204). These results are interesting, but not surprising, with *Hypothesis Four* being supported. This is consistent with a bevy of literature that shows correlations between authoritarians and a number of predictors of support for

capital punishment (Soss et al., 2003; Stack, 2003, 2003). Thus, the comparison of means analyses has proven meaningful in examining some of the fundamental differences in death penalty support by race and authoritarianism. Additional regressions and analyses are displayed in the coming pages to further demonstrate the relationship between several variables and attitudes toward capital punishment for murderers.

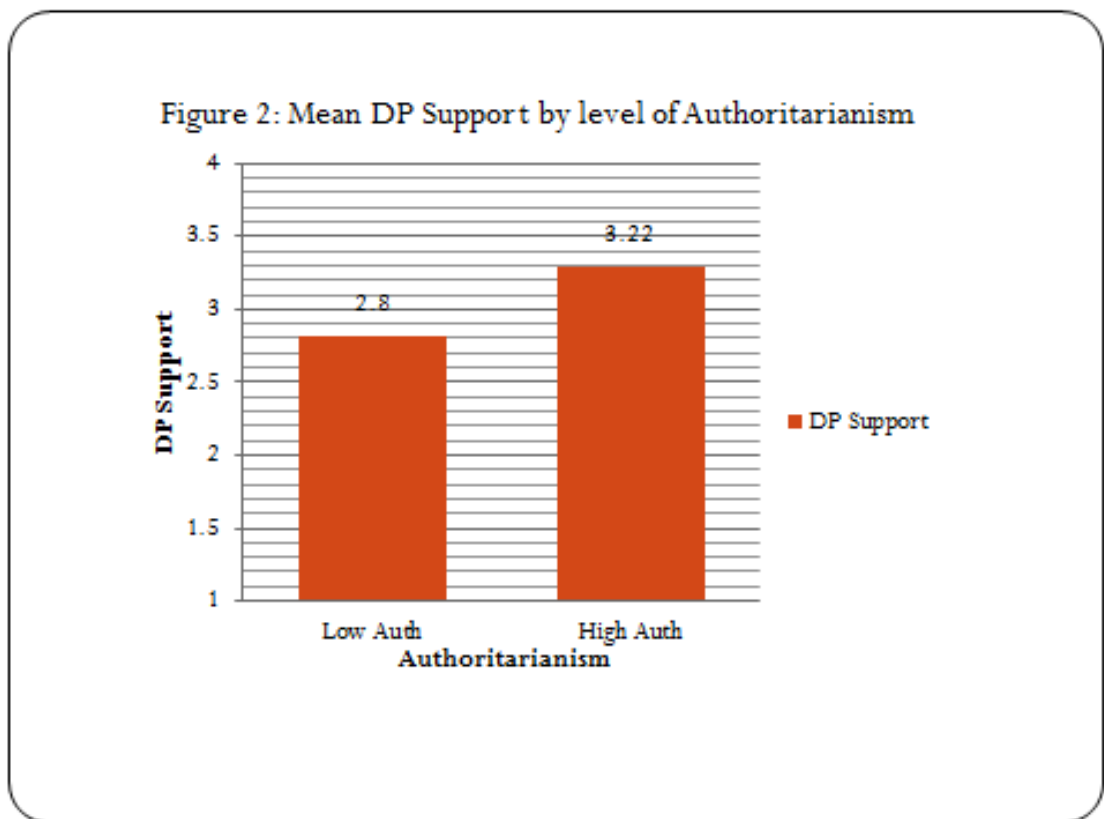


Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for the Dependent and Independent Variables by Race and Authoritarianism

Variable	Race			Authoritarianism	
	Blacks	Others	Whites	Low Auth.	High Auth.
<i>DP Support w/no Options</i>	2.814 (1.044)	3.034 (0.852)	3.067 (0.967)	****	****
<i>DP Support w/No Options Dummy</i>	0.686 (0.471)	0.682 (0.471)	0.730 (0.445)	0.525 (0.501)	0.787*** (0.410)
<i>DP Support w/LWOP Dummy</i>	0.371 (0.490)	0.364 (0.487)	0.467 (0.500)	0.253 (0.436)	0.513*** (0.501)
<i>Biblical Literalism</i>	3.770† (1.374)	3.500 (1.419)	3.300† (1.504)	2.480 (1.463)	3.700*** (1.356)
<i>Conservatism</i>	1.930* (0.740)	2.300 (0.758)	2.210 (0.739)	1.940 (0.709)	2.300*** (0.728)
<i>South</i>	0.429 (0.502)	0.341 (0.479)	0.310 (0.463)	0.204 (0.404)	0.348*** (0.477)
# of cases	35	44	403	162	362

Notes: N=524; standard deviations in parentheses.

***p ≤ .001; **p ≤ .01; *p ≤ .05; † p ≤ .10 (approaching significance)

Research Question One

Research question one is the result of an extensive literature review which establishes that the most people support the death penalty when no alternatives are present. Furthermore, there is literature that suggests that level of support varies by factors such as race, authoritarianism, and other control variables. As such, *Research Question One* asks: Do the majority of Americans support capital punishment for persons convicted of murder? If so, how does support vary on a continuum of strongly support to strongly against the death penalty? Additionally, *Hypothesis One* states that the majority of Americans support capital punishment for persons convicted of murder. *Hypothesis Two* states that the majority of Americans, however, do not *strongly* support capital punishment. The largest statistical category of support will be somewhat in favor of capital punishment. To answer this research question and test these hypotheses, simple frequency distributions are analyzed to examine the shift of the sample between questions one and two.

As previously noted in the methods section, *Support for the death penalty* (DPS) was created from the question: “What is your opinion of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? Are you...?” Values codes and responses (as shown previously in Table 2) are as follows: strongly in favor of it (coded 4, with 203 respondents for 40.5 %); somewhat in favor of it (coded as 3, 167, 33.3 %); it depends (coded as 2.5, 15, 3 %); somewhat against it (coded as 2, 68, 13.6 %); and strongly against it (coded as 1, 48, 9.6 %). Responses of don’t know, refused, and

drop-out were coded as missing and were excluded from the analysis. Combined, 370 respondents are in favor of the death penalty when no alternatives are mentioned. That is, 73.8 percent of the sample is in support of the death penalty, irrespective of strength of support. *Hypothesis One* is supported. However, something that is important to note is that only 40.5 percent of this sample *strongly* supports the death penalty. Therefore, valuable information is being gathered from this question format. Chances are, if we were to ask respondents to only respond to this question by selecting yes or no, we would have approximately 74 percent of the sample say yes without knowing how strongly their opinions are. To summarize, *Hypothesis Two* is also supported: the majority of Americans do not *strongly* support the death penalty.

Additionally, comparisons can be drawn between research questions one and two to see the shift in response from the sample. When adding alternatives to the death penalty such as life without parole, the support for death penalty changes meaningfully. To answer the first part of research question two, do the majority of Americans support capital punishment when other alternatives to a death sentence are present, we see that those in favor of the death penalty (227, 46.6 %); life without the possibility of parole (224, 46.0 %); life with the possibility of parole (27, 5.5 %); and other punishment (9, 1.8 %). Cumulatively, the majority of respondents (53.4 %) are in favor of other alternatives rather than the death penalty, compared to only 46.6 percent who prefer the death penalty. Therefore, *Hypothesis Three* is supported: death penalty support changed and decreased once alternatives

to the death penalty were added as options. This suggests the importance of phrasing the questions, and it calls into question majority of the death penalty beforehand that utilize a dichotomous response format.

