

# SENTENCED TO DEATH WITHOUT EXECUTION:

## WHY CAPITAL PUNISHMENT HAS NOT YET BEEN ABOLISHED IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN AND BARBADOS

### Introduction

There are 10 independent island nations and two independent mainland nations in the Caribbean region that are members of Commonwealth; Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Belize.

All use English as their official language and are often referred to as countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. Over half are members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). All retain the death penalty in law and are among the minority of countries globally to continue to do so.



**There are approximately 85 individuals on death row across the 12 countries of the English-speaking Caribbean**

**There have been no executions carried out in the region since 2008**



Despite retaining the death penalty in law, the punishment appears widely redundant; only St Kitts and Nevis - which executed Charles Elroy Laplace for murder in 2008, has carried out an execution in the past 20 years. Many have not carried out a death sentence in over 30 years. There are approximately 85 people on death row across the 12 countries, in Barbados (10), Grenada (1), Guyana (25), Saint Vincent and The Grenadines (1) and Trinidad and Tobago (48).

### Why retain capital punishment?

In order to investigate this important question The Death Penalty Project carried out research, the first of its kind, in the 6 member states of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as well as Barbados. The research aimed to uncover possible reasons as to why this part of the world is so reluctant to eradicate the death penalty, despite the punishment being barely used and when over 75% of countries around the world have abolished.



**Our research focussed on Barbados and the OECS countries; Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and The Grenadines.**

### How was the research carried out?

Interviews were conducted with 100 opinion formers, who work in four areas of public life; politics, civil service, law and criminal justice and religious leadership as well as influential members of civil society. We asked opinion formers for their views on the death penalty, their knowledge of the subject and their thoughts regarding public opinion and possible barriers to abolition in their countries.

The study was carried out as part of a larger collaborative project funded by the European Union and undertaken by The Death Penalty Project; the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill); local organisations Greater Caribbean for Life and the St Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association; and the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. It was authored by the late Professor Roger Hood and Dr Florence Seemungal, with assistance from Amaya M Athill, attorney at law.

# 'I don't want to see anyone sentenced to death, but I want the law to remain on the books as a deterrent'

## Attitudes to capital punishment

When asked whether they were in favour of, or opposed to, the retention of the death penalty, the majority of opinion formers across all seven countries, expressed a preference for abolition.

**52%** were in favour of abolition

were in favour of retention

**48%**

## Strength of opinion

Beyond the initial question of support, we examined the strength of opinion to discover how entrenched views were.

**strongly against abolition = 18/48 retentionists**

**strongly for abolition = 30/52 abolitionists**

## Trends in opinion

The professions of the opinion formers predicted a preference for retention or abolition, those working in politics and civil society were more frequently retentionists, while those working in criminal justice and law favoured abolition, as did religious leaders.



**56% of those working in politics favoured retention**



**65% of those from legal backgrounds favoured abolition**



**59% of those in civil society favoured retention**



**60% of religious leaders favoured abolition**

## Scrutinising opinions

With serious and violent crime rates high across the Caribbean, we asked opinion formers to select the measures they felt would be most effective in deterring serious crime in their countries.

**10%**



**Despite 48% supporting the death penalty only 10 endorsed more executions as a way to reduce violent crime**

**Only 2% ranked the death penalty as the most effective deterrent against murder**



**90%**

**did not select the death penalty as an effective deterrent at all**

Across both retentionists and abolitionists 76% chose social measures including;

**More effective policing**

**Better moral education of young people**

**Poverty reduction**



**63% of those who favoured retention did not wish to see any expansion in the use of the death penalty or in the number of executions**

When the 100 respondents were asked to rank 'the likely effectiveness of more executions as a way of controlling violent crime leading to death, when compared with eight other social and criminal justice policies' 72 chose, as either their main or a subsidiary policy, 'better education of young people against the use of violence'. In contrast, only two ranked 'more executions' as their first choice, and only 10 chose it at all.

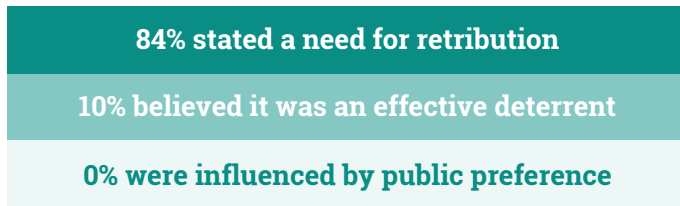


**Even 'longer prison sentences' was only ranked first choice by five opinion formers**

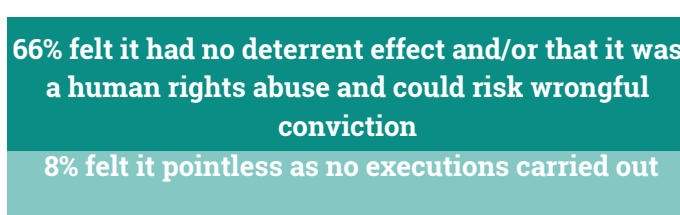
## Rationales behind attitudes

The predominant reason among retentionists for wishing to keep capital punishment was a belief in the need for retribution.

Retentionists citing their rationale:

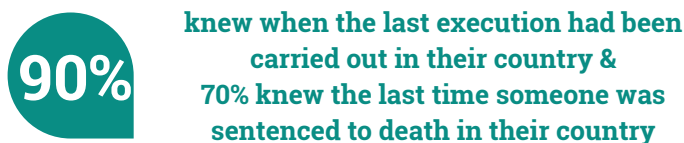


Abolitionists citing their rationale:



## Level of knowledge

The majority of the opinion formers considered themselves well informed about the death penalty and wider criminal justice system.



Most were unaware that their country (all seven) had voted against the UN resolution for a universal moratorium on the death penalty in 2007, rejecting the global move against the punishment.

## Governments failure to abolish

The main reason cited for why governments have failed to abolish was due to popular support for the punishment among the public and a lack of public pressure to abolish. Yet the findings suggest that opinion formers, even those who favoured retention, did not personally accept that public opposition to abolition should determine the issue.

There was also a belief in an unwillingness to follow international trends. .



**0% of the retentionists felt influenced by the global move away from the death penalty**

## Public reaction to abolition

Only 19% said they thought 'there would be demonstrations of strong public dissatisfaction in the media and elsewhere' if governments were to abolish the death penalty.

Despite only 8% stating they thought the majority of the public would accept abolition immediately, 68% agreed that after an initial expression of dissatisfaction "the majority of the public would come to accept it once the law was passed' or 'a majority of the public would immediately accept it'.



**76% of all the opinion formers, believed the public would come to accept abolition**

## Conclusion

The research has found that not only are the majority of opinion formers in favour of abolition but that they believe the public would accept a government policy of abolition.

Taken together with research from other countries on public opinion which show attitudes towards the death penalty are far more nuanced than they first appear and that support falls dramatically when people are presented with further details of the risks and realities of the punishment's administration; we believe that perceived public support is a flawed argument for retaining the death penalty.

In line with similar studies conducted elsewhere, the research shows a strong preference for social measures, over the death penalty, to reduce crime and very little support for expanding its use. We hope that the findings from this study can help facilitate a new dialogue in both the Eastern Caribbean, Barbados and the wider region, and encourage leaders there to take the necessary steps to move from 'abolitionists de facto' to eradicating the death penalty entirely.

## Download the report

The full study is available to read or download on our website, click [here](#) to read.

**Sentenced to Death Without Execution**  
Why capital punishment has not yet been abolished in the Eastern Caribbean and Barbados  
The views of opinion formers  
Roger Hood and Florence Seemungal  
with the assistance of Ananya Adhikari