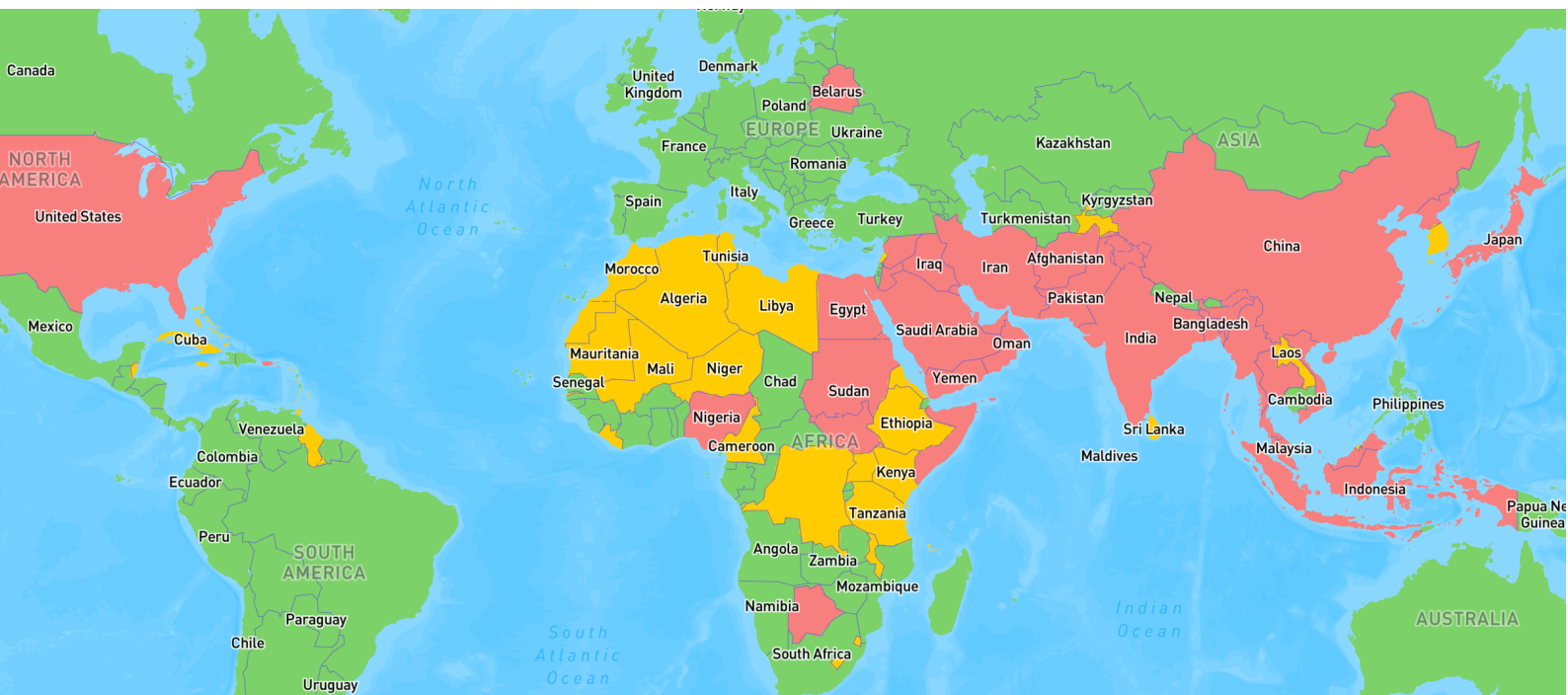




DEATH PENALTY RESEARCH UNIT (DPRU) ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



**CENTRE FOR CRIMINOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**

DECEMBER 2024

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Cover image: Global death penalty status map December 2024, Death Penalty Research Unit (DPRU), University of Oxford, using @Mapbox platform. States shown in red are retentionist; green are abolitionist; yellow are abolitionist de facto.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On 31 December 2024, President Emmerson Mnangagwa assented to legislation to abolish the death penalty in Zimbabwe, almost 20 years since the last execution in the country. The legislation had been approved by the Senate on 11 December, following its introduction to Parliament as a Private Members' Bill by opposition MP Edwin Mushoriwa in late 2023 and its adoption by the Cabinet in early 2024.

This significant reform will see those convicted of murder facing long-term imprisonment rather than the death penalty, and those who were on death row (approximately 60 people) will be resentenced; some are likely to be released without the need to serve further time in prison.

