

**The Effects of Sex, Ideology, and Race on People's Opinions of the Death Penalty**

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**Spring Semester 2018**

## INTRODUCTION

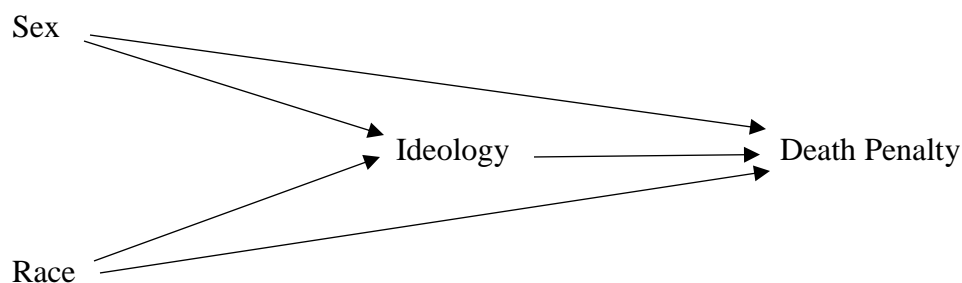
The use of the death penalty in the United States has been a topic of debate for decades, and a controversial one. In the South specifically, the death penalty debate is one underlined by long-held ideas about racial relations, gender norms, and ideological beliefs. While the number of death row executions has gone down since 1977, out of all states still using capital punishment, the Southern region of the United States still accounts for over 80% of executions by death penalty. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 the state of Mississippi had 48 inmates on death row out of a total 2,817 death row inmates throughout the states that still use the death penalty (deathpenaltyinfo.org). The race of the victim in death penalty cases plays a large role in the sentencing of death row inmates as well. One study found that defendants who were convicted of killing whites were more than three times as likely to be sentenced to death as defendants who were convicted of killing blacks (deathpenaltyinfo.org). While women only constitute 2% of death row inmates, the idea of executing a woman is complicated and controversial when dealing with gender norms specifically in southern states and is yet another factor to consider when debating the use of capital punishment.

The issue of the death penalty is not a simple one. Factors including ideology, race, income level, sex, and discrimination all play a major role in people's attitudes towards the use of the death penalty. It is important to study this subject because these attitudes towards the death penalty could possibly be correlated and result in disproportionately higher death rates for black people and a persistence of racism within our court system in the southern region of the United States. The fact that all of the Southern states still use the death penalty also speaks to a certain set of ideological beliefs at play based on region, religion, and a long-standing struggle with racial inequality.

In order to study this subject further I am going to examine the interplay between race, sex, and ideology in the formation of attitudes towards the death penalty. Based on my prior knowledge and my own observations of racial and ideological attitudes in the South I have come up with five hypotheses. Based on my knowledge of gender ideas in the South I predict that men will be more likely than women to support the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. I also predict that men are more likely than women to self-identify as conservative. I expect to find that people who self-identify as conservative will be more likely to support the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. Finally based on my personal observations of racial ideas in the South, I predict that whites will be more likely than blacks to self-identify as conservative. I also predict that whites will be more likely than blacks to support the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.

### MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Assume that sex and race are my earliest independent variables, ideological self-identification is my intervening variable, and attitudes towards the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder is my dependent variable.



H<sub>1</sub>: Men are more likely than women to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.

H<sub>2</sub>: Men are more likely than women to self-identify as conservative.

H<sub>3</sub>: People who self-identify as conservative are more likely than people who self-identify as liberal to support the death penalty for those convicted of murder.

H<sub>4</sub>: Whites are more likely than blacks to self-identify as conservative.

