

# Deterrence and the Death Penalty

The overwhelming majority of criminologists in the United States today reject the argument that the death penalty is a deterrent. No scientifically evaluated study has shown that capital punishment deters violent crime. To the contrary, scores of studies have found that the death penalty is not a deterrent. Most murders are committed in the heat of the moment, and usually while the offender is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. That makes it very unlikely that people who commit murder fully consider the consequences of their actions.

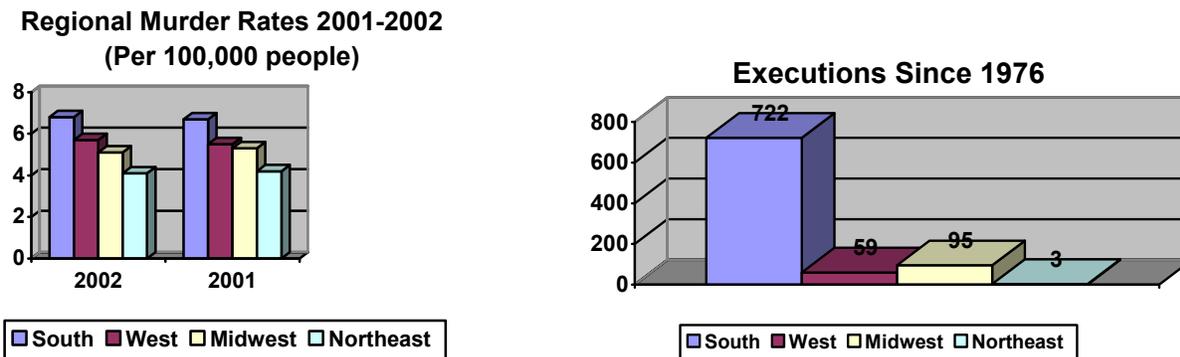
## Police Don't See Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment

A 1995 Hart Research Associates Poll found that the majority of police chiefs do not believe the death penalty significantly reduces the number of homicides. In fact, the police chiefs polled ranked the death penalty last among effective ways of reducing violent crime (behind reducing drug abuse, creating jobs, simplifying court rules, imposing longer prison sentences, hiring more police officers, and reducing access to guns).

## States that Hold Executions often Have *Higher* Murder Rates

The murder rate in the South in 2002 increased by 2.1% while the murder rate in the Northeast decreased by almost 5% according to the FBI's 2002 Preliminary Uniform Crime Report. The South accounts for 82% of all executions since 1976; the Northeast accounts for less than 1%.

## Murder Rates Compared to Number of Executions By Region



## No Deterrent Effect in Texas

A study examining executions between 1984 and 1997 in Texas concluded that the number of executions was unrelated to murder rates. Texas is the state with the highest rate of executions. The authors found no evidence of a deterrent effect when they examined patterns in executions across the study period and the relatively steady rate of murders. (Sorenson, Wrinkle, Brewer, and Marquart, Capital Punishment and Deterrence: Examining the Effect of Executions on Murder in Texas, 45 *Crime and Delinquency* 481-93 (1999))

## No Evidence that Executions Deter Murder of Police Officers

A study of a 13-year period of police homicides study concluded "we find no consistent evidence that capital punishment influenced police killings during the 1976-1989 period...[P]olice do not appear to have been afforded an added measure of protection against homicide by capital punishment." (Bailey and Peterson, Murder, Capital Punishment, and Deterrence: A Review of the Evidence and an Examination of Police Killings, 50 *Journal of Social Issues* 53, 71 1994)

