OVERVIEW

Many studies have found that whites are more likely than blacks to support the death penalty, and another study concluded that racism plays a factor in white support for harsher treatment of criminals. This study investigates whether white support for the death penalty is associated with racism.

The study was conducted by questionnaire, asking several questions relating to racism and antipathy toward blacks and one question of personal support for the death penalty. The survey, taken in 1990 of over a thousand white people, also asked other questions that might affect their support of the death penalty, such as religious beliefs, political conservatism, fear of crime, place of residence, age, gender, and education. The results show that "white support for the death penalty is, as hypothesized, associated with antipathy to blacks and with racial stereotyping." (p. 205) Political conservatism is also a factor, but the other variables proved inconclusive in this study.

Although this study suggests a casual relationship between racism and support for the death penalty, more research is needed to define more closely the relationship between the two. However, if public support for the death penalty is even partially motivated by racial prejudice, "...the influence of public support for capital punishment on legislative and judicial policy making may be misguided." (p. 207)

This study is helpful because it reveals the close relationship between death penalty support by whites (82.8%) and mutual occurrence of prejudice. Not only is this an alarming measure of continuing racism, but it is even more frightening when this prejudice affects the lives of so many people. This is another incentive to work to reduce, and eventually remove, racism from American society.

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