H<sub>5</sub>: Whites are more likely than blacks to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Men are more likely than women to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.**

In Whitehead and Blankenship's journal article, *The Gender Gap in Capital Punishment Attitudes: An Analysis of Support and Opposition*, the two researchers claim that men are significantly more likely to support the use of the death penalty than women. Whitehead and Blankenship compiled a 1997 mail survey of one-thousand households in Tennessee with a final response rate of about 50% (Whitehead and Blankenship, 2000: 5). Their findings were significant in identifying death penalty attitude differences between men and women in a southern state. The survey found that over 80% of men favored the death penalty for someone convicted of murder with only 65% of women favoring its use (5). They also found a significant gender difference in the question of supporting life without parole. When asked if they would favor life without parole over the death penalty, 26% of women said they would rather have life without parole for someone convicted of murder, and only 12% of men favor life without parole over the death penalty (5). The survey also asked **why** men and women were either in support of the death penalty or against it. Supporters (both male and female) cited deterrence as their reason for supporting the death penalty while those opposed (both male and female) cited the biblical tenant of "Thou shall not kill" as their reason for opposition (5). Whitehead and Blankenship concluded that while in this study both genders favored the death penalty, women were less likely to support it than men, which supports my hypothesis that men are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than women. They also hypothesized that if

women were to be convinced that the death penalty disproportionately targeted a certain race, their support for it may erode in the future (11).

In another article entitled, *Hardening of Attitudes: American's Views on the Death Penalty*, Phoebe Ellsworth and Samuel Gross examined the trend of American support for the death penalty from past to present analyzing both national Gallup polls and General Social Survey polls through 1991 (Ellsworth and Ross, 1994: 21). They found that the support for capital punishment has gone through ups and downs—declining throughout the 1950s and into the 1960's then increasing starting in 1966 through 1982, and seeming to remain stable since then (21). Secondly, they found a trend that further supports my hypothesis that men are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than women. Their second figure shows that for the entire period that polling data have been available on the death penalty men have favored the death penalty more than women, and Whites have favored it more than Blacks based on a cross-analyzation of national polls spanning from 1936 through 1991 (22).

Furthermore, Cochran and Sanders' article *The Gender Gap in Death Penalty Support: An Exploratory Study* supports the conclusion that men have proved to be more supportive of capital punishment than women over the past fifty years but also tries to explain why this is the case and what factors influence death penalty support (Cochran and Sanders, 2009: 525). Using data from the cumulative National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys data file from 1972-2002 Cochran and Sanders examined why this gender gap in death penalty support persists looking at socioeconomic status, gender, religiosity, political ideology, positions on abortion, and other social issues as factors in determining support for capital punishment. They found that while the GSS suffered from less than ideal data on some of these factors, the effect of

gender on capital punishment attitudes still proves robust in comparison to all other social issues (525).

**Men are more likely than women to self-identify as conservative.**

In the article, *The Developmental Theory of the Gender Gap: Women's and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective*, Inglehart and Norris try to identify and explain the gender gap in ideology comparing sixty different societies' voting patterns of male and female citizens. They argue that structural and cultural trends have changed the values of women and men in postindustrial societies, and thus created a change in gender voting patterns through the late 1900s (Inglehart and Norris, 2000: 443). For data, the authors looked at World Values Surveys that were carried out in three waves; one in the early 1980s, one in the early 1990s, and again in the mid-1990s (442). The gender differences in voting intentions were compared on a 10-point scale that was derived from experts' assessments of the position of parties across the left-right spectrum (442). Inglehart and Norris found that in the U.S. the process of gender realignment (or women moving parties to vote more Democratically) began to occur during the 1970s and from the 1980s onward the voting gap became much more apparent in presidential, gubernatorial, and state-level races (445). Based on a Gallup poll included in their research, from 1952-1960 women were still voting within the Republican Party and self-identifying as such (445). In 1964, the percentage of women voting for Democrats was finally more than the percentage of men, with 62% of women voting for Democrats, and 60% of men voting for Democrats (445). This trend has persisted since. Inglehart and Norris found that in most postindustrial societies by the 1990s women had shifted leftwards and by the mid-1990s they were able to establish that women were no longer more conservative than men (458). This article works to support my hypothesis

that men are more likely than women to self-identify as conservative, since the Republican Party offers more conservative platforms than does the Democratic Party.