As with abolition in other countries that we have worked in, change is driven locally, by tireless campaigners, lawyers and parliamentarians. That said, assistance from the international community can help, and we have been privileged to work with the Death Penalty Project (DPP) in supporting a local rights organisation, Veritas, in their long-term advocacy in Zimbabwe. We drew on legal strategy, capacity building for stakeholders, empirical research and high-level dialogue working within an advocacy network including embassies.

With Zimbabwe, 128 countries worldwide have now embraced abolition, leaving 43 countries keeping the death penalty in law without having carried out an execution for ten years or more (regarded as 'abolitionist de facto' (ADF) by the UN) and just 30 countries retaining capital punishment in law and in practice. Change has been particularly pronounced within the African Union: of those 54 states, only six are 'actively retentionist'; 18 are ADF, and 30 have abolished the death penalty in law; prior to Zimbabwe's abolition, most recently, Ghana in 2023 and Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic and Zambia in 2022.

Zimbabwe is one of the case study countries in the DPRU and DPP's current research project on ADF status. This project originated out of the identification of a knowledge gap concerning ADF states' relationships with the death penalty, leaving policymakers with limited tools to shift policy and overcome barriers to abolition. Our project aims to develop a more robust intellectual framework informing the concept of ADF status and to draw on knowledge and experience from relevant case studies in Africa and the Caribbean. It will conclude in July 2025, and we look forward to working in partnership with the Council of Europe in order to disseminate our findings.

We are also entering the final year of the DPRU and DPP's research on drug offending in Indonesia, exploring who is convicted of drug offending in Southeast Asia and whether capital punishment serves as a deterrent. During 2024, our partner organisations Atma Jaya University and Karisma completed interviews in Indonesia with drug offenders on death row and with those involved in the drug trade living in the community. We will be disseminating the findings from this project in Southeast Asia in Autumn 2025.

As part of the DPRU's objective to encourage death penalty scholarship through research dissemination, in December 2023 we launched the DPRU Research Paper Series. The series features articles of around 4-5,000 words drawing on original research on topics relating to the death penalty, and we are delighted to have so far published six papers as part of the series. We welcome new contributions to the series from established academics, emerging scholars, and civil society, criminal justice and legal professionals.

In addition to knowledge production and research dissemination, the past year was also another very active year for our impact and engagement work. We undertook legal advocacy through the submission of expert evidence in a constitutional challenge to the death penalty in Taiwan, and held engagement events at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, and at the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna. The work of DPRU Research Associate Professor Jon Yorke also provided a shining example of committed engagement work, receiving international media coverage for his efforts to oppose the use of execution by nitrogen gas in Alabama.

As the DPRU enters its fifth year, we continue to recognise the role of those who built the foundations of contemporary abolition efforts. The DPRU remembers the decades of scholarship undertaken by the late Professor Roger Hood (1936–2020), whose life and work I reflected upon in a new biography published by the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. This year also saw the passing of the renowned French jurist and politician Robert Badinter (1928–2024), whose central role in the passing of abolition of legislation in France in 1981 was acknowledged in the DPRU's reflection on his life.

The DPRU also remains committed to training a new generation of death penalty scholars and advocates. During 2024, three DPRU research students successfully completed their postgraduate studies, with Lucrezia Rizzelli and Amelia Inglis completing their DPhils and Aimee Clesi completing her MPhil (and continuing on to the DPhil programme), while DPRU Research Intern Jackson Foster was awarded prizes for his academic performance on the MSc programme and his MSc dissertation. In September and October, DPRU DPhil researcher and President of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Matthew Goldberg, hosted the first two in a three-part series of international lectures surveying the status of global abolition.

As we reached the end of the year, we were pleased to co-host a roundtable event in London with the DPP to reflect on the future of the death penalty over the next 10 years. The roundtable, which brought together academics, legal practitioners, policy and medical experts, and research students, provided an important opportunity for members of the abolitionist community to meet in person and discuss their work, and consider how further research could assist their efforts towards abolition. Optimism can be crucial in sustaining the work of the abolitionist community over the long term, and developments such as abolition in Zimbabwe provide the inspiration to continue this with this commitment.

