"An Examination of Death Penalty Views of Nigerian and U.S. College Students: An Exploratory Study."

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the examination of the views of Nigerian and U.S. college students regarding the death penalty and related issues. This exploratory undertaking seeks to answer three main questions. First, are there differences in the level of support of the death penalty between Nigerian and U.S. college students. The second objective of the study is to understand the reasons that the
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students provided for either supporting or opposing the death penalty. The third objective of this study is to account for the variance of support or opposition of the death penalty. The research findings show both similarities and differences in views regarding the death penalty between Nigerian and United States college students which we attribute to the differences between the social structure and culture of the two societies.

Capital punishment as a sanction for criminal offenders is a controversial subject which often evokes passionate debate between death penalty proponents and abolitionists. Because it involves the state’s taking of a human life, the death penalty is a critical social issue, one of the most frequently written about subjects in the field of criminal justice. Extensive polling during the past 60 years has mainly aimed at determining the degree of support for the death penalty, particularly in the U.S. (Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1996). While the degree of support for or opposition to the death penalty is important, it does not explain the differing views found. The reasons why people support or oppose capital punishment have both theoretical and practical implications for abolitionists, proponents, politicians, and social scientists. There are many reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty. Because the death penalty is the ultimate, irreversible punishment, there is a need for extensive research. Moreover, much of the literature on death penalty attitudes focuses on people in Western countries, particularly the U.S. “Despite the fact that opinion polls have explored public attitudes to punishment for over 50 years now, surprisingly little is known about international differences. The reason for this is that - with a few exceptions -
researchers have explored public opinion within, rather than across, jurisdictions” (Mayhew & van Kesteren, 2002, p. 63). By looking at capital punishment from a cross-cultural perspective, a better understanding of the subject and of both nations will be gained.

Rather than focusing on the death penalty views of people in a single nation, this study examined the views of college students in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (henceforth Nigeria) and the United States of America (henceforth the U.S.). Over the past thirty years, there has been a considerable reduction in the number of countries that execute criminal offenders (Hill, 2005). At the end of 2003, 80 out of 195 nations had completely abolished capital punishment. Twelve nations had no capital punishment for ordinary crimes and only had the death penalty for extraordinary crimes, such as treason or war crimes. Forty-one nations had capital punishment but had not used it in the past ten years (i.e., de facto abolitionists). Finally, 62 nations used capital punishment for civilian crimes (Hill, 2005). The U.S. and Nigeria are two retentionist countries. Exploring the level of support and the reasons for support or opposition of Nigerian and U.S. residents provides a more detailed picture of capital punishment and if views on it differ across nations. There is a scarcity of cross-national research on criminal justice issues between Nigeria and the U.S. No published study could be found which compared and contrasted capital punishment views between Nigerian and U.S. citizens. This exploratory study was undertaken, because we find it imperative to examine why people support or oppose capital punishment.
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Literature Review

Nigeria

Nigeria became a politically independent country in 1960. The military has dominated Nigerian politics since it became an independent country from Britain forty-six years ago. Nigeria’s underdevelopment and economic decline is often blamed on the frequent intrusion of the military in Nigeria politics and endemic political corruption. Nigeria returned to a democratic civilian government in 1998, after several years of military rule. Nigeria operates a federal government structure made up of 36 states and the federal capital territory. Abuja is the administrative headquarters of Nigeria.

Nigeria is a large nation in sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated population of 150 million. Population figures are a highly contested issue in Nigeria because of their relevance for revenue sharing and political representation. Nonetheless, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. As a matter of fact, it is estimated that one out of every five Africans is a Nigerian. The Nigerian population is also very young. People under 20 make up more than 40% of the Nigerian population (Bamgbose, 2002). Half of all Nigerians are Muslims, and thus Nigeria has the largest concentration of Muslims in Africa. About 35% are Christians. The remaining 15% practice a variety of different religions. Northern Nigeria is mainly Muslim, southern Nigeria is mainly Christian, and middle Nigeria is of mixed faith (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1991). While many residents still live in rural areas, there has been a migration to urban areas over the past thirty years (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1991).
Nigeria is the fifth largest petroleum producer in the world (Okonofua, Ogbomwan, Alutu, Kufre, & Eghosa, 2004). Because the U.S. imports a significant portion of its oil from Nigeria, the U.S. is one of Nigeria’s largest trading partners. While Nigeria is a major oil producing nation, the majority of Nigerians remain poor (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1991). There is high unemployment (Alemika, 1993; Adeyemi, 1990; Human Rights Watch, 2005). AIDS is a serious social problem (Bamgbose, 2002). Nigeria also has a large foreign debt, and the restructuring of its debt has led to economic hardship for Nigerian citizens (Bamgbose, 2002; Federici & Caffentzis, 2001). Corruption and mismanagement has also led to a decline in Nigeria’s per capita gross national product (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005).