Research Question Two

Research question two asks, “Do the majority of Americans support capital punishment when other alternatives to a death sentence are present? Furthermore, how do specific variables such as authoritarianism, race, and the combination thereof, as well as other control variables impact this relationship?” In addition to this research question, there are several hypotheses that will be tested from this research question. *Hypothesis Four* suggests that authoritarianism will emerge as a significant predictor of death penalty support: authoritarians are more likely than non-authoritarians to support capital punishment even when alternatives are offered, indicating that the authoritarian, hard-core death penalty supporters tend to have values that are largely different from the general population across a wide variety of factors. *Hypothesis Six*, based on a vast span of literature, states that males will be more likely to support the death penalty than females. Also, males will be more strongly in favor of the death penalty than females. *Hypothesis Nine* proposes that political affiliation will have an impact on death penalty attitudes. Those who identify as politically conservative will be more in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Moreover, *Hypothesis Ten* suggests that religious fundamentalists, as measured by biblical literalism, will be more likely to

support capital punishment. Finally, the first part of *Hypothesis Twelve* proffers that Whites are more likely than Blacks and other racial/ethnic categories to support capital punishment when controlling for a number of factors.

In order to address the second part of this research question, I first used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to determine death penalty support from a question that asks about the use of capital punishment for murder. Responses exist on a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree. There were several expected findings present. As shown in Table 8, the authoritarianism scale produced significant results: those who scored higher on the authoritarian scale are significantly more likely to support the death penalty for persons convicted of murder ($b=.177$; $p<.001$). Additionally, *Blacks* were significantly less likely to support capital punishment than were *Whites* ($b=-.349$; $p<.10$). There was no significant difference between the *Others* race/ethnicity category and *Whites*. Those who agreed with a literal interpretation of the Bible (as measured by *Biblical Literalism*) were significantly more likely to support capital punishment ($b=.072$; $p<.05$). Political conservatives are more in favor of a death sentence ($b=.152$; $p<.05$), as were males ($b=.169$; $p<.10$) compared to females. For this question, *Hypotheses Four, Six, Nine, Ten, and Twelve* were supported. Contrary to previous literature, *income, age, level of education, and region of country (South)* do not significantly impact support for the death penalty at this point. This could be due to the thought that these variables (especially *Income* and *South*) are subsumed by authoritarianism, conservatism, and biblical literalism.

Table 8. OLS of Authoritarianism and Race on Death Penalty Support Likert Scale with No Options, plus Control Variables (standardized coefficients in parentheses)

Variable	Result	(standardized)
Authoritarianism	.177***	(.185)
Black	-.349†	(-.089)
Other Race	-.068	(-.019)
Biblical Literalism	.072*	(.110)
Conservatism	.152*	(.116)
Males	.169†	(.085)
Income	.053	(.258)
Age	-.001	(-.018)
Education	-.039	(-.061)
South	.141	(.067)
R ²	.133	

† p ≤ .10; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Death Penalty with No Options Dummy Variable

Preliminarily, it proves fruitful to ask respondents about their views on capital punishment in a Likert-style manner as opposed to a dichotomous structure. Nonetheless, I wanted to know if there were any specific differences between results of this style as compared to the vast majority of studies, so I created a dummy variable for death penalty support. The comparison group is comprised of those who selected strongly and somewhat agree (coded as 1), and all others (it depends and somewhat/strongly disagree) were coded as 0. Utilizing this strategy allowed for the use of logistic regression to determine significant differences in support.

The results are presented in Table 9. Using this format, authoritarianism was again highly statistically significant. Those who identified as authoritarian were 62.8 % more likely to support the death penalty ($b=.488$; $p<.001$; odds ratio=1.628). Also, biblical literalists were 17.4 % more likely to support the death penalty ($b=.160$; $p<.10$; Odds Ratio=1.174), as were conservatives, who were 55.1 percent more likely to support the death penalty ($b=.439$; $p<.01$; odds ratio=1.551). No other independent or control variables were statistically significant. An important change to note is that the variable for gender, *Males*, is no longer statistically significant. This could be due to the notion that the strength of support matters for gender. Males may be more likely to *strongly* support the death penalty compared to females. Also, *Blacks* fell out of significance. *Hypotheses Four, Nine* and *Ten* were supported. This suggests, in part, that a broader range of choices (e.g.

Likert scale) may be a better option for determining death penalty support among a variety of groups.

Table 9. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis of Authoritarianism and Race on Death Penalty Support Dummy Variable with No Options, plus Control Variables

Variable	B	Odds Ratio
Authoritarianism	.488***	1.628
Black	-.399	.671
Other Race	-.514	.598
Biblical Literalism	.160†	1.174
Conservatism	.439**	1.551
Males	.296	1.345
Income	.079	.257
Age	-.007	.993
Education	.056	1.058
South	.120	1.127
<i>Nagelkerke R²</i>	.164	

† p ≤ .10; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Death Penalty with LWOP Dummy

To answer research question two more directly, I created a dummy variable from the question *Death Penalty with LWOP* that asks respondents to select which punishment they most favor for murder. Viable choices include: death penalty, life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), life with the possibility of parole (LWP), and other punishment. I created a dummy variable where death penalty is coded 1 as the comparison group, and all other options were coded as 0. I used logistic regression to analyze death penalty support when options are included. As revealed in Table 10, the results are thought-provoking. Authoritarians are 59.5 percent more likely to select the death penalty for murder over options compared to non-authoritarians ($b=.467$; $p<.000$; odds ratio=1.595). Additionally, race was a significant factor. Blacks were significantly less likely to support the death penalty when other options are present. Specifically, they are 50.7 percent less likely to support a death sentence in that context ($b=-.708$; $p<.10$; odds ratio=.493). Furthermore, what distinguishes this study from previous studies is the *Other Race* category. Those of other race (including Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native American, Biracial or multiracial, or other) were also significantly less likely (52.6 percent to be exact) to support the death penalty when other options are present in comparison to Whites ($b=-.746$; $p<.10$; odds ratio=.474). In other words, Whites are more likely to support the death penalty when other alternatives are available than both Blacks and other races/ethnicities.

In addition to authoritarianism and race categories, biblical literalism was a significant factor of death penalty support. Biblical literalists are 15.7 percent more likely to support a death sentence for murderers over other alternatives ($b=.146$; $p<.10$; odds ratio=1.157). Males were 60.2 percent more likely to support a capital sentence than were females ($b=.471$; $p<.05$; odds ratio=1.602). A primary discernment from the previous questions, region of country became a significant predictor of death penalty support in this analysis. To clarify, *Hypothesis Eleven* states that geographic location of the respondents will significantly impact the results of the study. Those who classify themselves as a resident of a state in the South will be more in favor of the death penalty than those from other regions of the country. In this analysis, those from the South were 57.9 percent more likely to select the death penalty as the punishment for murderers compared to all other defined regions of the country ($b=.457$; $p<.05$; odds ratio=1.579). Using alternatives to the death penalty appears an to be important element for region of country. Overall, *Hypotheses Three, Four Six, Nine, Eleven, and Twelve* were all supported in this model.