Finally, all of the DPRU's work is only possible with the support of our colleagues in the Centre for Criminology, the Faculty of Law, our partner organisations and our funders. Our current research projects are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) and the Faculty of Law, and the DPRU's ongoing operations have been very generously supported since its establishment by donations from Lady Edwina Grosvenor. Building on this support, and together with likeminded academics elsewhere and our collaborators in the abolitionist community, we look forward to celebrating further abolition victories in the coming years.

Carolyn Hoyle, 31 December 2024

DPRU UPDATES

ODNB PUBLISHES BIOGRAPHY OF PROFESSOR ROGER HOOD



In April 2024, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB) published a biography of the late Professor Roger Hood (1936-2020) by Carolyn Hoyle.

The biography covers Roger's younger life and education, his early criminological research, his research into sentencing and treatment of minorities in the UK, his role in the development of the Oxford Centre for Criminology, his pioneering international work on the death penalty, his family life and his ongoing legacy.

The ODNB has generously allowed the biography to be shared via [the DPRU website](#).

DPRU RESEARCH STUDENTS SELECTED AS JOHN ROBERT LEWIS FELLOWS

In February 2024, DPRU research students Aimee Clesi and Serene Singh were named as [John Robert Lewis Fellows](#) by the US-based [Faith and Politics Institute](#) (FPI), among a cohort of 10 Fellows for 2024-25.



Image: Aimee Clesi (left); Serene Singh (right)

Aimee Clesi is a DPhil Criminology candidate and recent graduate of the MPhil Criminology and Criminal Justice, whose research examines the legislative and civil society conditions necessary to galvanize US states towards abolition de jure, especially following a period of abolition de facto status.

Serene Singh is a DPhil Criminology candidate whose research focuses on women on death row in the US, exploring the gendered pains of capital punishment through interviews with death-sentenced

women, their families and professionals who support them.

The FPI's fellowship programme is designed to support graduate students to engage with the nonviolent philosophy of the late civil rights activist and politician John Robert Lewis (1940-2020), examining the historical context of the philosophy, its principles and strategies, and its applicability to contemporary issues.

CELEBRATING DPRU STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

During the past year, the following DPRU research students successfully completed their postgraduate studies: Lucrezia Rizzelli and Amelia Inglis graduated from the DPhil Criminology programme, while Aimee Clesi graduated from the MPhil Criminology and Criminal Justice programme. DPRU Research Intern Jackson Foster received prizes for his MSc performance and dissertation.



Lucrezia Rizzelli's DPhil thesis examined the decision-making processes of Indonesian drug offenders in light of the country's highly punitive approach to drug crimes, including capital punishment.

Challenging classical rational choice theory, which assumes a risk-reward calculus deterred by punishment severity, this research investigated offenders' decision-making and the factors influencing it.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with prisoners, the research revealed a complex interaction of individual, cultural and systemic factors. Immediate rewards of drug crime and difficult personal circumstances often led drug offenders to discount legal risks. Corruption in the criminal justice system introduced further uncertainty within the rational risk assessment, and the trust the interviewees had in their recruiters, as well as personality traits such as impulsivity and fatalism played a role.

Lucrezia's study highlights how inadequate a highly punitive system based on a strict conceptualisation of rational choice theory is in deterring drug offenses within the Indonesian context.



Amelia Inglis' DPhil thesis explored the experiences of homicide victims' families ('co-victims') in the US, assessing the psychological and cognitive impacts of protracted capital appeals processes.

Through interviews with co-victims in cases in which the defendant was sentenced to death and cases in which the defendant was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, the thesis reveals that the lengthy delay between the death sentence and an execution, and the specifics of the appeal process, complicates the grieving

process for co-victims. It finds that the judicial system does not consistently provide 'closure' to co-victims.

The thesis explores these impacts from the perspective of a 'three-phase' model of co-victim engagement through capital judicial processes: first, the pre-trial and trial stage; second, during delays arising from post-conviction review; and third, the impacts of the prolonged timeframe. The third phase highlights how co-victims make strategic decisions to engage or disengage from the criminal process once they are clear that it does not bring closure or 'therapeutic' effects, providing a further argument for the abolition of the death penalty in the US.

CELEBRATING DPRU STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS (CONT.)



Aimee Clesi's MPhil thesis examined the phenomenon of abolitionist de facto (ADF) (in practice) states in the US.

These states, located primarily in the Midwestern and Western US, retain the death penalty in law but have not carried out any executions in at least 10 years. Focusing on Kansas and Wyoming, her thesis challenges the assumption that ADF status inevitably leads to abolition in law.