In another article entitled, *The Gender Gap in Ideology*, authors Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox explore the sources of the gender gap in ideological self-identification. They used the cumulative data file for the National Election Studies Survey, starting with an ideological identification question that was asked in 1972. The respondents to the survey were asked, “Do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, extremely conservative, or have you not thought much about this?”. They were asked to give their answers on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative) (507). In order to measure the gender gap the researchers subtracted women’s mean ideology from men’s. A positive gap score meant that women were more liberal than men. After the year 1972 the gender gap is positive which indicates that women are less conservative than men. In the years following though, the gender gap was not significant, averaging .04. The gap again become significant in 1982 and 1984, and again between 1992 and 2004 when the gap was significant in five of the seven surveys (508). The authors note that the gender gap emerges not because women have become more liberal, but because men have become much more conservative on average (509). Norrander and Wilcox conclude that the gender gap in ideology truly emerged as men became more consistently conservative while one group of women became more conservative and another became more willing to identify as liberal. They further conclude that men’s increased conservatism is due to the declining class basis of ideological self-identification while the increase of female liberalism is due to educational factors (521). The findings in this study act to support my hypothesis that men are more likely than women to self-identify as conservative.

**People who self-identify as conservative are more likely than people who self-identify as liberal to support the death penalty for those convicted of murder.**

A Gallup poll conducted in October of 2017 states that American support for the death penalty has dipped to a level not seen in 45 years. Gallup released this poll on October 26, 2017 after conducting a nationwide survey of 1,028 adults from October 5-11<sup>th</sup> 2017. The results are based on telephone interviews conducted with a random sample of 1028 adults, ages 18+, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus four percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Only 55% of adults said they favored the death penalty for a person convicted of murder, down 5% from the 60% in support of the death penalty in October of 2016. The poll also found that death penalty support has dropped 9 points since 2007 and 20 points since its peak in 1994. The 2017 results also suggest a split in party attitudes about capital punishment. In this survey, 72% of Republicans said they favored the death penalty in comparison to 39% of Democrats and 58% of Independents (Gallup Poll, 2017). This figure supports my hypothesis that those who self-identify as conservative are more likely than people who self-identify as liberal to support the death penalty for people convicted of murder, given the more conservative nature of the Republican Party.

In an article entitled, *The Dynamics of Public Opinion on Cultural Policy Issues in the US*, researchers Kenneth Mulligan, Tobin Grant, and Daniel Bennett claim that since the early 1970s cultural policy mood has moved steadily and consistently in a liberal direction. More importantly they argue that opinion on two notable cultural issues—the death penalty and abortion—do not follow cultural policy mood, and as such have not consistently moved towards the liberal direction. Based on their research they conclude that public opinion has grown



increasingly anti-death penalty for more than a decade while also becoming more pro-life on abortion. The researchers used more than 2,000 survey marginals that were nested in more than 200 time series, expressing aggregate opinions in 16 cultural policy domains across 38 years (Mulligan, Grant, and Bennett, 2013: 807). The researchers found that in 1972 the opinion towards the death penalty was as liberal as it has been in the timeline they explored. The opinion then swung right and reached a conservative peak in the 1990s which we see in the Gallup poll referenced above when the height of support occurred in 1994, but since then has swung back left to a liberal point (819). While this research does not confirm that conservatives are more likely than liberals to support the death penalty, it does show that cultural policy mood indicates that the death penalty topic is not consistently aligned with cultural policy attitudes and it is a difficult topic to track. This article does not confirm or deny my hypothesis but helps to explain evidence found in the Gallup poll referenced above.

**Whites are more likely than blacks to self-identify as conservative.**

As there were hardly any articles dedicated to the racial nature of political self-identification, I was forced to look to polls to analyze. A poll done by Gallup in 2003 argues that most Americans identify as either conservative or moderate, and not liberal (Gallup Poll, 2003). The data was compiled through 4036 interviews conducted in October and early November 2003. The survey found that whites are indeed more likely to self-identify as conservatives than blacks with 43% of whites self-identifying as conservative and only 30% of blacks self-identifying as conservative. This statistic helps to prove my hypothesis but is not the most interesting part of the research. The study found that black Democrats were actually slightly more conservative than white Democrats are, and decidedly less liberal (Gallup Poll, 2003). The

authors argue that this has to do with religious beliefs held within the black community but provides an interesting pattern when looking at party identification.