Rapid urbanization, high unemployment, a large youth population, rising industrialization, and corruption have all contributed to a rising crime problem in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 2002). Additionally, there appears to be a widening gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria, and this gap has contributed to crime (Bamgbose, 2002). Also, as Nigeria becomes more industrialized and urban, many of the past informal social control mechanisms are losing their power, leading to increasing crime rates (Ebbe, 1989). Nevertheless, “the vast majority of Nigerians, despite all temptations and pressures, live generally law-abiding lives” (Marenin & Reisig, 1995, p. 514). It is hard to live peaceful, law-abiding lives when so many problems confront them daily, particularly a crime problem that government has been unable to resolve. “Criminal victimization has serious consequences for the citizens and society. Individual and social aspirations for
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democracy, development, human rights, high standards of living are undermined by high level of criminal victimization” (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005, p. 6).

Overall, the official per capita rate of crime, particularly violent crime, is lower in Nigeria than the U.S. (Alemika, 1993; Marenin & Reisig, 1995). However, it is important to realize that official crime data from many countries should be taken with a degree of caution. Nevertheless, perceptions of crime as a social problem are relative. There has been a significant increase in crimes, especially violent crimes in Nigeria over the past decade (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005).

The Nigerian judicial system is based upon the Western legal system (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1991). As with the West, there are prisons in Nigeria, and imprisonment is common. Most Nigerian prisons are overcrowded (Alemika, 1993). There are tens of thousands of individuals in Nigeria jails and prisons; many are yet to be tried, and others have been waiting for years for a formal hearing on their cases. According to Adeyemi (1990), the major focus of the penal system in Nigeria is retribution and deterrence. Overall, the Nigerian criminal justice system is unfamiliar to many Nigerians and is viewed as having being forced upon them by its former colonial powers. Among many crime ridden areas, a growing trend of rejecting Western style justice organizations can be observed (Harnischfeger, 2003). In addition, the criminal justice system found in the West was forced upon the Nigerian community when it was a colony. Thus, this style of justice is alien to many, especially in light of traditional methods of crime control once used in Nigeria (Harnischfeger, 2003).
In Nigeria, there is a feeling that the government is unable to stop crime (Baker, 2002). In some states, vigilante groups have been formed (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005). These groups apprehend and torture suspected criminals to deter future crimes, especially robbery (Baker, 2002). In a few cases, the vigilante groups have executed suspected offenders (Baker, 2002). The executions are watched by local residents and appear to be supported by them as well (Harnischfeger, 2003). Also, due to rising crime rates, particularly violent crime rates, several states have recently initiated programs to address the problem (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

One response to crime has been to use capital punishment. Nigeria has a death penalty. There was frequent use of public executions under military rule in Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s (Federici & Caffentzis, 2001). During the regime of the military, public executions were held and in a few instances were broadcast on state television (Harnischfeger, 2003). From 1994 to 1998, 248 people were officially executed in Nigeria. The execution rate was approximately .40 per one million citizens. From 1999 to 2003, only 4 people were officially executed, for a rate of less than .01 per one million people. These numbers do not include people who were executed extra-judicially. There are Nigerian residents who are put to death by the police, vigilante groups, and armed militias without the rule of law. The decline in the number of people officially executed by the Nigerian government is the result of a moratorium put in place in 2003 by President Obasanjo. President Obasanjo has called for a national debate on the use of capital punishment in Nigeria. The moratorium was the result of calls to
abolish capital punishment from both within the nation and outside the nation. In conjunction with the national debate on capital punishment, no person was executed in Nigeria in 2004 or 2005 (Amnesty International, 2005). The moratorium on executions does not mean people are not still sentenced to death or waiting execution. The death penalty is still on the statute books in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 does not prohibit its application. As of 2003, almost 500 people in Nigeria were sentenced to death and are waiting to be executed (Amnesty International, 2004). In addition, the Sharia (religious) courts in Nigeria can also sentence people to death.

“Death sentences can be imposed under both the criminal law system (the Penal Code and the Criminal Code) and the Sharia penal system” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 1). Sharia, the Muslim code for living, was practiced in Nigeria for centuries until the arrival of the British in the late 1800s. In about 1999, the Sharia penal system was reintroduced in several Northern states. Sharia (Islamic) law and courts are found in the Muslim sections of Nigeria. “Since 1999, 12 states in northern Nigeria have introduced new Sharia penal legislation. Under these, the application of the death penalty has been extended to offences such as zina, rape, incest, and “sodomy” as defined in Sharia penal codes” (Amnesty International, 2004). While the Federal Constitution of Nigeria allows only hanging as the only method of execution, the Sharia courts allow for stoning or hanging (Imoukhuede, 2001).

The U.S.

The U.S. is a very large, westernized, urban nation with almost 300
million citizens. Compared to Nigeria, the average per capita income and living standards are much higher. The U.S. population is older on average than the Nigerian population. The U.S. relies far more on official control structures than informal control structures. While crime is increasing in Nigeria, in the U.S., the crime rate, especially violent crime, has leveled off and dropped slightly (BJS, 2005). Nevertheless, the U.S. tends to be viewed as a punitive nation in how it handles criminal offenders (Cullen, Pealer, Fisher, Applegate, & Santana, 2002). With a rate of 775 per 100,000, the U.S. has the highest rate of people under criminal incarceration in the world. The next nearest nation is Russia with a rate of 584 per 100,000. Nigeria has a much lower rate of 33 per 100,000 (NationMaster.com, 2003). Moreover, the U.S. has capital punishment and frequently executes people convicted of serious crimes. Capital punishment is one of the harshest punishments available in the modern world.

