

Death Penalty Framing Experiment Booklet

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The materials on pp. 2-18 in this booklet were distributed to 184 undergraduate student enrolled in an introductory mass communications course at Penn State University on March 9, 2004.

CONTENTS:

I. Framing Treatment Mock News Articles

Each experimental group read a similar “newspaper” story on the issue of capital punishment. The stories were constructed using arguments and specific language drawn from real *New York Times* articles and were composed to resemble photocopies of actual newspaper articles. The headlines, lead, and closing paragraphs were manipulated. In each case the middle two paragraphs were identical. Treatments were as follows:

<u>pg</u>		
2	Group 1:	Control (first and last paragraphs are neutral) (391 words)
3	Group 2:	Focus on pro-death penalty – morality (399 words)
4	Group 3:	Focus on anti-death penalty – fairness (402 words)
5	Group 4:	Focus on anti-death penalty – morality (399 words)

II. “Dummy” Articles

The manipulated death-penalty article was placed in between two authentic articles describing current debate on two sociopolitical issues, as follows:

6	Dummy 1:	Health care/ Medicaid (404 words)
7	Dummy 2:	Logging/EPA (397 words)

Therefore, each participant read the story on Health Care (p 6 here), then each read a different Death Penalty story depending on which experimental treatment group they were randomly assigned to, and then each read the story on Logging. The stories are all attached here but were inserted in the appropriate place in the experimental booklet, as noted.

III. Pre-Test Questionnaire

IV. Post-Test Questionnaire

Capital punishment debated: Lawmakers intensify dispute

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation that has been the source of much political friction in the last week. Legislators are strongly divided on the issue, as witnessed by the heated nature of this morning's discussion, and the debate is expected to continue into the early part of next week. This is a familiar agenda item in the state senate, which has deliberated capital punishment legislation twice in the last three years, each time with great conflict and turmoil. This morning's meeting was no exception.

Some lawmakers argue that there are crimes heinous enough to warrant the death penalty. Leaders from a variety of religions support this view, saying government has a moral responsibility to answer crime with a reciprocal response. Other legislators point to flaws in the system – citing cases in which death row inmates have been proven innocent, even after their convictions – to argue that the risk of executing an innocent person is too great a price to pay. Still other lawmakers contend that the death penalty is immoral, saying that government should not be responsible for taking human life. In support of this position, religious leaders from many faiths denounce capital punishment as a sin.

The death penalty has been deemed illegal in the United States only once, when the Supreme Court placed an effectual moratorium on capital punishment from 1972 to 1976. Each state makes its own decision about the death penalty, and today 38 states enforce it. This number has fluctuated over the years, as many states have struggled to craft legislation on which lawmakers can agree. Although most states have revised their capital punishment guidelines over the last 50 years to make lethal injection the primary or only mode of execution, many other points of contention still exist, as illustrated by this morning's divisive session.

Even the brevity of the session has raised concern among some lawmakers who expressed reluctance to decide on a bill of such importance in a three-day special session. Nevertheless, the debate will end in a vote Monday. It is difficult to predict whether the problematic nature of this session will influence how this group of legislators, usually hailed for its ability to reach bipartisan compromises, will handle future policy issues. One thing is clear: it is doubtful that a full consensus will be reached by Monday.

Capital punishment advocated: Moral approval dominates legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the moral balance of society by placing greater value on the rights of criminals than on the lives of victims. The memories of victims who have been slain are disgraced, they claim, by “quarrelling over legalities.” “It is nothing short of common decency,” Senator Pat James said this morning, “to act in proportional response to evil deeds. When an individual commits murder with malice and without mercy, that person deserves to die.”

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For many, the issue is a moral one, and many say the death penalty is morally justified. Simply put, they believe some crimes are terrible enough to demand the death penalty. “It would be unethical for us to deliver any softer punishment for these brutal crimes, as if the worth of the victim’s life could be measured via sentencing guidelines,” Senator Chris Thomas said. “I cannot in good conscience tell the mother of a child who has been murdered that the only punishment the killer will receive is a lifetime guarantee of free room and board.”

Capital punishment denounced: Flaws in system dominate legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the lives of innocent people accused of crimes they did not commit. These legislators cite exonerations as proof of errors in the system – errors that are human and unavoidable. “Our death penalty system is not just deeply flawed,” Senator Pat James said. “For the wrongly convicted its flaws are fatal. Our society has deemed the execution of a few innocents an acceptable price to pay to eliminate the guilty, and that’s a disgrace.”

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For many, the question is simple: Can we guarantee that the system is 100 percent perfect, that no mistake could ever be made? For many lawmakers, the answer is no. “Executing the wrong person is the most ghastly error imaginable, because it’s an error we can’t undo,” Senator Chris Thomas said. “The death penalty is a human-designed institution. And while we can add safeguards, we can never be sure that the system will be perfect, not just beyond a reasonable doubt, but absolutely perfect. When dealing with a matter of life and death, we must have that certainty.”