In the article, *Race and Ideology: A Research Note Measuring Liberalism and Conservatives in Black America*, authors Richard Seltzer and Robert Smith seek to explain and measure the level of support in the black community for conservative policy preferences (Seltzer and Smith, 1985: 98). Utilizing data from the 1982 General Social Survey the authors analyzed black-white policy positions on a range of issues and the effects of education on racial differences in policy positions. Based on survey data the authors found that 42.9 percent of blacks identified as liberal while only 24.4 percent of whites identified as liberal (100). The authors caution that one should not assume that a person's response to this question will always align with their policy stance on certain issues (100). With whites self-identifying as less liberal than blacks, and thus more conservative, this article helps to support my hypothesis.

**Whites are more likely than blacks to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.**

In an article entitled *Reassessing the Racial Divide in Support for Capital Punishment: The Continuing Significance of Race*, authors James Unnever and Francis Cullen investigated the racial divide in support for capital punishment and how much race truly effects views on the death penalty. Using data from the General Social Survey, Unnever and Cullen found a large racial divide in support for the death penalty with African Americans overwhelmingly opposed (Unnever and Cullen, 2007: 124). The authors began their study with multiple hypotheses, one of which being that race would be a predictor of attitudes on the death penalty. To test their hypothesis they analyzed samples from the General Social Survey from the years 1974, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1987 to 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 which included

13,823 respondents of which 1,915 were African American (136). Respondents to the survey were asked whether they favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Responses were categorized into three groups: “favor”, “oppose”, or “don’t know” (136). The survey found that African Americans were significantly more likely to oppose the death penalty than whites and the predicted odds of African Americans supporting capital punishment were nearly one-fourth the odds of Whites (140). This article directly supports my hypothesis that Whites are more likely than blacks to support the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.

Furthermore, the article *Why do White Americans Support the Death Penalty?* seeks to explain the reasoning behind white support of the death penalty. Right away the authors reference levels of opposition measured in American National Election Studies from 1992, 1996, and 2000. According to the studies in 1992, only 17% of white respondents to the survey opposed the death penalty, while opposition by black respondents was at 43%. Similarly in 1996, white opposition was 18% with black opposition at 47%, and finally in 2000 the sample presented white opposition at 24% with black opposition at 45% (Soss, Langbein, and Metelko, 2003: 399). The authors are not so concerned with the idea that whites support the death penalty more than blacks, but why white Americans support the death penalty and what influences this idea. Using survey data from the 1992 American National Election Study and contextual data from the 1990 census the researchers found that much of the basis of support for the death penalty for white Americans was a distrust in other people and in the government, plus a broad scope of other factors (415). Furthermore they concluded that white responses to the death penalty are extremely sensitive to social context and specific locations’ high crime rates,

education levels, and racial compositions (415). Overall this article helped to support my hypothesis but also sought to explain why the correlation exists.

Another article entitled, *Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support and Opposition: A Preliminary Study of White and Black College Students*, examined the levels of support for the death penalty among a group of college students. The researchers conducted a survey of college students from a public Midwestern University using a nonrandom, systematic convenience sampling design which involved 20 academic courses in the spring of 2002. For this study only white and black respondents were used which consisted of 19% black respondents and 81% white respondents (Baker, Lambert, and Jenkins, 2005: 207-8). The survey found that 62% of white respondents supported capital punishment, 10% were uncertain, and 28% opposed it (208). For black students, 42% supported the death penalty, while 41% opposed it, and 16% were uncertain (209). This data actually does support my hypothesis, but does so in a particular age group and in a particular region (Midwest), focusing on college students which provides an interesting idea about the effect of age on perceptions of the death penalty.