Curiously, *Conservatism* was no longer significant when alternative punishments were added to the list of options. Given the distribution of results compared to the previous model, this could imply the importance of using an authoritarian measure in combination with political values. Conservatives may not all be strongly supportive of the death penalty, and therefore, may be willing to change their position when given alternatives that seem more plausible. This is a

marked difference from authoritarians, who believe firmly in the rules and laws of society, and are steadfast in their positions. Although the R^2 values may be considered to be somewhat low, this is a common result in research on public opinion and attitudes (Britt, 1998).

Table 10. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis of Authoritarianism and Race on Death Penalty Support Dummy Variable *with* Alternative Sanctions, plus Control Variables

Variable	B	Odds Ratio
Authoritarianism	.467***	1.595
Black	-.708†	.493
Other Race	-.746†	.474
Biblical Literalism	.146†	1.157
Conservatism	.089	1.093
Males	.471*	1.602
Income	.097	1.102
Age	-.009	.991
Education	-.015	.986
South	.457*	1.579
<i>Nagelkerke R²</i>	.164	

† $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

In an attempt to compare using a three-item authoritarianism measure versus a four-item scale (as in the research of Soss and colleagues, 2003; and Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts, 2005), I ran the all three regression models with a four-item authoritarianism scale to determine if the fourth pairing (being considerate or well-behaved) had a significant impact on the results. First, in using OLS regression for the analysis of the four-item authoritarianism scale and race and death penalty support with no options, the only significant changes were that *Blacks* became more highly significant, increasing from $p \leq .10$ to $p \leq .05$. No variables became significant that were not in the previous three-item authoritarian scale male, and no variables fell out of significance. Similarly, there were no significant differences when between the three-item and four-item authoritarian measures for the logistic regression analyses of the death penalty support dummy variable. In fact, many items stayed exactly the same. Lastly, when using logistic regression to analyze the relationship between the four-item authoritarianism, race, and controls with alternative sentences (e.g., LWOP), there is only one major difference. Income was previously *approaching* significance (.110), whereas in the four-item authoritarianism scale model, income was barely significant at the $p \leq .10$ level (.099). There were no other major differences. Consequently, the three-item measure is better utilized in this study due to a higher internal consistency measure and greater reliability.

Interaction Terms

In further analyzing the relationship between views toward capital punishment and a variety of key independent variables and controls, many previous studies have utilized interaction terms to determine the strength of the relationship between attitudes and predictor variables. For example, Britt (1998) used an interaction term to determine the effect of race and religious affiliation on attitudes toward capital punishment. Similarly, Unnever and Cullen (2005) explored whether the association between believing that an innocent person has been executed and support for capital punishment varies based on whether Americans perceive the death penalty as applied unfairly or fairly. Finally and most notably, Unnever and Cullen (2007a) use interaction effects to examine whether the influence of race on support for the death penalty varies across levels of income. They used interaction terms for Blacks and income, Black and south, Blacks and conservatism, and Blacks and religious fundamentalism, making it one of the most investigatory research projects of race and support for the death penalty of all time.

Hypothesis Five states that authoritarianism and race will combine for an interaction effect that explains away other significant factors in death penalty support. Race will no longer be a significant predictor, whereas authoritarianism will explain a greater portion of the variation in support for capital punishment. To determine whether there were interactions between race and several independent variables on support for the death penalty, several interaction terms were created. First, interaction terms of *Authoritarianism x Blacks* and *Authoritarianism x Other*

Race were developed in order to investigate the relationship between authoritarianism, race, and views toward a capital sentence. Second, given the prior research on race and religion as it impacts death penalty support, interaction terms of *Biblical Literalism x Blacks* and *Biblical Literalism x Other Race*. Finally, some literature suggests that being from the South may interact with race to predict strong support for the death penalty. As such, interaction terms of *South x Blacks* and *South x Other Race* were created.

The only statistically significant interaction term was *Authoritarianism x Other Race*, which was technically *approaching* significance at the $p \leq .10$ level (.097). In this case, they were 46 percent less likely to support the death penalty. However, the results are interpreted with caution because *Other Race*, which was statistically significant prior to the interaction terms, was no longer significant in the current model. Also, this rationale would be counter-intuitive based on prior research that suggests that authoritarians more strongly support the death penalty. No other computed interaction terms were significant, which suggests that there is no moderating effect of race on some of the key independent variables in this study.

Reasons for Death Penalty Support and Non-Support

One of the elements that make this study unique is the detail of questions in the data. Respondents in favor of the death penalty were asked to indicate their primary reason for selecting the capital sentence as punishment for murderers, whereas those who did not favor capital punishment were asked to clarify their position. A number of options were available for respondents to choose from, but a

few stuck out from each category. As shown in Table 6, the most common reasons for death penalty support were: the punishment should fit the crime (49.5 %); to keep the offender from committing additional offenses (13.1 %); and to set an example to others who think of committing the same crime (9.8 %). For those who opposed the death penalty, the most common explanations were: doubt about whether the right person was convicted (25.7 %); it's wrong to take a life (13.2 %); and life in prison without parole is a better punishment (14.2 %). To test how these responses may vary by race, cross-tabulations were run for two separate questions: 1) primary reason for supporting the death penalty by categories of race; and 2) primary reason for not supporting the death penalty by race. A race variable was created that includes *Whites*, *Blacks*, and *Other Race* for the purpose of identifying and distinguishing primary explanations by race. Additionally, cross-tabulations were run for 1) the primary reason for death penalty support and non-support question and 2) a filter by the

As the statistics in Table 11 show, 50 percent of *Whites* chose “punishment fits the crime” as their primary reason for supporting the death penalty, compared to only 37.5 percent of *Blacks* and 36.7 percent of *Others*. Although the results in this model were not statistically significant, the numbers essentially support an argument for retribution or just deserts as a rationale for death penalty support. Collectively, 48 percent of those who support the death penalty for persons convicted of murder believe so due to a retributive perspective.

Table 11. DP Support for *Punishment Fits the Crime* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Punishment Fits the Crime</u>		
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>Whites</u>	147 (50.0%)	147 (50.0%)	294 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	15 (62.5%)	9 (37.5%)	24 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	19 (63.3%)	11 (36.7%)	30 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	181 (52.0%)	167 (48.0%)	348 (100.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 3.075; df = 2; p = .215$$

Interestingly, when running crosstabs for the reasons for death penalty support filtered by the death penalty with LWOP question, the results for the “punishment fits the crime” rationale was now approaching significance (or significant at the $p \leq .10$ level). As shown in Table 12, 55.9 percent (105) of *Whites* chose the death penalty over other alternatives, providing a rationale of “the punishment fits the crime.” This percentage is vastly different from *Blacks* (30.8 %, 4) and *Others* (37.5 %, 6) who supported the death penalty when other options were available. This suggests somewhat that *Whites* are more likely than non-Whites to have a retributive justification for punishment. Overall, the majority (115, 53%) of those who chose the death penalty over alternatives such as LWOP cited just deserts as their rationale for their decision.

