

Should the death penalty be banned as a form of punishment?

Yes	No
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial costs to taxpayers of capital punishment is several times that of keeping someone in prison for life. 2. It is barbaric and violates the "cruel and unusual" clause in the Bill of Rights. 3. The endless appeals and required additional procedures clog our court system. 4. We as a society have to move away from the "eye for an eye" revenge mentality if civilization is to advance. 5. It sends the wrong message: why kill people who kill people to show killing is wrong. 6. Life in prison is a worse punishment and a more effective deterrent. 7. Other countries (especially in Europe) would have a more favorable image of America. 8. Some jury members are reluctant to convict if it means putting someone to death. 9. The prisoner's family must suffer from seeing their loved one put to death by the state. 10. The possibility exists that innocent men and women may be put to death. 11. Mentally ill patients may be put to death. 12. It creates sympathy for the monstrous perpetrators of the crimes. 13. It is useless in that it doesn't bring the victim back to life. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The death penalty gives closure to the victim's families who have suffered so much. 2. It creates another form of crime deterrent. 3. Justice is better served. 4. Our justice system shows more sympathy for criminals than it does victims. 5. It provides a deterrent for prisoners already serving a life sentence. 6. DNA testing can now effectively eliminate uncertainty as to a person's guilt or innocence. 7. Prisoner parole or escapes can give criminals another chance to kill. 8. It gives prosecutors another bargaining chip in the plea bargain process, which is essential in cutting costs in an overcrowded court system.

Overview/Background

The United States remains in the minority of nations in the world that still uses death as penalty for certain crimes. Many see the penalty as barbaric and against American values. Others see it as a very important tool in fighting violent pre-meditated murder. Two things have once again brought this issue to national debate. One is the release of some highly publicized studies that show a number of innocents had been put to death. The second is the issue of terrorism and the need to punish its perpetrators.

Yes

1. **Financial costs to taxpayers of capital punishment is several times that of keeping someone in prison for life.** Most people don't realize that carrying out one death sentence costs 2-5 times *more* than keeping that same criminal in prison for the rest of his life. How can this be? It has to do with the endless appeals, additional required procedures, and legal wrangling that drag the process out. It's not unusual for a prisoner to be on death row for 15-20 years. Judges, attorneys, court reporters, clerks, and court facilities all require a substantial investment by the taxpayers. Do we really have the resources to waste?
2. **It is barbaric and violates the "cruel and unusual" clause in the Bill of Rights.** Whether it's a firing squad, electric chair, gas chamber, lethal injection, or hanging, it's barbaric to allow state-sanctioned murder before a crowd of people. We condemn people like Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong Il when they murder their own people while we continue to do the same (although our procedures for allowing it are obviously more thorough). The 8th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution prevents the use of "cruel and unusual punishment". Many would interpret the death penalty as violating this restriction.
3. **The endless appeals and required additional procedures clog our court system.** The U.S. court system goes to enormous lengths before allowing a death sentence to be carried out. All the appeals, motions, hearings, briefs, etc. monopolize much of the time of judges, attorneys, and other court employees as well as use up courtrooms & facilities. This is time & space that could be used for other unresolved matters. The court system is tremendously backed up. This would help move things along.
4. **We as a society have to move away from the "eye for an eye" revenge mentality if civilization is to advance.** The "eye for an eye" mentality will never solve anything. A revenge philosophy inevitably leads to an endless cycle of violence. Why do you think the Israeli-Palestine conflict has been going on for 50+ years? Why do you think gang violence in this country never seems to end? It is important to send a message to society that striking back at your enemy purely for revenge will always make matters worse.
5. **It sends the wrong message: why kill people who kill people to show killing is wrong.** Yes, we want to make sure there is accountability for crime and an effective deterrent in place; however, the death penalty has a message of "You killed one of us, so we'll kill you". The state is actually using a murder to punish someone who committed a murder. Does that make sense?
6. **Life in prison is a worse punishment and a more effective deterrent.** For those of you who don't feel much sympathy for a murderer, keep in mind that death may be too good for them. With a death sentence, the suffering is over in an instant. With life in prison, the pain goes on for decades. Prisoners are confined to a cage and live in an internal environment of rape and violence where they're treated as animals. And consider terrorists. Do you think they'd rather suffer the humiliation of lifelong prison or be "martyred" by a death sentence?
7. **Other countries (especially in Europe) would have a more favorable image of America.** It's no secret that anti-Americanism is rampant around the world. One of the reasons is America's continued use of the death penalty. We're seen as a violent, vengeful nation for such a policy. This is pretty much the same view that Europeans had of America when we continued the practice of slavery long after it had been banned in Europe.
8. **Some jury members are reluctant to convict if it means putting someone to death.** Many states require any jury members to be polled during the pre-trial examination to be sure they have the

stomach to sentence someone to death before they're allowed to serve. Even if they're against the death penalty, they still may lie in order to get on the panel. The thought of agreeing to kill someone even influences some jury members to acquit rather than risk the death. Some prosecutors may go for a lesser charge rather than force juries into a death-or-acquit choice. Obviously, in all these situations, justice may not be served.