Capital punishment denounced: Moral objections dominate legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the moral balance of our society by sanctioning state-sponsored murder. These legislators called today for a more civilized penal system that tempers the heat of emotion and directs society instead toward alternative punishments and greater respect for human life. “It discredits us,” Senator Pat James said, “both as statesmen and as human beings, to be reduced to a level where we act through violence and bloodlust in the name of justice.”

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For many, the issue is a moral one, and many say the death penalty is morally wrong. It is inappropriate, some lawmakers argue, for decisions about life and death to rest in human hands. They contend that government should not pass final judgment on human beings, no matter what they have done, because the weight of that judgment is too great for society to bear. “The death penalty is still killing, and killing is a sin,” Senator Chris Thomas said. “State-sponsored killing is just as wrong as the original murder for which these criminals should be punished.”

State seeks to shift Medicaid patients' basic care

The governor's administration wants to prohibit low-income residents from seeing primary care doctors at hospitals, jumping into a longstanding debate about whether patients are driving up healthcare costs by relying too heavily on expensive medical centers.

State officials want to shift patients enrolled in Medicaid – the state and federal insurance program for the poor that's facing skyrocketing costs – from hospitals to community health centers for basic medical care, which they estimate would save the state \$16 million next year.

Ronald Preston, secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, said that Medicaid patients would still be able to make appointments with cardiologists, gastroenterologists, and other specialists at hospitals. But community health center staff have more time to provide basic medical care and can more easily connect patients with a wide array of social-service programs, he said. Comparable services are cheaper at community health centers, which means state fees are lower for health centers than for hospital outpatient departments.

"A hospital is there to be a hospital, to treat emergencies and admit patients overnight," Preston said. "When patients show up at their door, it's a very expensive proposition."

At least 20,000 of the state's 928,000 Medicaid patients and an unknown number of uninsured patients receive most of their primary care in hospitals.

Dr. Judy Bigby, an internist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said shifting Medicaid enrollees to community health centers could harm many patients. Bigby said community health centers may not have the space and staff to take on thousands of extra patients. In addition, she said, the administration's proposal ignores patients' personal preferences and the fact that many patients who end up in hospital outpatient clinics are "pretty sick people" who need to see specialists in addition to their primary care doctor.

"The majority of my patients are not coming for prevention," Bigby said. "If you put them in community health centers where they don't have specialists, what's going to happen to continuity of care and communication between doctors?"

The plan is one of several administration budget proposals that would reduce state payments to hospitals by \$87 million to \$100 million for treating poor patients. One proposal would eliminate Medicaid payments to help train young doctors, or residents, a plan that hits academic medical centers especially hard. Another would do away with a special pool of relief money for hospitals that rely on the funds to treat large numbers of poor patients.

EPA attacks plan to log in burned forest

The largest proposed salvage logging operation in decades would do severe, long-term damage, according to an Environmental Protection Agency review.

The US Forest Service's draft plans to log 29,000 acres blackened by the 2002 Biscuit fire would cause erosion and sediment-loading in key watersheds that are supposed to be protected for salmon, the review said.

The Biscuit fire in the Siskiyou National Forest, the nation's largest conflagration in 2002, prompted an initiative that called for more forest thinning to prevent such catastrophic wildfires. The charred Oregon forest has been the focus of intense national debate among the administration, the timber industry and environmentalists over whether or how much logging after a fire can contribute to the future health of a forest.

Unveiled last fall, the administration's proposal to remove more than 500 million board feet of timber from the burn zone – more than the entire annual Forest Service harvest in all of Western Washington and Oregon – cited a report by an Oregon State University professor that said heavy logging would more quickly return the landscape to a natural state.

But EPA's harsh review could cause the Forest Service, which was already expecting to have to downsize its timber-harvest goals, to scale back even more.

EPA's review noted that the Forest Service's draft proposal called for a 1,200 percent increase in logging activity in the area. It said at least a half-dozen of the 22 stream systems that already are too warm by federal standards could see temperatures rise as erosion during logging fills pools or causes river channels to braid.

The EPA pointed out that federal lands burned in the fire were an important source of dead and downed trees necessary to provide rearing, nesting and foraging spots for fish and other wildlife. And it said logging near the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area, in the Siskiyou National Forest, would cause "irretrievable" damage to otherwise pristine forest lands, forever ensuring those lands couldn't be added to the wilderness preserve.

However, EPA's review comes after field work by Forest Service staffers showed some trees were decaying so much they were no longer valuable. Also, timber industry advocates maintain that logging practices already reduce erosion, and that most of the cutting was to be done by helicopter or using cables, which would reduce ground disturbances.

The Forest Service is expected to release a final draft of its logging proposal in April.

General Instructions

You are now about to begin the newspaper study.
On the following page, you will answer some preliminary questions.

Then, you will read several newspaper articles
and answer subsequent questions.

Remember that all answers are completely anonymous,
so your honest opinion is greatly appreciated.

IMPORTANT:

During the study, please ALWAYS stay only within the
section/page you are working on and answer the questions at hand.

