# How do age and political ideology impact views on the death penalty?

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# Introduction

- The influences surrounding the justifiability of the death penalty has been a topic of interest within the political world for many years.
- These different views on the death penalty have been tied to many different attributes of human beings.
- The two main characteristics that may influence one's views on the justification of the death penalty include age and political ideology (left-leaning or right-leaning on a 10-point scale).
- This research investigates whether age and political ideology influence one's views on the death penalty.
- Does the "retiree class" ( $\geq$  50-years-old and older) view the death penalty always justifiable?
- Does the "working class" ( $\leq$  49-year-old and younger) view the death penalty never justifiable?
- Do individuals who land farther right on the ideology scale view the death penalty as always justifiable?
- Do individuals who land farther left on the ideology scale view the death penalty as never justifiable?
- Today, there are widespread and conflicting views surrounding the death penalty: those who support it as a necessary evil and those who want to abolish it.
- There is a strong "philosophical justification" for the death penalty within traditional theories of punishment (Flanders).
- These areas of punishment are: "the deterrent, the retributive," which "tend to provide good reasons to favor the death penalty" (Flanders 595).
- Scholars look at and recognize "capital punishment as a denial of the universal human rights to life and to freedom from tortuous, cruel, and inhumane punishment" (Hood and Hoyle 1).
- "This argument or hypothesis suggests that we must punish offenders to discourage others from committing similar offenses; we punish past offenders to send a message to potential offenders" (Radelet & Borg 44).
- Researchers have found that "public opinion polls measure support for the death penalty in the abstract, not support for the death penalty as it is actually applied" (Radelet & Borg 47).

### Theory and Hypotheses

**Theory**: Age can be an important determining factor as to why an individual has certain views and opinions surrounding certain concepts, like the death penalty. Younger generations tend to feel that the death penalty is never justifiable, as it inherently violates the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment. H1: If one is 49 years old or younger, then he or she is more likely to agree that the death penalty is <u>never</u> justifiable.

H0: There is no correlation between age and the justifiability of the death penalty.

Theory: People who land farther right on the ideology scale tend to view the death penalty as always justifiable. The conservative platform favors law and order and ensuring that people who commit violent crimes are properly punished. The motto "do the crime, do the time" stands strong with right-wing Americans.

H2: If one is more right leaning, then he or she is more likely to agree that the death penalty is <u>always</u> justifiable.

H0: There is no correlation between left-right political ideology and the justifiability of the death penalty.

**Theory**: Those who view the death penalty as always justifiable tend to be rightleaning, as well as members of the "retiree" ( $\geq$  50 years old) class. As older, conservatives don't want to continue to pay taxes to keep violent crime doers in prison, when they could be executed instead.

H3: Americans who affiliate with the right side of the political spectrum and 50 years old or older, are more likely to view the death penalty as <u>always</u> justifiable. H0: Political ideology and age have no impact of the justification of the death penalty.

# Methods

This study involves a quantitative research design that utilizes a Large-N study based on a probability sample from the World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2022). The research population is composed of individuals living in America ages 18 and older. The concept under investigation (DV) and indicator used is WVS Question 195: justifiability of the death penalty. The table below addresses the other concepts involved. In regard to reliability, the World Value Survey questions are clearly worded and understandable. With this, I am confident that respondents would respond in a similar manner if the same or similar questions were asked repeatedly over time, this makes these indicators replicable and in turn reliable. The indicators chosen have face validity, as they are related to the other concepts I am researching. However, content validity of these indicators is restricted because it is difficult to capture the entire notion of the death penalty in one question. The statistical tests performed were the **Difference in Means Test**, which tests the binary Independent Variable of age, and its effect on the justification of the death penalty. The next test performed determined the **Correlation Coefficient** between the DV of justification of the death penalty (which is an ordinal variable on a 10-point scale) and the ordinal IV of the left-right political scale, which is also measured on a 10-point scale. This test best summarizes the linear relationship between two variables, as we can see if there is a negative or positive correlation between the variables being tested. Finally, I performed Linear Regression on three different models. Model 1: testing the binary Independent Variable, Model 2: testing the ordinal Independent Variable, and Model 3: testing both Independent Variables. This test allows us to see the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> which indicates the amount of variability in the DV that can be accounted for by my independent variables. The linear regression equation is:  $y_i = \alpha + (\beta 1 * x 1_i) + (\beta 2 * x 2_i)$ .