Table 12. DP Support w/ LWOP for *Punishment fits the Crime* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Punishment Fits the Crime</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
<u>Whites</u>		83 (44.1%)	105 (55.9%)	188 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		9 (69.2%)	4 (30.8%)	13 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	16 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	102 (47.0%)	115 (53.0%)	217 (100.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 4.736; df = 2; p = .094$$

Another common reason for death penalty support is specific deterrence. As Table 13 shows, 12.6 percent of *Whites*, 12.5 percent of *Blacks*, and 13.3 percent of *Other Race* supported a death sentence for the purpose of keeping the offender from committing additional crimes. Race does not play a significant role in this model, as all of the race categories are somewhat evenly proportionate with regards to this justification. Approximately 13 percent of all death penalty supporters combined chose this as their primary reason. Comparatively, when focusing only on the cases where respondents chose the death penalty over alternatives (shown in Table 14), only 9.2 percent of all supporters selected specific deterrence. When looking at individual race differences, 23.1 percent of *Blacks* chose specific deterrence as their reason, whereas only 8.5 percent of *Whites* and

6.2 % of *Others* did. Although these percentages vary, this may not be important considering the raw numbers are not as convincing in this case.

Table 13. DP Support for *Specific Deterrence* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Specific Deterrence</u>		
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Whites</u>		257 (87.4%)	37 (12.6%)	294 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	24 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		26 (86.7%)	4 (13.3%)	30 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	304 (87.4%)	44 (12.6%)	348 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = .014$; df = 2; p = .993

Table 14. DP Support w/ LWOP for *Specific Deterrence* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Specific Deterrence</u>		
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Whites</u>		172 (91.5%)	16 (8.5%)	188 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		10 (76.9%)	3 (12.5%)	13 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		15 (93.8%)	1 (6.2%)	16 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	197 (90.8%)	20 (9.2%)	217 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 3.265$; df = 2; p = .195

In addition to specific deterrence, general deterrence is another common reason for death penalty support. The results for this category were interesting, as demonstrated in Table 15. For *Other Race*, 23.3 percent of those who support the death penalty do so for the purpose of setting an example to others who think of committing the same crime. Comparatively, only 9.9 percent of *Whites* favored a general deterrence perspective, while no *Blacks* chose this as their reason for support. Therefore, there is a significant difference by race (at the $p \leq .05$ level) when it comes to perspectives on using the death penalty for deterring others. These results are similarly confirmed in Table 16, which saw 10.1 percent of *Whites*, 25 percent of *Others*, and no *Blacks* support the general deterrence rationale for the death penalty when alternatives are present. Overall, 10.6 percent of individuals chose the death penalty in this context with the purpose of making an example out of the offender to show others what would happen to them if they commit the same crime.

Table 15. DP Support for *General Deterrence* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>General Deterrence</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
<u>Whites</u>		265 (90.1%)	29 (9.9%)	294 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		24 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	24 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		26 (76.7%)	4 (23.3%)	30 (100.0%)
<u>Total</u>		312 (89.7%)	36 (10.3%)	348 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 8.299$; df = 2; p = .016

Table 16. DP Support w/ LWOP for *General Deterrence* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>General Deterrence</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
<u>Whites</u>		169 (89.9%)	19 (10.1%)	188 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		13 (100.0%)	3 (0.0%)	13 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		12 (75.0%)	4 (25.0%)	16 (100.0%)
<u>Total</u>		197 (89.4%)	23 (10.6%)	217 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 5.091$; df = 2; p = .078

Finally, the last major reason for death penalty support among respondents is that the Bible says it is right. Overall, and somewhat surprisingly, not many chose this option as the primary reason for their viewpoint. There were some significant differences by race, however. As shown in Table 17, 12.5 % of *Blacks* chose the Bible as their primary justification for choosing a sentence of death for murderers, while only 2.4 percent of *Whites* and 3.3 percent of *Others* did so. There is a significant difference between *Blacks* and the race other categories at the $p \leq .05$ level. However, when isolating this measure by those who chose the death penalty over alternatives such as LWOP, the results are no longer significant. Table 18 shows that only 7.7 percent of *Blacks*, 6.2 percent of *Others*, and 3.2 percent of *Whites* chose the death penalty over other alternatives because the Bible says it is right. This demonstrates the importance of question phrasing in public opinion questionnaires regarding crime and punishment. Without asking the question about alternatives to the death penalty, more individuals support the death penalty, thus demonstrating how misconstruing results can be with insufficient questions and response options.

Table 17. DP Support for *Bible Says It's Right* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Bible Says It's Right</u>		
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Whites</u>		287 (97.6%)	7 (2.4%)	294 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	24 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		29 (96.7%)	1 (3.3%)	30 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	337 (96.8%)	11 (3.2%)	348 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 7.426$; df = 2; p = .024

Table 18. DP Support w/ LWOP for *Bible Says It's Right* as Reason for Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Bible Says It's Right</u>		
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Whites</u>		182 (96.8%)	6 (3.2%)	188 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		12 (92.3%)	1 (7.7%)	13 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		15 (93.8%)	1 (6.2%)	16 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	209 (96.3%)	8 (3.7%)	217 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 1.013$; df = 2; p = .602

Using cross-tabulations can also prove beneficial for analyzing reasons for not supporting the death penalty. Some of the top reasons for non-support include: doubt about whether the accused is truly guilty; belief that it's wrong to take a life; and that the death penalty is not applied equally among different groups (which implies racism). The same approach with reasons for death penalty support above is taken here, where I examine the differences in non-support by race, after filtering down to those who chose an alternative (such as LWOP) over the death penalty. A marked difference between support for the death penalty and non-support is that the numbers for support decrease after filtering for the alternatives, whereas the total respondents after the filter for non-support *increased* from 134 to 265. This further demonstrates to importance of options in question formatting. The findings for non-support are equally noteworthy.

First, the original results for *Doubt about Guilt* are shown in Table 19. *Whites* were most likely to have doubts about whether the right person was convicted at 23.9 percent, compared to *Blacks* at 9.1 percent and *Other Race* at 7.1 percent. Although this difference wasn't statistically significant, one can see the difference in rationale by race. Overall for this question, 20.9 percent of those who did not support the death penalty (before options) did so because of doubts about guilt. After filtering for the change in responses when alternatives were provided, 9.8 percent of all respondents who chose an alternative to the death penalty did so due to a wrongful conviction angle. Interestingly, Table 20 shows that 11.6 percent

of *Whites* were had doubts, whereas only 3.6 of *Others* and no *Blacks* felt this way.

This rationale for opposition to the death penalty is now approaching significance.

Table 19. No DP Support for *Doubt about Guilt* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Doubt about Guilt</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
<u>Whites</u>		83 (76.1%)	26 (23.9%)	109 (100.0%)
<u>Blacks</u>		10 (90.9%)	1 (9.1%)	11 (100.0%)
<u>Others</u>		13 (92.9%)	1 (7.1%)	14 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	106 (79.1%)	28 (20.9%)	134 (100.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 3.106; df = 2; p = .212$$

Table 20. No DP Support w/LWOP Dummy for *Doubt about Guilt* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Doubt about Guilt</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	190 (88.4%)	25 (11.6%)	215 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	22 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	27 (96.4%)	1 (3.6%)	28 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	239 (90.2%)	26 (9.8%)	265 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 4.427$; $df = 2$; $p = .109$

A second major reason why individuals do not support the death penalty is the belief that it is wrong to take a life. In this case, the results were pretty similar by race categories and when adding the alternatives. For example, Table 21 shows that 26.6 percent of *Whites*, 27.3 percent of *Blacks*, and 28.6 percent of *Other Race* selected “it’s wrong to take a life” as their primary reason for non-support. The results do not differ significantly when filtering for the DP w/LWOP measure, as Table 22 shows that 13 percent of *Whites*, 13.6 percent of *Blacks*, and 14.3 percent of *Other Race* felt that executions are wrong. 26.9 percent of respondents chose this as their reason before alternatives, whereas only 13.2 percent did so after filtering.