Aimee's study analyses death sentences, state supreme court rulings, legislative efforts to repeal the death penalty, prosecutorial decisions and public attitudes toward the death penalty to understand how ADF persists in these states.

It argues that antecedent historical conditions are responsible for a 'cowboy culture' and the contemporary endorsement of capital punishment as a means of maintaining order and justice, which in turn affects the survival of the death penalty. It also posits that race, class and an 'othering' dynamic have influenced who is deemed worthy of execution in these states, influencing the outcomes of critical junctures that set ADF into motion. Lastly, it proposes that 'local legal cultures' explain how certain jurisdictions start, and continue, a pattern of execution (or not), and how certain contingent events could have turned ADF into abolition.



Jackson Foster, 2023-24 DPRU Research Intern, was awarded the Roger Hood prize for best overall performance on the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice programme, and the dissertation prize for his MSc thesis 'Understanding and moving beyond de facto death penalty abolition in Belize'.

Jackson's dissertation - the first academic work to centre on the death penalty in Belize, an abolitionist de facto jurisdiction which has not carried out an execution since 1985 - identifies and analyses the major obstacles to formal abolition.

Adopting a quasi-historical, archival approach, it documents the use of capital punishment in nineteenth-century British Honduras, as Belize was formerly known. It argues that the application of the death penalty imbued the sanction with a sovereignty-affirming symbolism - a dimension that remains valuable today. It also reflects on the motifs that shaped a peak in media coverage of capital punishment in the early 2010s and charts a subsequent decline, to the point where the death penalty has currently become an issue with low media salience.

Against the major obstacles of sovereignty-symbolism and low media salience, the dissertation also explores potential paths to formal abolition. It suggests these routes lie through legislation backed by a decolonial movement that is already influential in the country.

In November 2024, Jackson published [a paper based on his thesis](#) in the DPRU Research Paper Series (detailed below), on the theme of the salience of the death penalty as an issue in Belize.

UPDATES ON THE DPRU BLOG

The DPRU Blog has now been active for four years, publishing posts from academic researchers, lawyers, criminal justice practitioners, human rights advocates and graduate students on a wide range of topics related to the death penalty, from various theoretical and empirical perspectives.

The screenshot shows the top section of the DPRU Blog website. It features a search bar with five input fields: 'title or content', 'Author', 'Keywords', 'Start', and 'End'. Below the search bar are two additional controls: 'Items per page' (set to 10) and a 'Filter' button. Below the search bar, three blog posts are displayed in a list format. Each post includes a title, a date, an author name, and a representative image.

- Abolition, retention and capital punishment in twentieth-century India**
22 April 2024
by Alastair McClure
Image: Indian national flag
- Witness: An Insider's Narrative of the Carceral State**
16 April 2024
by Lyle C May
Image: Book cover for 'WITNESS'
- Treason and the death penalty in sub-Saharan Africa**
26 March 2024
by Diana Peel
Image: A classical building with columns and a star on top

Image: A selection of recent posts on the DPRU Blog.

The DPRU Blog's publications from the last year have covered a very wide range of topics and jurisdictions, including the following posts:

- Diana Peel, '[The politics behind Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act](#)'
- Jon Yorke and Joel Zivot, '[Two damnable trilogies: The U.S. Supreme Court's jurisprudence on "method-of-execution" challenges and resultant botched and failed executions in Alabama](#)'
- Carolyn Hoyle, '[The DPRU honours Robert Badinter \(1928-2024\)](#)'
- Diana Peel, '[Treason and the death penalty in sub-Saharan Africa](#)'
- Lyle C May, '[Witness: An insider's narrative of the carceral state](#)'
- Alastair McClure, '[Abolition, retention and capital punishment in twentieth-century India](#)'
- Jackson Foster, '[Researching the enigma of de facto abolition: Notes on Kenya and Belize](#)'
- Saul Lehrfreund, '[Hakamada case: World's longest-serving death row inmate acquitted in Japan](#)'
- Michelle Miao, '[Form without function: The surprising irrelevance of legal representation in Chinese death penalty trials](#)'

During 2023, the DPRU was generously awarded a small grant (£4,844) from the Faculty of Law's Faculty Internet Engagement Fund to develop a new series of Q&A interviews with death penalty lawyers around the world, with a particular emphasis on the work of those practicing in the Global South. The interviews addressed participants' notable past cases, career trajectories, emotional motivations, challenges in their work and the particularities of working in the jurisdictions that they practice in.