The U.S. has a long history with the use of capital punishment for offenders. From colonial times until now, it is estimated that more than 19,000 people have also been executed in the U.S. (Durham et al., 1996). In 1972, in Furman v. Georgia, the U.S. Supreme Court declared capital punishment, as it was being administered at the time, unconstitutional. In 1976, in Gregg v. Georgia, the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty. In addition, the U.S. is in the top five countries in the world in terms of the number of people put to death (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). There are five methods of execution in the U.S.: lethal injection (the most common practice today), electrocution, gas chamber, hanging, and firing squad (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, over 1000
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people have been executed (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). As of this date, 38 states and the federal government have
death penalty statutes (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). From 1994 to 1998, 274 people were officially put to death
in the U.S., which was an execution rate of about .20 per one
million people. From 1999 to 2003, 385 people were officially
executed, for a rate of about .27 per one million citizens (Hill, 2005). In 2004, 59 individuals were put to death in the U.S. There
appears to be no foreseeable end to the use of the death penalty in
the U.S. There are over 3400 individuals on death row in the U.S.
(The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). Finally, between 60
and 70% of the U.S. public supports in some degree capital
punishment (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007).

Brief Overview of Reasons to Support or Oppose the Death Penalty

Deterrence, instrumental perspective, retribution, and
incapacitation are the four fundamental rationales provided by
proponents for their support of capital punishment (Lambert &
Clarke, 2001). Some argue that people can be stopped from
committing criminal offenses by the use of severe sanctions. It is
argued that executing criminals deters others from committing
serious offenses (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Supporters of
deterrence advocate that executing convicted murderers is a far
more effective deterrent than life imprisonment. It must be noted
that the literature strongly suggests that the death penalty has little,
if any, deterrent effect on the crime of murder (Bailey, 1991). The
instrumental perspective, which is tied to the deterrence ideology,
is another reason provided in support for the death penalty. It
argues that capital punishment is required to maintain law and
order and represents the willingness to use state violence to bring order (Maxwell & Rivera-Vazquez, 1998).

Retribution is probably the most emotional of the punishment ideologies and support for the death penalty is frequently based upon emotion, especially the desire for vengeance (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). It is basically the “eye for an eye” argument, and as such, the death penalty fits the crime of murder (i.e., the Just Deserts). In addition, retribution can be an emotional response to the horrific and shocking crime of murder (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). For many people, the ideology of retribution is based upon the idea of revenge for the victim’s family and society in general, and sentencing someone to death relieves the anger and hurt brought forth by the act of violence. The last major reason provided for supporting the death penalty is incapacitation (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). According to this ideological perspective, convicted offenders are kept under tight state control so as to minimize their ability to commit future criminal acts. Curtailment can be done in many ways, such as house arrest, intensive supervision probation, imprisonment, and death. Executing a person is the ultimate form of incapacitation.

Morality/mercy, promotion of violence (i.e., the brutalization effect), life imprisonment without parole (LWOP), and unfair administration of the death penalty are major reasons provided for opposing capital punishment. The morality viewpoint contends that the death penalty is immoral, uncivilized, and cruel (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Similarly, abolitionists argue that the death penalty violates the fundamental human right to life. The death penalty violates the standards of dignity and humanity found in a civilized
society, and it undermines society’s moral point that killing is wrong (Hood, 2001). Finally, linked to the morality position is the idea that the death penalty is cruel and violates the principle that it is better to show mercy than it is to respond with violence (Lambert & Clarke, 2001).

Rather than deter, some abolitionists argue that capital punishment leads to increased violence, which is referred to as the brutalization effect (Thomson, 1999). Many abolitionists argue that LWOP is an effective method of stopping people from committing serious violent crimes, including murder (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Finally, administrative concerns are frequently provided as a reason for opposing capital punishment. One type of administrative concern is that the death penalty is unfairly imposed, as it is disproportionately given to poor and minority offenders. The greatest administrative concern is the risk of executing an innocent person. Many innocent persons have been sentenced to death (Huff, 2004). Since 1973, more than 120 individuals have been exonerated and released from death row (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). The issue of executing an innocent person is a reason provided by many for opposing the death penalty (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994).

Age, race, educational level, gender, and religion have been correlated with death penalty support. Those who are older tend to be more supportive of capital punishment than younger individuals (Bohm, 1987). White persons tend to be more supportive of the death penalty than minority persons, particularly in the U.S. (Bohm, 1991). Education is generally inversely associated to level of support for the death penalty (Bohm, 1987). In general, men are
more supportive of capital punishment than women (Bohm, 1987). Finally, religious salience (i.e., the importance of religion in a person’s life) and frequency of religious attendance are usually associated with support for capital punishment (Grasmick & McGill, 1994).

Research Objectives

This study focused on three research objectives. First, it explored whether there was a difference in the level of support for the death penalty between Nigerian and U.S. individuals. Second, it explored students’ views on the major reasons to support or oppose capital punishment and whether there were differences in views between Nigerian and U.S. students. Third, the impact of the major reasons on the level of support for the death penalty were studied in a multi-variate analysis to determine which reasons best accounted for the variance in the level of support and whether these reasons differed between Nigerian and U.S. respondents. While literature on the death penalty has explored reasons for support and opposition surrounding capital punishment, it has not adequately explored which reasons account for the differences in the degree of support or opposition to the death penalty and their relative importance. In this study, indexes for each of the primary reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty were entered into a multi-variate analysis with support for the death penalty as the dependent variable in order to determine which reasons are the best predictors for level of support and whether there were differences between the two groups of respondents.