Concept	Indicator	Variable	
DV: justifiability of the death penalty	WVS Q195: Is the death penalty justifiable? 1 means never justified; 10 means always justified	Variable with ordinal measurement:1 means the death penalty is never justified; 10 means the death penalty is always justified.	
IV 1: age (≤ 49 OR ≥ 50)	WVS Q262: Age. Grouping into a working-class category (49 and younger) and a retiree class (50 and older)	Variable with ordinal measurement. Transformed into a binary variable; working class and retiree class; category 1 is $\leq$ 49, category 2 is $\geq$ 50.	
W IV 2: left-right political scale ar sc	WVS Q240: In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?	Variable with ordinal measurement, ten possible categories: a 1 means Left and a 10 means Right; numbers in between represent intermediate points of view.	

						Resi
	Minimum value	Maximum value	Mean	Standard deviation	% Category 1	% Category 2
Dependent Variable (ordinal, 10 categories) Never Justified vs. Always Justified Differences	1 (never justified)	10 (always justified)	5.51	2.800	13.6% (1 – never justified)	11.9% (10 – always justified)
Independent variable 1 (binary) Age					65.4% (≤49)	34.6% (≥ 50)
Independent variable 2 Left-Right Political Spectrum	1 (left)	10 (right)	5.21	2.516		



## Indepen

Independ Age

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Independe Left vs.

Constant

NAdj. *R*2

The results show that the impact of age on the views of the justification of the death penalty is statistically significant. This was expected, as I figured the "retiree" age group would have harsher attitudes toward people who commit violent crimes. And those in the younger, working-class age group would not support capital punishment. This assumptions were correct, as the data supported these ideas. When looking at the left-right political spectrum, landing farther on the right side of the scale is significantly correlated with views in favor of the death penalty. This is the opposite for those who land on the left side of the scale, as they view the death penalty as never justifiable. These ideas supported my various theories, as right leaning, older Americans tend to express their support for the death penalty, and left leaning, younger Americans tend to express their disapproval on capital punishment.

## ifference in Means Test

ne difference in means for whether the death penalty is stifiable based on *age* showed that those in the "working" ass" age group ( $\leq 49$ ), had a mean of 5.38. Whereas ose in the "retiree class" age group ( $\geq 50$ ), had a mean of 76. The mean difference of -. 373 between the two groups as *significant* at the p < .05 level. This means that if an dividual is in the "retiree class," they are more likely to ew the death penalty as *always justified*.

## orrelation Coefficient

ne correlation between position on the *left-right political* ectrum and views on the death penalty was a positive e at +.292. This means that as respondents move further *ght*, they are more likely to view the death penalty as ways justifiable, and as respondents move further left, ey are more likely to view the death penalty as *never* stifiable. This was significant at the p < .001 level.

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dent variables	Model 1 β (Std. error)	Model 2 β (Std. error)	Model 3 β (Std. error)
	Lusten dendined		Luston doudine d
ient variable 1 (binary) -	Unstandardized		
	for the demonstrate		for Indexed land
	for independent		ior independent
	variable I		variable I
	(Standard error)		(Standard error)
	.373*		.136*
	(.120)		(.116)
dent variable 2 -		Unstandardized	Unstandardized
Right Political scale		beta coefficient	beta coefficient
		for Independent	for Independent
		variable 2	variable 2
		(Standard error)	(Standard error)
		.334*	.330*
		(.022)	(.022)
t	5.382	3.770	3.741
	2522	2522	2522
	.003	.085	.085

## \* Significant at the p < .05 level.

# Discussion

## Conclusion

In conclusion, my first theory about age being a determining factor as to why individuals have certain views on topics like the death penalty was significant and correct. Age was a statistically significant variable as to why people may view the death penalty as justifiable or not. When looking at my other independent variable, the left-right political scale, my theory was significant and correct. People who land father right tend to view the death penalty as justifiable, whereas people who land farther on the left tend to view the death penalty as never justifiable. These results are consistent with the literature. These results could be improved by conducting a longitudinal study in order to answer more in-depth questions. In other words, expanding to further variables and looking more in-depth.

## References

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