UPDATES ON THE DPRU BLOG (CONT.)

Over the past year, the DPRU Blog published new Q&A interviews with:

- [Edmund Bon, Lawyer, Malaysia](#)
- [Fulgence Massawe, Legal and Human Rights Centre \(LHRC\), Tanzania](#)
- [Essen Lee, Lawyer, Taiwan](#)
- [Chris Kerkering, Katiba Institute, Kenya](#)
- [Elshareef Ali Mohammed, Sudanese Human Rights Initiative \(SHRI\), Sudan](#)
- [Timothy Bryant, Lawyer, Kenya](#)

In October 2024, the DPRU was pleased to be awarded a further grant (£2,506) from the Faculty of Law's Faculty Internet Engagement Fund to provide research assistance to support another new series of articles on the DPRU Blog, focusing on the theme of religion and the death penalty. We intend that the new series will present expert interviews and research articles on contemporary intersections between religion and capital punishment from a range of jurisdictions worldwide, particularly in the Global South - a topic that has received relatively little scholarly attention to date.

The DPRU Blog continues to welcome new contributions: guidelines for submissions, editorial policies and contact details are available [on the DPRU website](#).

DPRU LAUNCHES NEW RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

In December 2023, the DPRU launched the new [DPRU Research Paper Series](#) to promote dissemination of new research on topics related to the death penalty through articles of about 4-5,000 words, drawing on original empirical or library-based research.

The six research papers published so far are:

- **DPRU Research Paper No. 1** – Carolyn Hoyle, '[Efforts towards abolition of the death penalty: Challenges and prospects](#)' (December 2023)
- **DPRU Research Paper No. 2** – Helena D.M. Lagreou, '[Blaming it on the past: Usages of the Middle Ages in contemporary discourses of the death penalty in England](#)' (December 2023)
- **DPRU Research Paper No. 3** – Brian Egan, '[The politics of capital punishment for foreign nationals in Iran](#)' (December 2023)
- **DPRU Research Paper No. 4** – Vittorio Sassi, '[Is life without parole "the new death penalty"? Reformulating the identity critique](#)' (December 2023)
- **DPRU Research Paper No. 5** – Vittorio Sassi, '["Beccaria who?" A brief look at the life and thought of Cesare Beccaria](#)' (October 2024)
- **DPRU Research Paper No. 6** – Jackson Foster, '[The issue of salience in abolitionist de facto Belize](#)' (November 2024)

Further details about the DPRU Research Paper Series, as well as author guidelines and editorial policies, are available [on the DPRU website](#).

DPRU RESEARCH

ESRC RESEARCH PROJECT ON DRUG OFFENDING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The DPRU is now in the third year of its Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project, '[Mapping the Political Economy of Drugs and the Death Penalty in Southeast Asia](#)' (2022–2025), conducted in partnership with the Death Penalty Project.



To better understand who is convicted of drug offences in Southeast Asia and whether capital punishment serves as a deterrent, during 2024 our local partner researchers in Indonesia (Atma Jaya University and Karisma) completed two sets of interviews: one with drug offenders living on death row, and the other with those involved in the drug trade living in the wider community.

The community study, which included 100 interviews across Jakarta, Makassar, Medan and Denpasar, focused on understanding the personal circumstances, risk assessments and decision-making processes of individuals involved in the drug trade who had not been recently convicted. Interviews for the prison study took place in Jakarta, North Sumatera, Central Java, Riau, East Java, South Sulawesi and Aceh, involving 233 individuals convicted of drug offences. The majority of the interviewees had been sentenced to death, but a minority were sentenced to life imprisonment. Since we were only able to interview a small number of women on death row in Indonesia, we have also worked with our partner organisation, Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Masyarakat (LBHM) to collate statistics and case studies of women committing death-eligible drug offences.

Lastly, in partnership with Harm Reduction International (HRI), the DPRU is analysing Court of Appeal judgments of drug offenders sentenced to death in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. This part of the study seeks to establish if state narratives that capital punishment effectively targets high-level drug 'kingpins' are supported by records on those caught and punished by the state. The DPRU will present these findings at the Harm Reduction International (HRI) Conference in Bogotá, Colombia, in April 2025.