Methods
In the Spring of 2005, a survey of a convenience sample of students at two Nigerian universities and one in the U.S. was undertaken. The two Nigerian universities were metropolitan, public universities offering undergraduate, master, and terminal degrees, and each had an enrollment of about 16,000 students. One of the Nigerian universities was located in Ebonyi state and the other in Abia state. The U.S. university was a public institution located in the Midwest and had an enrollment slightly below 20,000. At the U.S. university, undergraduate students in 15 courses were surveyed, and at the Nigerian university, students in social science courses were surveyed. At both universities, the selected courses represented a wide array of majors and included classes required by all majors at the university. The survey was explained to the students, and it was emphasized both verbally and in writing that the survey was voluntary. Students were asked not to complete the survey if they had done so in another class. Students completed the survey during class time. For the Nigerian university, a total of 274 usable surveys were returned. For the U.S. university, a total of 484 usable surveys were returned. Thus, a grand total of 758 surveys were used in this study.

In terms of gender for the overall group of respondents, 54% were women and 46% were men. There were slightly more women in the group of students from the U.S. than there was from the Nigerian group of students (56% versus 49%). The median age of the respondents was 22. The mean age was 23.14, with a standard deviation of 5.63. The U.S. respondents were slightly younger than the Nigerian respondents (21.96 versus 25.99 years old). For the entire group, 14% were freshmen, 16% were sophomores, 33%
were juniors, and 37% were seniors. U.S. students were more likely to be freshmen or sophomores, and the Nigerian students were more likely to be juniors and seniors.

Respondents were asked their degree of support or opposition for the death penalty using a seven-item response category (see Table 1). Additionally, the respondents were also asked a series of statements on reasons to support or oppose capital punishment which were answered using a five-point Likert type of response scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (see Table 2 for the specific statements). Finally, gender, age, academic level, affiliation with a religious group, importance of religion in a person’s life, and location of the university were used in multivariate analyses. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable (women = 0 and men = 1). Age was measured in continuous years. Academic level was an ordinal variable coded as 1 = freshman, 2 = sophomore, 3 = junior, and 4 = senior. Respondents were asked if they had a religious affiliation, and this variable was coded as no = 0 and yes = 1. Seventy-six percent marked yes and 24% marked no. Similar results were observed between both groups of respondents for this measure. Respondents were also asked the extent that religion had played in their lives. Five percent indicated not at all (coded as 1), 23% indicated not much (coded as 2), 30% indicated a fair amount (coded as 3), and 41% indicated a great deal (coded as 4). Nigerian students were slightly more likely to indicate that religion was of great importance in their lives. Finally, a dichotomous variable was created to measure whether the respondents were from Nigeria (coded 1) or the U.S. (coded 0).
Results

The results for support or opposition to the death penalty between Nigerian and U.S. students are presented in Table 1. Nigerian students were slightly more likely to very strongly support capital punishment. U.S. students were slightly more likely to somewhat favor the death penalty. Nigerian students were also more likely to have marked uncertain variable in the survey. The two groups were similar in the different levels of opposition to capital punishment. The differences were less striking when the measure was collapsed into support, uncertain, and oppose. Sixty-four percent of U.S. students supported to some degree the death penalty, 6% were uncertain, and 30% opposed it. Similarly, 58% of Nigerian students supported in some manner capital punishment, 11% were unsure, and 31% opposed it. While not reported, a multi-variate analysis was conducted with the death penalty measure as the dependent variable and gender, age, academic level, having a religious affiliation, importance of religion, and nation of respondent as the independent variables. In the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model, gender, college level, and importance of religion had statistically significant effects on death penalty support/opposition. Nation of the respondent did not have a significant effect.
Table 1

Percentages of Support for the Death Penalty by Nation (N = 758)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Support</th>
<th>Total Group</th>
<th>Nigeria (N = 274)</th>
<th>U.S. (n = 484)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Opposed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Opposed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Opposed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Favor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Favor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Favor</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Chi-square = 19.00, degrees of freedom = 6, p < .01

The reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty were examined to determine whether there was a difference between the two groups of respondents. The percentage responses for the 22 items representing reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty for Nigerian and U.S. students are presented in Table 2. On all but three of the reasons for supporting capital punishment, the students from Nigeria were higher in their support than were the students from the U.S. Nigerian students were much more likely to feel that executions of criminals should be aired on the TV or on the Internet than were U.S. students. Nigerian students were much more likely to feel that violent crime would rise without the death penalty than did U.S. students (56% versus 17%). Very few Nigerian or U.S. students agreed that a 16-year old person...
convicted of first degree murder deserved the death penalty (17% and 20% respectively). There was only a small difference between the two groups in terms of an eye for an eye type of retribution. Likewise, a similar percentage in both groups felt death was the ultimate incapacitation of a violent criminal. Interestingly, Nigerian students were more likely to agree with many of the reasons for opposing capital punishment. Overall, the differences on the opposition reasons were less striking than the differences on the support items. The majority of both groups of students agreed that the death penalty is using violence to respond to violence and that innocent people are sometimes sentenced to death. About half of both group of students agreed in some manner that life imprisonment without the possibility of parole would deter people from committing murder.