## **METHODS**

To test my model, I use data taken from The Mississippi Poll project, which has been carried out over the years through a series of statewide public opinion polls conducted by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University and led by political science professor Stephen D. Shaffer. I combined or pooled telephone surveys conducted in three years-2010, 2012, and 2014 to maximize my sample size and minimize my sample error. The 2010 Mississippi Poll surveyed 604 adult Mississippi residents from April 5 to April 25, 2010 and had a response rate of 42%. The 2012 Mississippi Poll surveyed 439 adult Mississippi residents from April 2 to April 25, 2012 for a response rate

of 26%. The 2014 Mississippi Poll surveyed 350 residents from April 7 to April 30, 2014 with a response rate of 31%. The three years combined contained 1,393 respondents. With 1,393 respondents interviewed, the sample error is 2.7%, which means that if every adult Mississippian had been interviewed, the results could differ from those reported here by as much as 2.7%. The pooled sample was adjusted or weighted by demographic characteristics to ensure that social groups less likely to answer the surveys or to own telephones were also represented in the sample in rough proportion to their presence in the state population. In all three years, a random sampling technique was used to select the households and each individual within the household to be interviewed, and no substitutions were permitted. The SSRC's Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing System (CATI) was used to collect the data.

For my analysis I chose four variables that were included in three years of the Mississippi Poll. The first variable, sex was a simple question as respondents were asked to choose between male or female. The second variable, race, was also straightforward as respondents chose between white, black, or other. For Ideology respondents were asked to self-identify based on the following question: "What are your political beliefs? Do you consider yourself very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate or middle of the road, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?" Finally, attitudes on the death penalty were measured by asking the following question: "For someone who is convicted of murder, do you generally favor the death penalty, life in prison without parole, or a jail term that is shorter than for the rest of someone's life?"

For two of my variables I recoded or combined categories in order to make sure I had enough people to analyze using multivariate tables. The five ideological self-identification categories became three groups: liberals now included anyone who self-identified as "very liberal" or "somewhat liberal", conservatives now included anyone who self-identified as "very

conservative” or “somewhat conservative”, and the category in the middle, “moderate or middle of the road” became an intermediate “moderate” group. The five answers to the death penalty question became two dichotomous groups: those who answered in favor of using the death penalty for someone convicted of murder were now the “favor” group, and those who answered in favor of life without parole or a jail term shorter than the rest of someone’s life were now the “oppose” group. Sex did not have to be recorded because it only had two options. Race also only had two options so did not have to be recorded.

### **FINDINGS: BIVARIATE**

**Table 1**

#### **Gender Differences in Death Penalty Support**

<b>Death Penalty For Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Sex</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>For</b>	56.2%	40.5%
<b>Against</b>	43.8%	59.5%
<b>N Size</b>	568	662

Gamma: .306

Chi-Squared: <.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Hypothesis 1 of my model states that men are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than women. In the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Mississippi Polls, 56.2% of men were for the use of the death penalty, compared to just 40.5% of women. The magnitude of this relationship is 15.7%, which is the percentage difference between men and women who support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. The magnitude reflected by the gamma value of this relationship is .306. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is significant at the

.001 level, indicating that the relationship found between sex and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 statewide polls can be generalized to the entire population. Thus, my hypothesis that men are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than women is accepted.

**Table 2**  
**Gender Differences in Ideology**

<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Sex</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	13.6%	20.5%
<b>Moderate</b>	29.2%	29.8%
<b>Conservative</b>	57.1%	49.7%
<b>N Size</b>	609	688

Gamma: -.156

Chi-Squared: <.01

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Hypothesis 2 of my model states that men are more likely to ideologically self-identify as conservative than women. In the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Mississippi Polls, 57.1% of men were conservatives, compared to 49.7% of women. The magnitude of this relationship is 7.4%, which is the percentage difference between men and women who self-identify as conservative. The magnitude reflected by the gamma value of this relationship is -.156. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is significant at the .002 level, indicating that the relationship found between sex and ideological self-identification in the 2010, 2012, and 2014 statewide polls can be generalized to the entire population. Thus, my hypothesis that men are more likely to self-identify as conservative than women is also accepted.