Dissemination of the results of our main research outputs from the project will begin towards the end of 2025, across Southeast Asia, as we engage with local academics, civil society, policymakers and key stakeholders within the criminal justice system.

NEW DPRU RESEARCH ON DRUG POLICY IN INDONESIA



Image: Dr Lucy Harry (left); Professor Carolyn Hoyle (right)

In September 2024, Carolyn Hoyle and DPRU Research Associate Dr Lucy Harry published a new research article on drug policy in Indonesia in the journal *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*.

The article, titled 'Diversion or death? The moral framework shaping bifurcated punishments for drug offences in Indonesia' addresses the moral framework shaping Indonesia's drug policy regime, in which most drug offenders are sentenced to imprisonment or death, but some 'minor' offenders are instead diverted to drug treatment centres.

The article draws on the experiences and perceptions of 136 Indonesian criminal justice professionals, through in-depth qualitative interviewing and focus groups, to explore the moralities that shape drug policy, criminal justice professionals' interpretation and application of laws and policies, and judgments about who is deserving of diversion. This research highlights the analytical potential of moralities such as 'compassion' and 'traditionalism' in criminal justice research and policy in Southeast Asia. Understanding the formation and navigation of these normative values may assist in challenging harsh penal policy in Indonesia and the wider region.

The article can be read in full on an open-access basis via the [Drugs: Education, Policy and Practice journal](#).

PRESENTING DPRU RESEARCH AT THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY CONFERENCE



Image: Daniel Cullen speaks at the European Society of Criminology conference, Bucharest, September 2024.

In September 2024, Project Manager Daniel Cullen represented the DPRU at the European Society of Criminology (ESC) Annual Conference in Bucharest, Romania, held at the University of Bucharest from 11-14 September.

His presentation, titled 'Retributive and restorative approaches to drug offending in Indonesia', covered the simultaneous use of a punitive, criminal justice-focused response to the illicit drug trade in Indonesia alongside the championing of a 'restorative justice' approach that is applied to some drug use cases, leading to diversion to rehabilitation rather than imprisonment.

Over 40,000 individuals went through recognised rehabilitation treatment processes in Indonesia during 2021. However, the restorative justice approach has been implemented in a highly fragmented manner through numerous institutions, and has led to reports of forced treatment, corruption and extortion, and arbitrariness in the diversion process. Daniel's presentation drew on interviews with prisoners serving sentences for drug offences in Indonesia and interviews with civil society organisations working on drug policy issues to examine the implementation of the restorative justice model while embedded within a retributive drug policy regime.

OPEN RESEARCH PROJECT ON ABOLITIONIST DE FACTO (ADF) STATUS



Photo credit: Henry Mühlfordt via [Wikimedia](#), licensed under Creative Commons CC BY-SA.

The DPRU is in the second year of its Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN)-funded research project: '[Abolitionist in practice: Developing a new framework for policymakers in countries which do not execute](#)' (2023-25), in collaboration with the Death Penalty Project (DPP).

States which retain death penalty laws are classified as ADF by the UN once they reach a period of 10 years without an execution. There are approximately 40 ADF states worldwide, primarily in Africa and the Caribbean, and countries can remain ADF for many decades. Yet although executions are

not carried out in ADF states, death sentences can still be imposed. This means that individuals can remain on death row, in some cases leading to death row populations of several hundred.

The project is focused on two policy issues: the obstacles to abolition that policymakers in ADF states face today; and the adequacy of the ADF policy framework, originally conceptualised 50 years ago, when ADF status was seen as constituting a brief phase inevitably preceding full abolition, requiring little action or reflection. Today, this can result in entrenched retention without executions rather than facilitating full abolition.

Over the first year, the project team began to engage with academic experts and policymakers in ADF states, in our effort to further develop the intellectual framework underpinning the ADF concept, including those from our two case study countries, Kenya (which has not executed since 1987) and Belize (which has not executed since 1985).

In April 2024, Carolyn Hoyle, Parvais Jabbar (DPP) and Daniel Cullen visited Nairobi, Kenya, to meet with experts, lawyers, CSO representatives and academics to discuss Kenya's ADF death penalty, with further online interviews conducted since. In July 2024, Parvais Jabbar visited Belize ahead of another planned research visit by the DPRU/DPP team during 2025.



Image: A screenshot from the DPRU's forthcoming interactive map of abolitionist de facto (ADF) states.