NEVER look ahead or go back to previous sections.

Thank you for your participation.

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?
(please circle only the number that best corresponds to your response)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong Democrat	Not Very Strong Democrat	Independent Close to Democrat	Independent	Independent Close to Republican	Not Very Strong Republican	Strong Republican

2. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Imagine a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal – point 1 – to extremely conservative – point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Liberal						Extremely Conservative

3. How interested would you say you personally are in politics?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All Interested						Extremely Interested

4. Do you recycle? (please circle only one)

1. Yes 2. No

5. How afraid would you be to walk alone at night in the area around your home – that is, within a mile of your home?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All Afraid						Extremely Afraid

6. Do you take any medication on a regular basis? (please circle only one)

1. Yes 2. No

7. Generally speaking, how trustworthy do you think people are?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All Trustworthy						Extremely Trustworthy

8. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington DC to do what is right?)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	rarely	only some of the time	about half the time	a majority of the time	almost always	always

Newspaper Article Instructions

On the following pages, you will read three newspaper articles.

The articles were selected from a major daily newspaper in the US.

Please read the newspaper articles as you normally would at your own speed.

Questionnaire Instructions

We now would like to ask you some questions.

In completing this next questionnaire, please read all questions and instructions carefully.

Again, please remember that all responses are completely anonymous.

PLEASE DO NOT LOOK BACK AT PREVIOUS PAGES.

Thank you for your participation.

6. In making your own judgment about the death penalty, please indicate the importance of each consideration listed below by circling the appropriate number:

Consideration	No							
	Extreme	Importance						Importance
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a. Whether or not the death penalty deters or prevents crime	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Whether or not someone convicted of murder can be rehabilitated	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Moral/religious principles	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Aggravating circumstances (e.g. heinousness of the crime, number of victims, intent/premeditation, etc.)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Victim's family	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Mitigating circumstances (e.g. defendant's age and/or mental state at time crime was committed, abuse defendant suffered during childhood, etc.)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Defendant access to evidence (including DNA evidence) to use in defense	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Racial disparity in how the death penalty is applied	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Danger that flaws in the judicial system can lead to wrongful convictions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. Undue delays in the appeal process; danger that judicial system panders too much to criminals	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Life without parole a better alternative punishment	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. Financial cost of life imprisonment	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. Financial cost of death penalty prosecution	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. Defendants' Constitutional right to due process	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
o. Whether the death penalty is humane or inhumane	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
p. International criticisms of U.S. death penalty	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

PLEASE GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

20. Home state/country. Please answer only one item (A or B).

(a) If you are an American citizen, what state do you consider your home state?

(b) If you are not an American citizen, what country do you consider your home country?

21. What category best describes your ethnicity? (please circle only one)

1. American Indian/Alaska Native
2. Asian
3. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
4. Black/African-American
5. Hispanic/Latino
6. White (non-Hispanic)
7. Other (please specify) _____

22. What is your religious preference? (please circle only one)

1. Protestant
2. Catholic
3. Jewish
4. Buddhism
5. Hinduism
6. Muslim/Islam
7. Native American
8. Other (please specify) _____
9. None

23. Would you say that you are a religious fundamentalist, a religious moderate, or a religious liberal? (please circle only one)

1. Fundamentalist
2. Moderate
3. Liberal

24. How important would you say religion is in your everyday life?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All						Extremely
Important						Important

25. Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? (please circle only one)

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.
3. The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.

People talk a lot about race these days. For each of the following items, please indicate your level of agreement by circling the number which best corresponds to your response.

26. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

27. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

28. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

29. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

30. Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

31. Income. Please answer only one item (A or B).

(a) If you are financially dependent on your parent(s)/guardian(s), what is their estimated total annual household income (\$US)?

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Under \$10,000 | 7. _____ \$60,000-\$69,999 |
| 2. _____ \$10,000-\$19,999 | 8. _____ \$70,000-\$79,999 |
| 3. _____ \$20,000-\$29,999 | 9. _____ \$80,000-\$89,999 |
| 4. _____ \$30,000-\$39,999 | 10. _____ \$90,000-\$99,999 |
| 5. _____ \$40,000-\$49,999 | 11. _____ \$100,000-\$109,999 |
| 6. _____ \$50,000-\$59,999 | 12. _____ Above \$109,999 |

(b) If you are financially independent, what is your estimated total annual household income (\$US)?

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Under \$10,000 | 7. _____ \$60,000-\$69,999 |
| 2. _____ \$10,000-\$19,999 | 8. _____ \$70,000-\$79,999 |
| 3. _____ \$20,000-\$29,999 | 9. _____ \$80,000-\$89,999 |
| 4. _____ \$30,000-\$39,999 | 10. _____ \$90,000-\$99,999 |
| 5. _____ \$40,000-\$49,999 | 11. _____ \$100,000-\$109,999 |
| 6. _____ \$50,000-\$59,999 | 12. _____ Above \$109,999 |

The study is now complete. Thank you.