**Table 3****Ideological Differences in Death Penalty Support**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Ideology</b>		
	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Conservative</b>
<b>For</b>	30.6%	43.8%	56.2%
<b>Against</b>	69.4%	56.2%	43.8%
<b>N Size</b>	196	338	612

Gamma: -.327

Chi-Squared: <.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Hypothesis 3 of my model states that people who self-identify as conservative are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than those who self-identify as liberal. In the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Mississippi Polls, 56.2% of conservatives were for the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 30.6% of liberals. The magnitude of this relationship is 25.6%, which is the percentage difference between men and women who self-identify as conservative. The gamma value of this relationship is -.327. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is significant at the .001 level, indicating that the relationship found between ideology and support for the death penalty in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 statewide polls can be generalized to the entire population. My hypothesis that people who self-identify as conservative are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than those who self-identify as liberal is accepted as well.



**Table 4**  
**Racial Differences in Ideology**

<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Race</b>	
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	12.6%	26.0%
<b>Moderate</b>	23.1%	39.3%
<b>Conservative</b>	64.3%	34.8%
<b>N Size</b>	809	420

Gamma: -.468

Chi-Squared: <.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Hypothesis 4 of my model states that whites are more likely to self-identify as conservative than blacks. In the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Mississippi Polls, 64.3% of whites self-identified as conservative, versus only 34.8% of blacks. The magnitude of this relationship is 29.5%, which is the percentage difference between whites and blacks that self-identify as conservative. The gamma value of this relationship is -.468. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is significant at the .001 level, indicating that the relationship found between race and ideology in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 statewide polls can be generalized to the entire population. My hypothesis that whites are more likely to self-identify as conservative than blacks is also accepted.

**Table 5**  
**Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support**

<b>Death Penalty Support for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Race</b>	
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>
<b>For</b>	61.6%	19.7%
<b>Against</b>	38.4%	80.3%
<b>N Size</b>	776	390

Gamma: .734

Chi-Squared: <.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Hypothesis 5 of my model states that whites are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than blacks. In the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Mississippi Polls, 61.6% of whites supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, versus only 19.7% of blacks. The magnitude of this relationship is 41.9%, which is the percentage difference between whites and blacks that support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. The gamma value of this relationship is .734. Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is significant at the .001 level, indicating that the relationship found between race and support for the death penalty in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 statewide polls can be generalized to the entire population. My hypothesis that whites are more likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder is accepted.

**FINDINGS : MULTIVARIATE**

**Table 6**  
**Gender Differences in Death Penalty Support**  
**(Liberals Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Sex</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>For</b>	36.6%	27.2%
<b>Against</b>	63.4%	72.8%
<b>N Size</b>	71	125

Gamma: .215

Chi-Squared: >.05

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

**Table 7**  
**Gender Differences in Death Penalty Support**  
**(Moderates Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Sex</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>For</b>	47.1%	41.0%
<b>Against</b>	52.9%	59.0%
<b>N Size</b>	155	183

Gamma: .124

Chi-Squared: >.05

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

**Table 8**  
**Gender Differences in Death Penalty Support**  
**(Conservatives Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Sex</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>For</b>	68.0%	44.6%
<b>Against</b>	32.0%	55.4%
<b>N Size</b>	306	305

Gamma: .450

Chi-Squared: <.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Tables 6-8 are multivariate tables that control for the intervening variable of ideology. The findings show that among the individuals who were liberal and moderate, sex is not an important factor in determining support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. Sex impacted conservative's beliefs towards death penalty support the most, but for liberals and moderates, sex was less of a determining factor.

Among self-identified liberals, 27.2% of women supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 36.6% of males who self-identified as liberal (Table 6). The magnitude of the relationship between sex and support of the death penalty for self-identified liberals is only 9.4%. The gamma value reflecting the relationship between sex and death penalty attitudes towards someone convicted of murder is .215. Furthermore, the chi-squared statistic is insignificant at the .169 level.

Among self-identified moderates, 47.1% of the men supported the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 41% of women who self-identified as

moderate (Table 7). The magnitude of the relationship is only 6.1%, which is the percentage difference between male and female moderates who supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. The gamma value reflecting the relationship between sex and support of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder is .124. Additionally, the chi-square is not statistically significant at the .259 level.