In May 2024, the DPRU was awarded an additional small grant (£2,250) from the Faculty of Law's Faculty Internet Engagement Fund (FIEF) towards the development of an interactive online 'map' visually representing the world's ADF jurisdictions, developed with assistance from the [Social Spark](#) digital development agency. The map will be launched along with the final outputs from the research project in mid-2025, providing an authoritative and up-to-date record of states' abolitionist, retentionist or ADF status, along with further details in 'country profiles' for each ADF state.

DPRU MEMBERS

DPRU STAFF



[Carolyn Hoyle](#), Director of the DPRU and Professor of Criminology, has been researching and teaching on the death penalty for almost 20 years. She works closely with the Death Penalty Project on research that explores the rationales for retention, not least deterrence and public opinion, and uses that research to engage with governments and policymakers and to support civil society organisations in their efforts to bring about abolition or progressive restriction of capital punishment. Her work focuses primarily on Southeast Asia and on Commonwealth countries across Africa and the Caribbean.



[Daniel Cullen](#) is Project Manager in the DPRU, where he is lead researcher on the project 'Abolitionist in practice: Challenging the death penalty in countries which do not execute' (2023-25), as well as contributing to the DPRU's wider portfolio of research projects. He also holds the role of Managing Editor of the DPRU Blog. He previously worked in the Strategic Litigation Unit at Amnesty International and with the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva. He is currently undertaking the Bar training course at the Inns of Court College of Advocacy (ICCA) as an Inner Temple scholar.



[Lucrezia Rizzelli](#) is a Research Officer in the DPRU, where she works on the project 'Mapping the Political Economy of Drugs and the Death Penalty in Southeast Asia' (2022-25). Her doctoral research explored decision-making amongst Indonesian drug offenders, and she collaborated with Professor Carolyn Hoyle in analysing the data for the Death Penalty Project report 'Living With a Death Sentence in Kenya: Prisoners' Experiences of Crime, Punishment and Death Row'.

DPRU PARTNERS



[Parvais Jabbar](#) is Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of the Death Penalty Project and Visiting Professor of Practice at the University of Oxford Faculty of Law. He has for over two decades represented individuals facing the death penalty around the world at the appellate level and before international bodies. A recognised expert on the death penalty and human rights law, he has an MBE for his services to international human rights.

DPRU PARTNERS (CONT.)



[Saul Lehrfreund](#) is Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of the Death Penalty Project and Visiting Professor of Law at the University of Reading. He has dedicated his career to representing prisoners facing the death penalty in criminal and constitutional proceedings and also before international tribunals and courts. He is a leading authority on capital punishment and international human rights law and has an MBE for services to international human rights.

DPRU RESEARCH ASSOCIATES



[Dr Ron Dudai](#) is an Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Ben Gurion University. His work has been published in leading journals including *British Journal of Sociology*, *British Journal of Criminology*, *Law & Social Inquiry*, and *Punishment & Society*, and his monograph [Penality in the Underground: The IRA's Pursuit of Informers](#) (2022) is published by Oxford University Press.



[Dr Lucy Harry](#) is a Research Associate in the DPRU. Her doctoral research focused on cases of women sentenced to death for drug trafficking in Malaysia. As part of this, she conducted empirical research in Kuala Lumpur, and was a Visiting Scholar at Monash University, Malaysia.



[Jocelyn Hutton](#) is a Research Associate in the DPRU. She previously lead the [Mapping Death Row](#) project, researching foreign nationals sentenced to death across the Middle East and Asia. Jocelyn was also called to the Bar of England and Wales in 2013.



[Sabrina Mahtani](#) is a Zambian/British lawyer. She co-founded AdvocAid, an NGO that provides access to justice for women in detention in Sierra Leone. The organisation has freed six women on death row. Sabrina formerly worked for Amnesty International and The Elders and currently curates [Women Beyond Walls](#). She is an independent expert on access to justice for women and consults for a variety of organisations.

DPRU RESEARCH ASSOCIATES (CONT.)



[Professor William Schabas](#) is a specialist on capital punishment, especially on its international legal aspects. His research has addressed the evolving case law of bodies like the European Court of Human Rights, the use of international authorities and precedents in domestic litigation, and factors such as public opinion and global trends in countries that still retain the death penalty.



