

# Socrates Café

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

*All political, economic and social points of view are welcomed and encouraged.  
The only ground rule is that we will be polite to those opinions that differ from our own.*

## The Death Penalty

The United States is the only Western country that still uses the death penalty. Capital punishment is on the books in 31 states, the federal government, and the U.S. military. Since 1953 it has been used solely for murder convictions.

In 1976 the Supreme Court affirmed the legality of capital punishment. Since then, more than 1,400 offenders have been executed, including 20 in 2016. The peak was in 1999, when 98 persons were executed. In 2016 there were 20 executions in the U.S., the lowest level in 25 years.

Death penalty sentences peaked at 315 in 1996. Thirty death sentences were imposed in 2016, the lowest since the penalty was reinstated in 1973.

The number of appeals to both the state and federal courts that can be filed on behalf of a sentenced person varies based on the reasons, but is substantial.

Among the arguments against the death penalty sentence are:

- It is not uniformly imposed – people of means are not sentenced to death
- Innocent people may be executed
- It is not a deterrent to other criminals
- It is expensive due to the number of appeals possible
- The present method of execution, lethal injection, is cruel and inconsistent

Among the arguments for keeping the death penalty sentence are:

- The number of appeals is excessive (up to more than a dozen)
- The delay in implementation (years or decades) negates the deterrence effect.
- Families of victims deserve closure on their losses
- People like Timothy Mcveigh, Ted Bundy, and Dylann Roof do not deserve to live
- Spending such as \$90,000 a year for Mumia Abu-Jamal's Hepatitis-C medicine is obscene

What are your thoughts on the Death Penalty?

- Should the rules surrounding its use be changed?
- Should it be retained in individual states and the federal government?
- Should it be banned in either or both?

*Robert M. Rubin*