Table 21. No DP Support for *Wrong to Take a Life* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Wrong to Take a Life</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	80 (73.4%)	29 (26.6%)	109 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	11 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	10 (71.4%)	4 (7.1%)	14 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	98 (73.1%)	36 (26.9%)	134 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = .025$; df = 2; p = .987

Table 22. No DP Support w/ LWOP for *Wrong to Take a Life* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Wrong to Take a Life</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	187 (87.0%)	28 (13.0%)	215 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	19 (86.4%)	3 (13.6%)	22 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	24 (96.4%)	4 (14.3%)	28 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	230 (86.8%)	35 (13.2%)	265 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = .038$; df = 2; p = .981

Lastly, the final major reason of interest for not supporting the death penalty is the notion that the death penalty is not applied equally among different groups (racism). The results for this category are most intriguing and significant of all the reasons for non-support. First, Table 23 shows the results for cross-tabulations of race and non-support by reason of racism. Over 27 percent of *Blacks* selected this option as their primary justification for not supporting the death penalty. This differs significantly from *Whites* at 1.8 percent and *Other Race*, which had no respondents. The results are significant at the $p \leq .001$ level. Similarly, when filtering for the DP w/LWOP question, 9.1 percent of *Blacks* do not support a capital sentence using this rationale, compared to less than 1 percent for *Whites*, and 0 for *Other Race*, significant at the $p \leq .01$ level. Although the raw numbers are low, this is very telling with regards to racial differences in non-support for capital punishment, as shown in extant research.

Table 23. No DP Support for *Racism* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Racism</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	107 (98.2%)	2 (1.8%)	109 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	11 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	14 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	129 (96.3%)	5 (3.7%)	134 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 18.605$; df = 2; p = .000

Table 24. No DP Support w/LWOP for *Racism* as Reason for Non-Support, by Race

<u>Race:</u>		<u>Racism</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Other Choice</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	213 (99.1%)	2 (0.9%)	215 (100.0%)
	<u>Blacks</u>	20 (90.9%)	2 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
	<u>Others</u>	28 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	28 (100.0%)
	<u>Total</u>	261 (98.5%)	4 (1.5%)	265 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 9.420$; df = 2; p = .009

The Chi-square results and cross-tabulations show that there are some significant differences between *Whites*, *Blacks*, and *Others* in the reasoning behind support for and opposition to the death penalty. Thus, there is partial support for *Hypothesis Twelve*, which states: Whites are more likely than Blacks and others to support capital punishment when controlling for a number of factors; the racial gap will widen when analyzing reasons for support or non-support of a capital sentence for murder. In some cases, there were significant differences between the categories of race for support and non-support (punishment fits the crime, general deterrence, Bible says it's right, racism), while other distributions proved to be statistically very similar among the race groupings. Future studies should have greater racial heterogeneity in order to analyze the relationship between multiple race categories and support/non-support for capital punishment further.

Summary

Overall, using various forms of questions and analyses has proven to be effective in analyzing attitudes toward capital punishment by race, authoritarianism, and other controls. Death penalty support tends to be high when excluding alternatives to the death penalty, but the majority of respondents do not *strongly* support the death penalty. Furthermore, when alternatives such as life without parole are added to the death penalty question, Americans tend to be more in favor of alternatives rather than a capital sentence. Multiple regression results indicate that it is meaningful to include a Likert-scale format when asking about

death penalty support, in addition to alternatives to the death penalty. As such, death penalty support is much lower than many previous studies have indicated.

Authoritarians, Whites, males, biblical literalists, political conservatives, and southerners are most likely to support the death penalty, confirming much of the previous literature. Finally, there tends to be significant differences between *Whites*, *Blacks*, and *Others* when it comes to reasons for death penalty support and non-support. *Whites* tend to be most likely to hold a *just deserts* rationale, whereas general deterrence tends to be the primary reason for *Others*' death penalty support. Notably, a significant percentage of *Blacks* who did not support the death penalty viewed the death penalty as unfairly applied or racist. Overall, these findings have policy implications that are important to discuss for future legislation and research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This dissertation project addresses several gaps in the literature regarding attitudes toward capital punishment. This study explores two prominent predictors of support for the death penalty, race and authoritarianism, in addition to several other independent and control variables. Although previous death penalty literature has established that Whites and Authoritarians are much more likely to support a capital sentence for murderers, the bulk of the studies have done this in fragments with an inadequately structured dependent variable to study such views. Moreover, many studies only look at whether respondents support or do not support the death penalty, instead of assessing how strongly such views are. As a result, much of what we know about perspectives on capital sentencing is from single-question, binary choice variables that provide little insight into the circumstances in which citizens would desire the death penalty (Bohm, 2007; Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Jones, 1994; Mills & Zamble, 1998). Typically, these questions are a part of studies with broader topics that extend well behind a death penalty focus.

In addition to this flaw, rarely has the primary reasons for death penalty support and non-support been asked in a quantitative, multiple-option format as the data in this study allows. To my knowledge, this is the only dataset that addresses such a broad range of questions pertaining to death penalty outlooks. The current study utilized data that asks six questions specifically related to the death penalty, and a host of other questions that pertain to both well-known and lesser-known

predictors of such attitudes. Furthermore, a major dearth in previous capital punishment literature has been the lack of focus on racial/ethnic groups outside of African Americans and Caucasians. This study benefits from the exploration of the category of *Other Race*, which includes Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, and other minority groups. As such, I was able to study the relationship between race and support for the death penalty in a number of ways.

Summary of Findings

The first part of the analyses addresses research question one's prompt about whether the majority of Americans support capital punishment, and how such support varies by strength. T-tests were used for the comparison of means among the three racial categories. *Blacks* mean scores were lower than *Whites* in all three questions, indicating that the former group is less likely to support the death penalty. This is consistent with extant research that overwhelmingly concludes that White individuals are generally more supportive of the death penalty than Black persons (Arthur, 1998; Baker et al., 2005; Barkan & Cohn, 1994; Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; Ellsworth & Ross, 1994; Unnever et al., 2008). The *Other Race* category was used to explore racial differences in support further. Those who identified as a race or ethnicity other than Whites or Blacks had the lowest mean support for the death penalty when options are available. This may be due to the religious beliefs or other factors for this group. To my knowledge, no previous studies have meaningfully analyzed multiple racial groups beyond Blacks and Whites in this way in published work. Finally, *Blacks* scored higher as biblical

literalists and South and lower on the conservatism scale compared to *Whites* and *Others*. These mean values are consistent with the findings of Britt (1998), Unnever and Cullen (2006, 2007a), and Unnever, Cullen, and Bartkowski (2006). Specifically, Unnever et al. (2006) find *Blacks* to be more supportive of the notion of a having a close relationship with a loving God, where God would be sympathetic and forgiving to murderers for their sins. As such, this may explain the contradiction between a higher mean score for *Biblical Literalism*, but less support for capital punishment compared to *Whites* and *Others*.