9. **The prisoner's family must suffer from seeing their loved one put to death by the state.** One victim's innocent family is obviously forced to suffer from a capital murder, but by enforcing a death sentence, you force another family to suffer. Why double the suffering when we don't have to?
10. **The possibility exists that innocent men and women may be put to death.** There are several documented cases where DNA testing showed that innocent people were put to death by the government. We have an imperfect justice system where poor defendants are given minimal legal attention by often lesser qualified individuals. We can't risk mistakes.
11. **Mentally ill patients may be put to death.** Many people are simply born with defects to their brain that cause them to act a certain way. No amount of drugs, schooling, rehabilitation, or positive reinforcement will change them. Is it fair that someone should be murdered just because they were unlucky enough to be born with a brain defect. Although it is technically unconstitutional to put a mentally ill patient to death, the rules can be vague, and you still need to be able to convince a judge and jury that the defendant is in fact, mentally ill.
12. **It creates sympathy for the monstrous perpetrators of the crimes.** Criminals usually are looked down upon by society. People are disgusted by the vile, unconscionable acts they commit and feel tremendous sympathy for the victims of murder, rape, etc. However, the death penalty has a way of shifting sympathy away from the victims and to the criminals themselves. An excellent example is the 2005 execution of former gang leader "Tookie" Williams. This is a man who founded the notorious Crips gang, which has a long legacy of robbery, assault, and murder. This is a man who was convicted with overwhelming evidence of the murder of 4 people at a restaurant, some of whom he shot in the back and then laughed at the sounds they made as they died. This is a man who never even took responsibility for the crimes or apologized to the victims -- NOT ONCE! These victims had kids and spouses, but instead of sympathy for them, sympathy shifted to Tookie. Candlelight vigils were held for him. Websites like savetookie.org sprung up. Protests and a media circus ensued trying to prevent the execution, which eventually did take place -- 26 years after the crime itself! There are many cases like this, which makes a mockery of the evil crimes these degenerates commit.
13. **It is useless in that it doesn't bring the victim back to life.** Perhaps the biggest reason to ban the death penalty is that it doesn't change the fact that the victim is gone and will never come back. Hate, revenge, and anger will never cure the emptiness of a lost loved one. Forgiveness is the only way to start the healing process, and this won't happen in a revenge-focused individual.

No

1. **The death penalty gives closure to the victim's families who have suffered so much.** Some family members of crime victims may take years or decades to recover from the shock and loss of a loved one. Some may never recover. One of the things that helps hasten this recovery is to achieve some kind of closure. Life in prison just means the criminal is still around to haunt the victim. A death sentence brings finality to a horrible chapter in the lives of these family members.
2. **It creates another form of crime deterrent.** Crime would run rampant as never before if there wasn't some way to deter people from committing the acts. Prison time is an effective deterrent, but

with some people, more is needed. Prosecutors should have the option of using a variety of punishments in order to minimize crime.

3. **Justice is better served.** The most fundamental principle of justice is that the punishment should fit the crime. When someone plans and brutally murders another person, doesn't it make sense that the punishment for the perpetrator also be death?
4. **Our justice system shows more sympathy for criminals than it does victims.** It's time we put the emphasis of our criminal justice system back on protecting the victim rather than the accused. Remember, a person who's on death row has almost always committed crimes before this. A long line of victims have been waiting for justice. We need justice for current and past victims.
5. **It provides a deterrent for prisoners already serving a life sentence.** What about people already sentenced to life in prison. What's to stop them from murdering people constantly while *in* prison? What are they going to do--extend his sentence? Sure, they can take away some prison privileges, but is this enough of a deterrent to stop the killing? What about a person sentenced to life who happens to escape? What's to stop him from killing anyone who might try to bring him in or curb his crime spree?
6. **DNA testing can now effectively eliminate uncertainty as to a person's guilt or innocence.** One of the biggest arguments against the death penalty is the possibility of error. Sure, we can never *completely* eliminate all uncertainty, but nowadays, it's about as close as you can get. DNA testing is over 99 percent effective. And even if DNA testing didn't exist, the trial and appeals process is so thorough it's next to impossible to convict an innocent person. Remember, a jury of 12 members must *unanimously* decide there's not even a reasonable doubt the person is guilty. The number of innocent people that might somehow be convicted is no greater than the number of innocent victims of the murderers who are set free.
7. **Prisoner parole or escapes can give criminals another chance to kill.** Perhaps the biggest reason to keep the death penalty is to prevent the crime from happening again. The parole system nowadays is a joke. Does it make sense to anyone outside the legal system to have multiple "life" sentences + 20 years or other jiverish? Even if a criminal is sentenced to life without possibility of parole, he still has a chance to kill while in prison, or even worse, escape and go on a crime/murder spree.
8. **It gives prosecutors another bargaining chip in the plea bargain process, which is essential in cutting costs in an overcrowded court system.** The number of criminal cases that are plea bargained (meaning the accused admits guilt in return for a lesser sentence or some other concession) can be as high as 80 or 90 percent of cases. With the time, cost, and personnel requirements of a criminal case, there really isn't much of a choice. The vast majority of people that are arraigned are in fact guilty of the crime they are accused. Even if you believe a defendant only deserves life in prison, without the threat of a death sentence, there may be no way to get him to plead guilty and accept the sentence. If a case goes to trial, in addition to the enormous cost, you run the chance that you may lose the case, meaning a violent criminal gets off scot free. The existence of the death penalty gives prosecutors much more flexibility and power to ensure just punishments.