Table 2

*Percentage Results of Death Penalty Views for Nigerian and U.S. Respondents (N = 758)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Nigerian Respondents (n = 274)</th>
<th>U.S. Respondents (n = 484)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons to Support</td>
<td>SD D U A SA</td>
<td>SD D U A SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I become angry when a convicted murderer does not</td>
<td>10 15 15 31 29</td>
<td>13 44 18 18 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
receive the death penalty (Retribution).

I believe in the idea of an “eye for an eye, a life for a life” (Retribution).

16-year olds convicted of first degree murder deserve the death penalty (Retribution).

Murderers deserve the death penalty since they look a life (Retribution).

The death penalty is a more effective deterrent than life imprisonment (Deterrence).

I feel that death penalty deters others from committing

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The death penalty is a powerful deterrent to crime (Deterrence).

Executions should be aired on TV (Deterrence).

Executions should be presented on the Internet (Deterrence).

Most convicted murderers would kill again if given the opportunity (Incapacitation).
Death is the ultimate incapacitation of a violent criminal (Incapacitation).

The death penalty is necessary to maintain law and order (Instrumental).

Without the death penalty, violent crime would increase (Instrumental).

Reasons to Oppose

Showing mercy is more important than seeking revenge (Morality).

It saddens me when a person is executed, regardless of the
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crime they committed (Morality).

The death penalty serves little purpose other than to demonstrate society’s cruelty (Morality).

When society executes an individual for a violent crime it is responding to violence with violence (Morality).

Executions set a violent example that leads to further violence in society (Brutalization Effect).

Life in prison without the possibility of parole will deter 6 34 23 31 6 9 40 25 20 6

6 15 16 43 21 1 21 11 51 16

13 35 22 25 5 8 36 28 23 5

7 19 23 34 16 4 29 25 34 9
Innocent people are sometimes sentenced to death (Innocence).

I do not support the death penalty because there is the chance an innocent person will be executed (Innocence).

Note. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, U = Uncertain, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly Agree.

The Independent t-test was used to determine whether the two groups significantly differed from one another on the 22 items for supporting or opposing the death penalty. The results are presented in Table 3. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on 17 of the items. Nigerian students were significantly more likely to support the death penalty for the reasons of deterrence and law and order (i.e., the instrumental perspective). U.S. students were less likely to oppose capital punishment for the reasons of morality and innocence. There was no significant difference on the “eye for an eye” retribution, 16-year olds deserving the death penalty, capital
punishment being the ultimate form of incapacitation, responding to violence with violence, and the brutalization items.

Table 3

*Differences Between Nigerian and U.S. Respondents on Reasons to Support or Oppose Capital Punishment (N = 758)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Nigeria (n = 274)</th>
<th>U.S. (n = 484)</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Regr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I become angry when a convicted murderer does not receive the death penalty (Retribution).</td>
<td>3.55 1.31</td>
<td>2.63 1.14</td>
<td>-10.10**</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in the idea of an “eye for an eye, a life for a life” (Retribution).</td>
<td>3.12 1.38</td>
<td>2.96 1.21</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-year olds convicted of first degree murder</td>
<td>2.30 1.19</td>
<td>2.40 1.15</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>T Value</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murderers deserve the death penalty since they look a life.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-6.43**</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The death penalty is a more effective deterrent than life imprisonment.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>-2.04*</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that the death penalty deters others from committing crimes.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>-5.19**</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The death penalty punishment is a powerful deterrent to crime.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>-6.77**</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The death penalty will deter people from committing murder.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-7.38**</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executions should be aired on TV</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>14.96**</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**P < 0.05, *P < 0.01, #P < 0.001**
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(\textit{Deterrence}).

Executions should be presented on the Internet (\textit{Deterrence}).

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 2.87 & 1.24 & 1.99 & 1.12 & -9.44** \\
\end{tabular}

Most convicted murderers would kill again if given the opportunity (\textit{Incapacitation}).

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 3.61 & 1.16 & 3.13 & 0.97 & -6.15** \\
\end{tabular}

Death is the ultimate incapacitation of a violent criminal (\textit{Incapacitation}).

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 3.25 & 1.28 & 3.19 & 1.13 & -0.70 \\
\end{tabular}

The death penalty is necessary to maintain law and order (\textit{Instrumental}).

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 3.30 & 1.41 & 2.77 & 1.13 & -5.63** \\
\end{tabular}

Without the death penalty, violent crime would increase (\textit{Instrumental}).

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 3.46 & 1.38 & 2.54 & 1.00 & -10.38** \\
\end{tabular}

\textbf{Reasons to Oppose}

Showing mercy is more important than

\begin{tabular}{ccccc}
& 3.57 & 1.11 & 3.14 & 0.99 & -5.28** \\
\end{tabular}

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seeking revenge (Morality).