The mean scores for authoritarians were highly meaningful and significant. Those who scored higher on the authoritarian scale were more likely to support the death penalty under all conditions, interpret the Bible literally, be conservative and be from the South compared to lower authoritarians. Thus, hypothesis four is supported, and the findings suggest that those who score highly on the authoritarian scale are unwavering supporters of harsh punishments for law violators, specifically capital punishment. This is consistent with a bevy of literature on authoritarianism and support for capital punishment (Soss et al., 2003; Stack, 2003, 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2006; Unnever, Cullen & Roberts, 2005).

The first part of research question one (Hypothesis One) was tested by analyzing frequency distributions for the first two questions about death penalty support. The hypothesis confirmed, with a majority of Americans supporting the death penalty. This is consistent with preceding studies that have used the most basic of question formats and measures, including major nationally-representatives

surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS), the National Election Study (NES), and the Gallup Poll (Baumer et al., 2003; Cullen et al., 2000; Finckenauer, 1988; and Vollum et al., 2004). However, hypothesis two is also supported, which is the notion that the majority of Americans do not *strongly* support capital punishment. This echoes the results of Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts (2005), who also found that when asking respondents to choose their level of support (strongly or not strongly), a significantly greater proportion of individuals selected not strongly. Research question one, hypothesis one, and hypothesis two all demonstrate the importance of adding this dimension of detail when constructing survey questionnaires of this subject.

Research question two addresses the issue of whether the bulk of Americans still support the death penalty when other alternatives are present. Several hypotheses correspond to the research questions. To answer, regression analyses were run for several measures of death penalty support, including with and without alternatives. The first model showed that authoritarians, biblical literalists, males, and conservatives were statistically more likely to support the death penalty, while Blacks were significantly less likely to support a capital sentence compared to Whites and others. The results to this point are most similar to the works of Britt (1998), and Unnever and Cullen (2006, 2007b). When adding alternatives to the picture, the context of death penalty support changes considerably. Like before, authoritarians, Whites, biblical literalists, and males are more in favor of a capital sentence than their counterparts. Political conservatism was no longer a significant

factor, perhaps due to the role that authoritarianism plays among those who strongly support the death penalty. This result was unique compared to previous studies. Given that a slight majority of respondents supported alternatives compared to the death penalty in the final regression model, this could mean that some or most conservatives, when given options, are in favor of alternatives such as life without parole.

An additional factor became significant in this model: region of country. Several studies have found that those from the South are significantly more likely to support the death penalty (e.g., Barkan & Cohn, 2010; Baumer et al., 2003; Unnever & Cullen, 2006, 2007b). The majority of hypotheses were supported in the last model, suggesting that data used for this study allow for a more detailed exploration of support for capital punishment, yet with the same major conclusions of some of the larger and more popular datasets.

Based on previous studies such as Unnever and Cullen (2005, 2007a), interaction terms were created to further explain the relationship between predictors and death penalty support. However, there were no significant results, which suggests the need for further investigation as to which variables interact and how to create meaningful equations to further analyze such relationships.

Finally, reasons for support and non-support were studied via cross-tabulations. Similar to Baker and colleagues' (2005) examination, primary reasons for support and opposition indicate a divide in views by race. The results show that of those who supported the death penalty, Whites justified their position by a

retributive notion that the punishment fits the crime. This result is identical to Baker et al. (2005), and may align with Finckenauer's (1988) investigation of retribution as just deserts or revenge. Perhaps the philosophy of punishment also differs by race, hence the significant difference in the results. Interestingly, those of other race were statistically more likely to choose general deterrence and their primary justification for death penalty support. Almost no studies have investigated views toward capital punishment with a focus on punitive assessment, so it is difficult to compare how these factors vary by race. However, this result could be the product of a rather moderate level of punitive outlook, according to Payne and associates' (2004) study of demographic characteristics and justifications for sentencing. Unfortunately, the authors did not analyze races other than Black and White, which makes this study even more unique.

The major result for support for death penalty was Blacks significant association with the rationale that the Bible says it is right. This is consistent with the previous studies that have implied that Blacks are more likely to identify as biblical literalists yet are less in favor of a death sentence (Applegate et al., 2000; Britt, 1998; Unnever & Cullen, 2006). Interestingly, after filtering for those who support the death penalty when alternatives are available, this variable is no longer significant. As shown above, this aligns more with the majority of research that Blacks' religious views typically don't matter compared to their less punitive views on sanctions.

To further support this notion of racial differences in attitudes toward death sentencing, the results for non-support were highly significant with one variable: belief that the death penalty is not equally applied among all groups. This response implies racism, and was most significantly chosen by Blacks as their primary rationale for *not* supporting the death penalty. This result is not surprising given the bevy of research that has found Blacks to be less supportive, but this discernment in the research framework tells us why, unlike most studies. This is consistent with Baker et al.'s (2005) findings that African Americans are more likely to oppose a capital sentence due to the belief that it's unfairly administered. Also, this is consistent with the work of Bobo and Johnson (2004), Cochran and Chamlin (2006), and Johnson (2008), who provide insight into the differences among race/ethnicity by gap in punitive attitudes.

Overall, the current study tells us much about the context of question phrasing, race, authoritarianism, and support for capital punishment. There are some significant and noteworthy differences by race with regards to views and rationales that pertain to capital sentencing perspectives. Authoritarians are very much in a classification of their own in that they are significantly more likely to support a death sentence across all phrasings and questions. Collectively, a fuller picture of death penalty attitudes is presented. However, this project is not without shortcomings. Several issues will be discussed that are ultimately suggestions for future research in the field, as well as improvements for public opinion studies in general.

Limitations

Although the current study excels at framing death penalty attitudes in an original and comprehensive way, there are several issues that can be considered as weaknesses. First, the sample in the study suffers from a lack of racial heterogeneity. Many studies regarding public opinion and related fields have oversampled minority groups in order to rectify this problem, while others total sample is large enough to truncate more highly significant results than the current study. For example, Unnever and Cullen's (2007a) study that reassesses the racial divide in capital punishment benefits from using the multiple years of the GSS, with the specific purpose of maximizing the number of African Americans included in the analyses, based on the hypotheses. Similarly, Unnever and Cullen (2007b) used the 2000 National Election Study with a weighted sample size of 1,555 persons to assess the racial divide. As a result, they were able to satisfactorily assess how African Americans compare to Whites along a number of race-related independent variables. Furthermore, while percentages for the cross-tabulations were meaningful, the raw numbers are so low to where many would question how reliable the results are. As a result, future research endeavors should include a more rich diversity of minority groups to more accurately examine the perspectives on punishment.

The stratified sample in this study is not necessarily representative of the U.S. population. For example, the sample included over 60 percent of female respondents compared to the approximately 51 percent they represent in society.

Similarly, the mean age (51.1) is higher than perhaps many of the studies that see a mean age of around 45 years of age. Lastly, as mentioned above, the distribution of racial minorities in this study is quite low. It is estimated that African Americans make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population, and Hispanics/Latinos are close to that number at approximately 12 percent (and rising). However, the distribution for this study shows that minorities are represented at a significantly lesser degree. All of these are limitations that may impact the results on both sides of the death penalty viewpoint. For example, having more females in the sample could make males' views more highly significant. Additionally, there are fundamental differences between the elderly and the middle-aged, in that the elderly tend to be much more fearful of crime, which could lead to greater support for the death penalty, regardless of options. In the case of race, some results may not have been significant because of their considerably low representation.