Among self-identified conservatives, 68% of males supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 44.6% of females who self-identified as conservative (Table 8). The magnitude of the relationship is more extreme at 23.4%, which is the percentage difference between the male and female conservatives who supported the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. The gamma value reflecting the relationship between sex and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among conservatives is .450. Furthermore, the chi-square value is statistically significant at the .001 level.

The multivariate tables 6-8 show a relatively weak relationship between sex and death penalty support for someone convicted of murder among liberals and moderates, but sex was most important among conservatives. The difference between the males and females who supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder for liberals and moderates was 9.4% and 6.1% respectively, compared to a 23.4% difference among the conservatives. This shows that sex has a greater effect on support for the death penalty for people that self-identify as conservative.

At least 36% of males regardless of ideology supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. 36.6% of the male liberal self-identifiers supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 68% of the male conservative self-identifiers. This is a percentage difference of 31.4%, which is on par with what I would have expected. However,

the difference between the female liberals and female conservatives was less. Only 27.2% of the females among liberal identifiers supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 44.6% of the female conservative self-identifiers. The margin in this case was 17.4%, which is substantially less than the 31.4% difference among the males.

**Table 9**  
**Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support**  
**(Liberals Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Race</b>	
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>
<b>For</b>	37.1%	22.1%
<b>Against</b>	62.9%	77.9%
<b>N Size</b>	97	86

Gamma: .351

Chi-Squared: <.05

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

**Table 10****Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support****(Moderates Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Race</b>	
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>
<b>For</b>	62.9%	22.0%
<b>Against</b>	37.1%	78.0%
<b>N Size</b>	170	141

Gamma: .715

Chi-Squared: &lt;.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

**Table 11****Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support****(Conservatives Only)**

<b>Death Penalty for Someone Convicted of Murder</b>	<b>Race</b>	
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>
<b>For</b>	68.0%	14.6%
<b>Against</b>	32.0%	85.4%
<b>N Size</b>	462	130

Gamma: .851

Chi-Squared: &lt;.001

Note: Percentages total 100% down each column

Source: 2010, 2012, 2014 Mississippi Polls conducted by Mississippi State University

Tables 9-11 are multivariate tables that control for the intervening variable of ideology.

The findings show that among individuals with liberal, moderate, or conservative ideologies,

race is an important factor in determining an individual's support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. Whites are consistently and significantly more supportive of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder compared to blacks.

Among those with a liberal ideology, 37.1% of whites favored the death penalty for someone convicted of murder compared to 22.1% of blacks (Table 9). The magnitude of this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among those who are liberal self-identifiers is 15%. The gamma value reflecting this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder who are liberal self-identifiers is .351. Furthermore, the chi-squared statistic is significant at the .027 level.

Among those with a moderate ideology, 62.9% of whites favored the death penalty for someone convicted of murder compared to 22% of blacks (Table 10). The magnitude of this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among those who are moderate self-identifiers is 40.9%. The gamma value reflecting this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among those who are moderate self-identifiers is .715. Furthermore, the chi-squared statistic is significant at the .001 level.

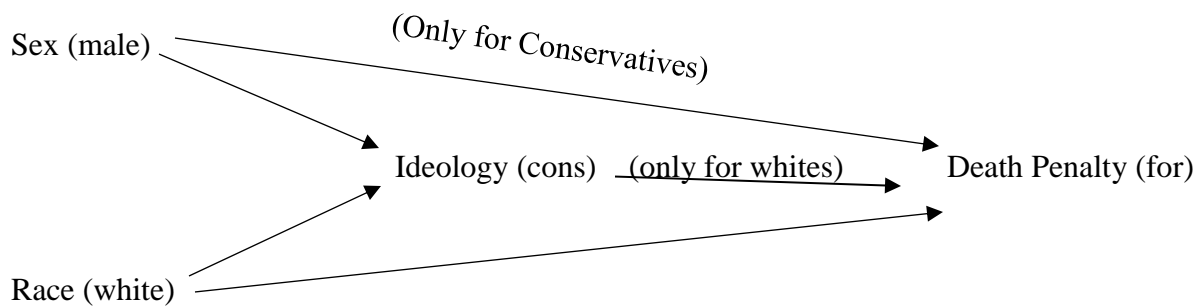
Among those who are conservative self-identifiers, 68% of whites supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder compared to 14.6% of blacks (Table 11). The magnitude of this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among those who are conservative self-identifiers is staggering at 53.4%. The gamma value reflecting this relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder among those who are conservative self-identifiers is .851. Finally, the chi-squared statistic is significant at the .001 level.