It saddens me when a person is executed, regardless of the crime they committed (Morality).

| 3.39 | 1.25 | 2.53 | 1.13 | -9.61** # |

The death penalty serves little purpose other than to demonstrate society’s cruelty (Morality).

| 2.98 | 1.06 | 2.74 | 1.07 | -2.72** # |

When society executes an individual for a violent crime it is responding to violence with violence (Morality).

| 3.58 | 1.14 | 3.59 | 1.03 | 0.08 |

Executions set a violent example that leads to further violence in society (Brutalization Effect).

| 2.72 | 1.11 | 2.81 | 1.05 | 1.05 |

Life in prison without the possibility of parole will deter people from

| 3.34 | 1.17 | 3.14 | 1.06 | -2.26* # |
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committing murder (LWOP).

Innocent people are sometimes sentenced to death (Innocence).

I do not support the death penalty because there is the chance an innocent person will be executed (Innocence).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SD stands for standard deviation and Regr represents the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression results. The Independent t-test was used. In the parentheses after each statement is the category of support or oppose capital punishment which we felt the statement measured. Regr in the last column stands for regression. In this column, the statistical significance of the dichotomous variable if the respondent was from the U.S. (0) or Nigeria (1) on the particular statement is reported, while controlling gender (females = 0, males =1), age (measured in continuous years), academic standing (1 = freshman, 2 = sophomore, 3 = junior, 4 = senior), having a religious affiliation, and importance of religion in a person=s life (1 = not at all, 2 = not much, 3 = a fair amount, and 4 = a great deal) using OLS regression. The symbol - indicates that the dichotomous variable measuring the nation of the respondent had no statistically significant effect in the OLS regression equation. The symbol # indicates that the dichotomous variable
measuring the nation of the respondent had a statistically significant effect in the OLS regression equation at the $p \leq .05$, even after controlling for the shared effects of gender, age, and academic standing, having a religious affiliation, and importance of religion in the respondent’s life.

* $p \leq .05$  ** $p \leq .01$

To determine whether the two groups of students were significantly different in their death penalty views independent of the effects of gender, age, academic standing, having a religious affiliation, and importance of religion, OLS regression was utilized. Each of the 22 measures presented in Table 3 were entered into an OLS regression as the dependent variable and gender, age, academic standing, having a religious affiliation, importance of religion, and nation as the independent variables. The results for the impact of the dichotomous measure of nation (Nigeria or U.S.) are reported in the last column of Table 3 (i.e., the Regr. column). On 16 of the 22 reasons, the nation variable had a statistically significant impact.¹

OLS regression was also utilized to determine the degree of impact of the major reasons for support or opposition on the level of support for capital punishment. The dependent variable was the seven-point scale measuring degree of death penalty support. Gender, age, academic level, having a religious affiliation, importance of religion in a person’s life, nation of the respondent, and the major reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty were the independent variables. The individual items provided in Table 2 were summed up together to form an index of the
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The four retribution items had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .79. The six deterrence items had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .77. Because the two incapacitation items had a low Cronbach’s alpha value (.36), they were left as single item measures. The two instrumental items had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .73. The four morality items had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .67. The brutalization effect and LWOP were each measured using a single item. Cronbach’s alpha was low for the two innocence items (.53); thus, the second item for opposing the death penalty because innocent people may be executed was used. The OLS results for the entire group, just Nigerian students, and just U.S. students are presented in Table 4.¹

Table 4

*OLS Regression Results on the Impact of Major Reasons to Support/Oppose Capital Punishment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Entire Group (N = 758)</th>
<th>Nigerian Group (n = 274)</th>
<th>U.S. Group (n = 484)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
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¹
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<th>Academic Level</th>
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<th>.02</th>
<th>.19</th>
<th>.06</th>
<th>.02</th>
<th>.01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Religion</td>
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<td>-.06*</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retribution</td>
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<td>.29**</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.37**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deterrence</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.10**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapacitation 1</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapacitation 2</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
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<td>.21**</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brutalization</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWOP</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>.28**</th>
<th>.32**</th>
<th>.28**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R-Squared</th>
<th>.74**</th>
<th>.64**</th>
<th>.79**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note. b represents the unstandardized regression coefficient and B represents the standardized regression coefficient.

* p #.05       ** p #.01

The R-Squared for the OLS regression equation using all the respondents was .74, which means 74% of the observed variance in the death penalty support variable was explained by the independent variables in the model. Neither gender, age, academic level, nor having a religious affiliation had a statistically significant effect on death penalty support. Importance of religion had a significant negative effect. Retribution, death as the ultimate incapacitation, and the instrumental perceptive all had a significant positive relationship. Deterrence had a non-significant impact. Morality, the brutalization effect, LWOP, and the issue of innocence all had significant negative associations with the level of support for capital punishment. The nation variable had a non-significant effect. Finally, retribution and innocence had the largest effects.

OLS regression equations were estimated for only Nigerian students and for only U.S. students. The results are also presented
in Table 4. The independent variables explained more variance for the U.S. model than for the Nigerian model (i.e., .79 versus .64). In both models, retribution, instrumental perspective, and innocence had significant effects. Gender, the first incapacitation measure (i.e., murderers would kill again if given the chance), morality, and the brutalization effect had a significant impact in the U.S. model but not in the Nigerian model. Importance of religion, the second incapacitation measure (i.e., death is the ultimate form of incapacitation), and LWOP had significant effect in the Nigerian model but not the U.S. model. In the Nigerian model, the instrumental perspective had the greatest impact, followed closely by innocence. In the U.S. model, retribution had the largest sized effect, followed by innocence.