Another critical limitation of this study is that the Cronbach's alpha for the authoritarianism scale was less than desirable. In order to achieve the highest internal consistency score, one of the original measures of authoritarianism was omitted. At .601, the alpha is lower than some would consider to be an acceptable number for publication. Although earlier studies that used an authoritarian measure also struggled with a low alpha score, more recent studies that use the scale have had higher alpha levels, including: Unnever, Cullen, and Roberts, 2005 (.65); Soss, Langbein, and Metelko, 2003 (.66); and Stack, 2003, which was based on six items similar to the RWA scale (.76).

Lastly, there is evidence that specification of religion types is important for discerning support for capital punishment (Applegate et al., 2000; Britt, 1998; Unnever & Cullen, 2006, 2011; and Unnever et al., 2006). Because biblical literalism is the only measure related to religion in this study, we may not be fully grasping the impact of religion on support for the death penalty, particularly as it contributes to the divide among races. For example, previous studies suggest that fundamentalism, church attendance, religiosity, image of a loving God, and other categories of religion may produce varying results in attitudinal surveys. As such, the current study may be impacted by the single-item measure of religion, biblical literalism.

Policy Implications

In many ways, the death penalty qualifies as a policy itself. That being said, there are numerous ways in which the current study impacts the future of the death penalty in various states and even the nation. Specifically, there are four primary ways in which the current study and similar research impacts the death penalty as a policy: 1) phrasing and details of the questions matters; 2) the public favors alternatives to the death penalty; 3) the death penalty is not a race-neutral policy; and 4) public opinion *does* matter for the death penalty.

First, after answering several research questions and hypotheses, the current study demonstrated the importance of organization, phrasing, and detail of survey instruments is as it pertains to the accuracy of results. Several earlier works stated

that the majority of Americans support the death penalty. However, many of these studies did not go beyond a single, dichotomous measure in order to gauge death penalty support. As a result, strength of support was not measured, which (as was it demonstrated) has a significant impact on the results. As Unnever and Cullen (2005) and Unnever et al. (2005) indicate, there is a substantial percentage of the public who hold their views more weakly, and may be alter their opinions of the death penalty. The current research confirms this notion. Most Americans do not strongly support the death penalty, and thus, may be less in favor of it when a broader range of questions is asked (e.g. Likert scale).

Moreover, with alternatives to the death penalty added, we see that the majority of citizens prefer other sanctions for murderers. Bowers (1993) found a similar result in that in all instances where LWOP with a restitution requirement was posed, death penalty support plummeted. This is important for several reasons, including costs of legal fees and cell isolation, the congestion of the courts and appeals process, and possibility of an innocent person being executed. Therefore, when legislators use research for the purposes of reaching a decision (as in *Gregg v. Georgia*), they come to a decision based on false information. The current research helps resolve this issue and set an example for how future public opinion research on the death penalty should be framed.

Third, there has been much research on the racial divide in death penalty support, but there has also been a substantial amount of research that focuses on the disparities and purported discrimination that is evident with the administration of

the a capital sentence. That being said, when individuals feel there is a possibility that an innocent person has been executed, they are more likely to oppose the death penalty. This is important because of the extant research that has concluded the likelihood of several people having been wrongfully executed over the past half-century. This is critical due to the finality of the sentence, when carried out.

Lastly, public opinion does have an impact on the legislative process pertaining to a death statute. As Mallicoat and Radelet (2004) explain, the Supreme Court has on several occasions (e.g. *Furman v. Georgia*, 1972) used public opinion as a way to ascertain the evolving standards of decency argument. Further, the Court recently indicated a new willingness to review data generated from public opinion polls when establishing the constitutionality of assorted components related to capital punishment. Thus, the implications of the current research are obvious. With better measures and a more detailed research agenda, the results of this study indicate a reassessment of public opinion on the death penalty, as well as the death penalty statute alike. Much in the same way that the death penalty was substantiated due to public opinion, it could be replaced with other feasible alternatives that fulfill the purpose of justice.

Future Research

This study on support for capital punishment was only the blueprint for a series of upcoming research projects. First, a key variable in other death penalty research is fear of crime. This variable is available for analysis in the dataset, and will be added to future models of regression to see how fear of crime predicts

support for capital punishment. I would expect to find a significant relationship, based on previous literature as well as the basic premise of American's anticipating a higher crime than actually exists. Similarly, a measure of empathy is included in the data that may predict a lesser likelihood for death penalty support. This measure is somewhat new to the death penalty literature, so that would be a valuable addition to the field.

Furthermore, there are more sophisticated ways to analyze primary and secondary reasons for support for and opposition to the death penalty. In addition to creating a dummy variable, multiple regressions may be appropriate to see how other variables outside of race predict reasons for support. For example, previous research indicates that authoritarians may hold a retributive mindset as a reason for their firm death penalty support. Finally, one component of this research that needs further exploration is variations in support by race. Specifically, racial and ethnic minorities are not well represented, so in future research, I would like to qualitatively investigate differences in attitudes toward capital punishment by race and ethnicity. A focus group could add a meaningful component to the literature that may help establish a different aspect to the understanding of public opinion in this field.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The death penalty is one of the most controversial policies in contemporary society. There are blatant racial disparities in the criminal justice system and especially in the death penalty sentencing process. Many studies have examined attitudes that pertain to capital punishment, but with insufficient measures that do little to establish viewpoints among various groups. Although limited by its lack of racial heterogeneity, the current research adds to the literature by utilizing stronger measures that show a clearer picture of death penalty views. There are several new and confirmed conclusions as a result of this examination. Most Americans *do not* strongly support the death penalty, nor do most Americans support the death penalty when alternatives are present. This is a primary discernment from prior studies that either do not examine strength of support for the death penalty, or found null results when trying to examine strength of attitudes with weak data.

Additionally, authoritarianism is a highly significant predictor of such support across various phrasings. This is important due to the steadfast yet prejudice and unempathetic nature of authoritarians. These 30 to 35 percent of Americans are unwilling to acknowledge the blatant disparities (and arguably discrimination) that exists towards minorities. They do not care that the death penalty may be applied differently among certain groups. They are unwilling to listen to statistics that definitively prove that the costs of a person on death penalty *grossly* outweigh the costs of life imprisonment for an individual convicted of

murder. Their retributive and prejudiced tendencies are unwavering. As a result, their opinions matter less when it comes to submitting to legislative decision making arenas and Supreme Court rulings. Similarly, those who interpret the Bible literally, males, conservatives, and those from the South all predict support for capital punishment in various models of analysis. Not surprisingly, authoritarianism significantly overlaps with the above categories, further emphasizing the divide in death penalty opinion.