The multivariate tables 9-11 show a strong relationship between race and support for the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, while ideology plays a role for whites. For example, only 37.1% of whites who self-identified as liberals support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 68% of whites who self-identified as conservatives. This is a difference of 30.9% which is quite significant.

Regardless of ideology, 22.1% at most of blacks supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder. Only 22.1% of blacks who self-identified as liberals support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder, compared to 14.6% of blacks self-identified as conservatives. This is an interesting finding as I would have originally thought fewer blacks that identity as liberals would support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than conservatives. Nevertheless, this percentage difference of 7.5% is a small difference that indicates that blacks, as a whole, do not support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder.

**CONCLUSION**



Through my critical analysis of the relationship between sex, race, ideology, and attitudes towards the death penalty, I found that all five of my hypotheses were accepted and after testing each one, every variable was found to be significant. Yet, after analyzing my multivariate tables, sex became less significant, only proving to be a true factor in determining death penalty support for conservative self-identifiers. Another interesting finding was that black conservatives were

less likely to support the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than liberal or moderate blacks.

Throughout my analysis I found that whites overwhelmingly supported the death penalty for someone convicted of murder compared to blacks, and furthermore, self-identified white conservatives were more likely to support the use of the death penalty than white liberal self-identifiers. Within the literature referenced above, all supporters of the use of the death penalty for someone convicted of murder seemed to be in support of the policy based on the idea that using the death penalty would deter future homicides from happening (Whitehead and Blankenship, 5). According to a study done by researchers Michael Radelet and Traci Lacock of the opinions of the top criminologists in the country, they found that a majority of the top criminologists in the United States do not support the literature stating that the death penalty has an effect on deterring future homicides (Radelet and Lacock, 490). The researchers also state that because no “social science research had found consistent evidence of crime deterrence through execution” the American Society of Criminology had passed a resolution that sought to condemn the death penalty (490). Public opinion on capital punishment is ever-evolving and if this information was to be made more public, the opinions of the death penalty may change in the future.

After finding that black conservatives were less likely to support the death penalty for someone convicted of murder than black moderates or liberals, I began to think about why this could be the case. My thought is that religion plays a large factor in determining attitudes on the death penalty. In the article, *The Gender Gap in Capital Punishment Attitudes: An Analysis of Support and Opposition*, Whitehead and Blankenship found that those who opposed the death penalty usually cited the biblical tenant of “thou shall not kill” as their reason for opposing it

(Whitehead and Blankenship, 5). In the South specifically, I would hypothesize that black people are usually more religious than white people, but this is also a regional hypothesis. In future research I would add religiosity as a variable, specifically when dealing with the southern region of the United States as the South is responsible for 80% of death penalty executions ([deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org)).

Capital punishment is a complicated and emotional policy that deals with many sociological factors. There is much more research to be done on attitudes towards the death penalty, but using Mississippi as an example is interesting because it provides a look into southern culture. More specifically, it provides a modern view into a culture that has long been based on the complicated relationship between the races. The death penalty adds another level to this conversation. In order to study this further in the future, I would make sure to look at religiosity, income level, and age as factors when determining public opinion on capital punishment. I would also be interested to see if there is any correlation between attitudes towards the death penalty and those towards abortion because many times, the attitudes align based on factors such as religiosity, race, and socioeconomic status. This further research is important because as sociological factors that affect beliefs about the death penalty shift, the public opinion shifts as well. As society continues to shift to the left on many issues, it will be interesting to see if opinions on capital punishment do as well.

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