Discussion

There was only a slight difference in death penalty support between Nigerian and U.S. students. Overall, the U.S. students were slightly more in favor of capital punishment than were their Nigerian counterparts (64% versus 58%). The level of support found among the U.S. students is similar to the level found in the general U.S. population. As previously indicated, the national polls indicate between 60 to 70% of the U.S. public supports the death penalty to some degree (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). It is unknown whether the results in this study are reflective of the Nigerian general population. No published poll of death penalty support among the Nigerian public could be located. Published poll data and crime statistics in Nigeria are difficult to find (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005). If the level of support found
in this study is representative of the level among the general Nigerian population, it would mean that both nations are similar in their overall level of death penalty support. There was, however, a difference in the degree of support among the two groups. Among proponents, Nigerian students, however, were more supportive than U.S. students, with 21% indicating that they were very strongly in favor of the death penalty while only 15% U.S. students were strongly in favor. The U.S. group appeared to be more tempered in their support, with about 31% indicating that they were only somewhat in favor of capital punishment. Thus, it is possible that there are staucher death penalty supporters in Nigeria than in the U.S.

There were significant differences between Nigerian and U.S. students in their views of the reasons to support or oppose capital punishment. In bi-variate analysis, there was a significant difference between the two groups of respondents on 17 of the 22 reasons. On 16 of the 22 reasons, there continued to be a difference in multi-variate analysis. Nigerian students were much more likely to express a need for emotional revenge. This may be because of the rising crime rate in Nigeria and the inability of government to respond to the crime problem effectively. When crime appears to be spiraling out of control, people tend to become more punitive due to a sense of frustration. Many punitive sanctions, such as mandatory sentences, more prison sentences, longer prison sentences, and three strikes laws, resulted from the rising crime rates of the 1980s in the U.S. Emotional revenge may explain why Nigerian observers cheer when criminal offenders are brutally put to death in public by vigilante groups (Baker, 2002). Further contributing to the frustration of many Nigerians with crime is the
fact that serving and retired police and military officers are frequently involved in armed robbery, and there are reported cases of armed robbers buying weapons and ammunition from the police and the army for robbery operations.

In general, Nigerian students were more supportive of deterrence reasons than were U.S. students. This difference may be because rising crime rates are causing Nigerian people to believe that harsher sentences will deter offenders. It could also be that knowledge plays a part in the difference. In the U.S., abolitionists have argued for several decades that capital punishment has little if any deterrent effect, and there is empirical evidence to support this contention. In Nigeria, there has not been much public debate on the death penalty until recently. Under military rule, there was little tolerance for public debates of government policies. The military regimes routinely advocated that capital punishment helped deter criminals. Only recently under the democratic government has there been an open debate on the capital punishment. There were very large differences between the two groups in whether executions should be made public. These results are probably the result of the belief in the deterrent effect of capital punishment and the fact that executions were publicly aired in Nigeria during military rule. There may be a belief that the public executions helped keep violent crime lower.

Likewise, Nigerian students were more supportive of instrumental perspective for the death penalty. There was a belief that capital punishment was necessary for law and order and without it, crime would increase. Maxwell and Rivera-Vazquez (1998) argued that “the instrumentalist perspective holds that peoples’ attitudes
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toward the death penalty are driven primarily by their desires to reduce crime and protect society, and that the death penalty is a means to achieve this end” (p. 337). It is probably a hope by some Nigerian individuals that the death penalty will bring order to a chaotic society. There are far more social problems in Nigeria than in the U.S. Moreover, the Nigerian government is either unable or unwilling to deal effectively with many social problems, including crime. There is probably an overwhelming desire by many Nigerian people for more peaceful and ordered society. They may believe the road to such a society is through the use of capital punishment.

Interestingly, there were statistically significant differences between Nigerian and U.S. respondents on the majority of the reasons to oppose capital punishment. It was not the U.S. students who were more supportive of these reasons. Rather, it was the Nigerian students who were more in agreement on many of the opposition items. Overall, Nigerian students were more supportive of the morality argument against the death penalty. This is an interesting finding considering that many of these same Nigerian students expressed agreement with many of the reason to support the death penalty items. There are several reasons for this finding. First, the Nigerian respondents may not have fully understood the nature of the survey. Issues of crime and criminality are not as extensively studied and discussed in Nigeria as in the U.S. Furthermore, how Nigerians perceive the relationship between governmental policies and actions and property crimes is not clear. For example, we doubt many see the political undertone of many cases of armed robbery with gangs of 10 to 100 persons. Armed robbery in modern Nigeria is hardly the action of few miscreant
individuals.