Perhaps most importantly, important racial differences exist in death penalty support, with Whites being overall more in favor of a capital sentence. We live in a society dominated by White leaders who largely shape policies for the rest of us. Blacks and Others feel differently about a policy that disproportionately affects them, yet the preponderance of the majority group does not care. This research has sufficiently demonstrated the need to eradicate a policy that targets and discriminates against Blacks. In many ways, this research can help add to the argument that the death penalty is indeed unconstitutional. As the recent research of Professors Carol and Jordan Steiker suggests, “the modern American death penalty – with its unprecedented costs, alternatives, and legal regulatory framework – seems newly vulnerable to judicial invalidation. Reform of the death penalty and its abolition might well be on the same path” (Steiker & Steiker, 2012). The authors also note the important developments that add to this position, such as the increasing number of exonerations from death row, the emergence of the sentence of life without parole (as noted in the current research), and the focus on death

penalty trials in the sentencing phase as helping to produce a hasty and unforeseen turnaround in the frequency of executions. It is efforts such as these that makes this current study more meaningful.

The purpose of this research was to show how public opinion, when sufficiently measured, reveals less support for a policy than what prior undeveloped research has reported. The implications of this research are clear: alternatives to the death penalty are preferred by most Americans, and consequently, policymakers and legislators should review current death penalty statutes that are racially discriminatory and ineffective. Adhering to such recommendations would be one step in the right direction towards creating a *true* justice system for criminals and citizens alike.

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APPENDIX A: DP SUPPORT SURVEY

I would like to start by asking you some questions about social values, crime, and punishment for criminals in this country.

1) Please tell me how strongly you agree with the following statement. **“Nobody is safe – everyone is at high risk of becoming the victim of a violent crime in the foreseeable future.”** Do you:

Strongly disagree	01
Somewhat disagree	02
Neither agree nor disagree	03
Somewhat agree	04
Strongly agree	05
Don't know/no answer	77
Refused, continued interview	88 (implied in remainder of questionnaire)
Refused, ended call	99

2) **“Is there any area right around where you live – that is within a mile – where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?”**

Yes	01
No	00
Don't know/no answer	77

3) Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities. For each pair please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have:

a) **independence or respect for elders**

independence	01
both (volunteered)	02
respect for elders	03
Don't know/no answer	77

b) **obedience or self-reliance**

independence	01
both (volunteered)	02
respect for elders	03
Don't know/no answer	77

c) **curiosity or good manners**

independence	01
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both (volunteered)	02
respect for elders	03
Don't know/no answer	77

d) **being considerate or well-behaved**

independence	01
both (volunteered)	02
respect for elders	03
Don't know/no answer	77

4) How strongly do you agree with the following statement? **“The Bible is the Word of God and should be taken literally, word for word.”** Do you...

Strongly disagree	01
Somewhat disagree	02
Neither agree nor disagree	03
Somewhat agree	04
Strongly agree	05
Don't know/no answer	77

5) How strongly do you agree with the following statement? **“I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.”** Do you...

Strongly disagree	01
Somewhat disagree	02
Neither agree nor disagree	03
Somewhat agree	04
Strongly agree	05
Don't know/no answer	77

6) What is your opinion about the **use of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?** Are you:

Strongly in favor of it	04
Somewhat in favor of it	03
Somewhat against it	02
Strongly against it	01
It depends	06
Don't know/no answer	77

7) If given the possibility of life without parole, **which of the following punishments would you most favor for someone convicted of capital murder?**

Death penalty	04
---------------	----

Life without the possibility of parole	03
Life with the possibility of parole	02
Other punishment	01
Don't know/no answer	77

8) Which of the following best describes your most important reason for supporting the death penalty?

They deserve it.	01
The punishment should fit the crime.	02
It will give the victim's family closure.	03
To keep the offender from committing additional crimes.	04
To set an example to others who think of committing the same crime.	05
Some criminals just can't be rehabilitated.	06
Help relieve prison overcrowding.	07
The Bible says it is right.	08
Save taxpayer money.	09
Other (only if volunteered)	10
Don't know/no answer	777
Doesn't apply to me	66

9) Which of the following best describes the second most important reason for your support?

They deserve it.	01
The punishment should fit the crime.	02
It will give the victim's family closure.	03
To keep the offender from committing additional crimes.	04
To set an example to others who think of committing the same crime.	05
Some criminals just can't be rehabilitated.	06
Help relieve prison overcrowding.	07
The Bible says it is right.	08
Save taxpayer money.	09
Other (only if volunteered)	10
Don't know/no answer	777
Doesn't apply to me	66

10) Which of the following best describes your most important reason for not supporting the death penalty?

Doubt about whether the right person was convicted.	01
It's wrong to take a life.	02
Life in prison without parole is a better punishment.	03
Death is not harsh enough for some criminals.	04
The criminal could be rehabilitated.	05

The death penalty is not a deterrent.	06
Religious beliefs.	07
The death penalty is not applied equally among different groups.	08
I believe the current method of execution is cruel and unusual.	09
Other (only if volunteered)	10
Don't know/no answer	777
Doesn't apply to me	66

11) Which of the following best describes **your second most important reason for not supporting it?**

Doubt about whether the right person was convicted.	01
It's wrong to take a life.	02
Life in prison without parole is a better punishment.	03
Death is not harsh enough for some criminals.	04
The criminal could be rehabilitated.	05
The death penalty is not a deterrent.	06
Religious beliefs.	07
The death penalty is not applied equally among different groups.	08
I believe the current method of execution is cruel and unusual.	09
Other (only if volunteered)	10
Don't know/no answer	777
Doesn't apply to me	66

12) Several men who were sentenced to death have been exonerated after spending years on death row. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

“It is probable that we have executed an innocent person in the United States in the past 25 years.” Do you:

Strongly disagree	01
Somewhat disagree	02
Neither agree nor disagree	03
Somewhat agree	04
Strongly agree	05
Don't know/no answer	77

13) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“There are enough checks and balances in the appeals process to uncover any errors that have been made in death penalty cases.” Do you:

Strongly agree	01
Somewhat agree	02

Neither agree nor disagree	03
Somewhat disagree	04
Strongly disagree	05
Don't know/no answer	77

14) We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. **On most political issues, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?**

Liberal (go to 12a)	01
Moderate	02
Conservative (skip to 12b)	03
Don't know	77

a) **Is that extremely liberal or somewhat liberal?**

Extremely liberal (skip to q13)	02
Somewhat liberal (skip to q13)	01
Don't know/no answer	777

b) **Is that extremely conservative or somewhat conservative?**

Extremely conservative	02
Somewhat conservative	01
Don't know/no answer	777

15) Determine gender without asking

Male	01
Female	00

Finally, I would like to ask you some questions about your background for statistical purposes.

16) How old were you on your last birthday?

17) Which of the following best describes the formal education you have completed?

Less than high school	01
High school	02
Some college	03
Associate degree	04
Bachelor's degree	05
Postgraduate degree	06
(MA, PhD, JD, MD)	
Don't know/no answer	777

18) Now I am going to read you a series of income ranges. Please stop me when I read the amount that best describes your total household income, before taxes in 2007.

LESS THAN \$25,000	01
\$25,001 TO \$50,000	02
\$50,001 TO \$100,000	03
\$100,001 TO \$150,000	04
MORE THAN \$150,000	05
Don't know	777

19) What is your marital status?

Single/never married	01
Married	02
Divorced/separated	03
Widowed	04
Other	05
Don't know	777

20) Do you have children under the age of 18 living at home?

Yes	01
No	00
No answer	777

21) What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself?

Caucasian/White	01
African American/Black	02
Hispanic Latino	03
Asian/Pacific Islander	04
American Indian/Native American	05
Biracial or multiracial	06
Other	07
Don't know	777

22) In which state do you live? (48 states plus District of Columbia)