Another reason is that the respondents are torn between two different competing crime control models. There is the Western style of criminal justice that was forced on Nigeria during its colonial period. This model advocates that the state can control violent crime through the use of capital punishment. This model has, however, broken-down in Nigeria. The other model is the African indigenous justice system (informal social control) which has a long history in Nigeria. This model advocates the community through social controls and restorative justice can control crime. African indigenous justice system’s goal is the restoration of the victim and community, peace, and harmony. It is rooted in the traditions, cultures and customs of the African people. In line with the African egalitarian world views, victims, offenders, and the community, who are the primary stakeholders in the conflict, are actively involved in the definition of harm and the crafting of solutions acceptable to all stakeholders. African leaders have followed the tradition of the erstwhile colonial authorities to subjugate African indigenous justice system. African indigenous political systems allow for the active participation of all community members and are accountable as there are institutionalized checks and balances. Nigeria was a country formed by the British with little consideration about the numerous different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. Nigeria is a highly pluralistic society (Bakarr Bah, 2004). Thus, the Nigerian students in this study may be unsure of whether to seek capital punishment to deter crime and to seek revenge or to oppose capital punishment because it violates the (informal control mechanisms) underlying African philosophy of justice found throughout the nation,
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particularly in the past. It is important, however, to point out that African indigenous justice systems do apply capital punishment in rare cases where the offender is a major threat to life and property in the community. The major difference between the African indigenous justice system and the modern African state justice system is the goal and processes of justice making. African indigenous political systems allow for participatory democracy. A major benefit with ordinary community members’ involvement and participation in justice making is that they get to appreciate the nature and circumstances of offenses, and this helps reduce the fear of crime and offenders. In the U.S., there is support for harsh sentences, yet at the same time there is support for more lenient responses to dealing with offenders (Cullen et al., 2002).

Likewise, Nigerian students were more likely to feel that innocent people are executed than were U.S. students. This is probably because there are far fewer procedural safeguards in Nigeria than in the U.S. This view may also be a reflection of the general distrust of the Nigerian people of the agents of the criminal justice system due to endemic corruption in the political system. Corruption undermines the effectiveness of any procedural safeguards in the system. Overall, this study upholds the contention that support for the death penalty is complex. Rarely do people hold a single reason for supporting or opposing complex social issues (Zaller, 1992).

In the multi-variate analysis of the impact the major reasons to support or oppose capital punishment (see Table 4), there were both differences and similarities between both groups of respondents. Retribution had a significant effect on capital
punishment views for Nigerian and U.S. students. It appears that the desire for vengeance appears to know no borders. While retribution was a significant predictor of death penalty views for both groups, it had a much larger sized effect among the U.S. students than it did for the Nigerian students. It appears that the death penalty literature is correct when it contends that the major reason for supporting capital punishment among U.S. citizens is retribution (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Similarly for both groups, the instrumental perspective helps shape the level of death penalty support. There appears to be a desire to use executions to bring order to society in both nations. Nevertheless, the instrumental perspective had a larger effect in the Nigerian model than it did in the U.S. model. This is probably the result of crime trends in both countries. Crime, including murder, is rising in Nigeria, while violent crime has been declining in the past decade in the U.S. Support for the instrumental perspective could be a result of a desire for a more stable, peaceful society.

The second best predictor for both groups was innocence. The fear of executing an innocent person is a powerful force to oppose capital punishment regardless of national borders. The execution of an innocent person is a real threat in both nations. Since 1973, more than 120 individuals have been exonerated and released from death row in the U.S. (The Death Penalty Information Center, 2007). While there is no official statistics in the number of death row inmates exonerated in Nigeria, the sentencing of innocent persons to death is a real probability. Interestingly, LWOP and incapacitation only had significant effects in the Nigerian regression equation, while deterrence, morality and brutalization only had significant effects in the U.S. model. Prisoners in Nigeria
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are frequently released before the end of their sentence through amnesty granted by either the President or Governors of the states. Finally, importance of religion was a significant predictor of death penalty support for Nigerian but not U.S. students. Many Nigerians are deeply religious people who believe wrongful behavior deserves punishment.

This was only a single study which surveyed college students. Additional research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn. More people in Nigeria and the U.S. should be surveyed to determine whether similar results are found. It would be interesting to determine whether the death penalty support found among the Nigerian students in this study would be found in other studies. Besides surveying students at other colleges and universities, people from the general population should be surveyed. Future studies should also include multiple item measures for incapacitation, brutalization, and innocence. In this study, single item measures were used rather than indexes. Furthermore, measures of other reasons to support or oppose capital punishment could be included. Future research should also determine whether presenting more information on the issue of executing an innocent person is a significant factor in reducing support for capital punishment across different nations. If it is a significant factor, this could help opponents of capital punishment. They could focus even more on this issue so as to lower support for the death penalty across the globe. There is a need to study death penalty attitudes across different nations. The bulk of the research has focused on the U.S. and other Western nations. There are many other countries across the world that use capital punishment. There is a need to know the level of death penalty support in these nations and why
people support or oppose it. It is clear that additional cross-national research on death penalty attitudes and reasons for support or opposition is needed. The death penalty is literally a matter of life or death issue.

Endnotes

1. The dependent variable is an ordinal level variable. While OLS regression is robust, it is sometimes argued that Ordered Ordinal regression should be used when the dependent variable is measured at the ordinal level (Menard, 1995). Using Ordered Ordinal regression the same results in terms of statistical significance were found.

2. In addition to the Independent t-test, two nonparametric tests were used. Specifically, the Kruskal-Wallis H test and the Mann-Whitney U test were utilized. Similar results to the t-test were observed.

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http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/gvc.htm#rape.


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