[Dr Claudia Stoicescu](#) is a Research Associate in the Centre for Criminology and an Associate Professor in Public Health at Monash University, Indonesia. She is a social epidemiologist and policy analyst with expertise in HIV, gender-based violence, drug use and drug policy.



[Professor Jon Yorke](#) is Professor of Human Rights and the Director of the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University. He is a member of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Pro-Bono Lawyers Panel, in which he advises the British Government on death penalty matters. His current major research focus is on the theory of 'utopia' in international law and his external work now focuses upon the UN's Universal Periodic Review and the filing of Stakeholder Reports in the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

DPRU INTERNS

Since 2018, the DPRU and the Death Penalty Project (DPP) have collaborated on [Research Internships](#), with Oxford Criminology MSc or DPhil students conducting small death penalty research projects.

In the academic year 2023-24, three DPRU-DPP Research Interns supported the DPRU's research projects: **Francesca Rigg**, **Jackson Foster** and **Hanqing Xu**.

For the current academic year 2024-25, three new DPRU-DPP Research Interns are focusing on the 'Abolitionist in practice: Challenging the death penalty in countries which do not execute' research project: **Alexa Crowe**, **Bernice Chen** and **Elena Borhoata Cucu**.

Over the summer of 2024, **Bernice Chen** worked as a DPRU Summer Intern, researching and drafting 'country profiles' on the death penalty status of ADF states.

DPRU RESEARCH STUDENTS

Five Oxford DPhil students who are conducting research on death penalty topics are currently affiliated as members of the DPRU:



Aimee Clesi is a DPhil candidate focusing on judicial and legislative paths to abolishing the death penalty in the United States. Her research explores the contingent nature of the death penalty, its entrenchment and interpretation under the Eighth Amendment, and its localisation to the American South, where she plans to practice law. She has worked throughout the judiciary in Florida, including at the state Supreme Court and federal trial court, and recently completed a visiting fellowship at Northeastern Law School's Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project.



Amanda Clift-Matthews is a practising barrister specialising in criminal law and human rights, with a particular emphasis on capital cases and miscarriages of justice. She was formerly in-house counsel and Legal Director at the Death Penalty Project and has represented individuals facing a death sentence at the appellate level throughout the Caribbean, Asia and Africa, including before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. She is a co-author of '[Sentencing in Capital Cases](#)' (2018) and was shortlisted for the 'Employed Barrister of the Year' award by the Bar Council in 2020. Her DPhil research focuses on capital drug trafficking cases in Singapore.



Matthew Goldberg is a DPhil candidate researching the prohibition of the death penalty in international law, with a focus on human rights forums at the United Nations and the role of digital methods in the development and realisation of human rights. He is an experienced criminal barrister, has lectured in criminal law at King's College, London, and is a former president of Repeal Australia. In 2021, he was elected President of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty.



Abdul Rashid Ismail is undertaking DPhil research on the abolition of the death penalty in Malaysia. Rashid actively litigates in the Malaysian courts on behalf of death row prisoners and those facing capital charges. He has been and continues to be involved in landmark constitutional cases involving the mandatory death sentence, the rights to a fair trial and the rights of the vulnerable including the mentally ill facing execution. His research explores the factors that contribute to the movement for abolition in Malaysia and those that militate against abolition.



Serene Singh is a Rhodes and Truman Scholar and completed her Master's in Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government. Originally from Colorado, USA, she graduated with Bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Journalism which were awarded summa cum laude honors, as well as attaining a minor in Leadership Studies. For her DPhil, she is researching women on death row in the United States. More specifically, she is seeking to identify the influence of topics like 'cruel and unusual punishment' on the ways in which women undergoing the criminal justice system's capital punishment are experiencing justice.

DPRU IMPACT & ENGAGEMENT

PROFESSOR JON YORKE'S LEGAL ADVOCACY AGAINST NITROGEN GAS EXECUTION IN ALABAMA



On 25 January 2024, Kenneth Smith was executed by the State of Alabama, using a new and untested execution process of nitrogen gas inhalation. Prior to the execution, [Professor Jon Yorke](#), DPRU Research Associate and Director of the Centre for Human Rights at Birmingham City University (left), undertook extensive advocacy and media engagement about the case, applying his international legal expertise.

Together with Dr Joel Zivot, Associate Professor of Anesthesiology and Surgery at Emory University School of Medicine, Professor Yorke submitted a legal complaint on behalf of Kenneth Smith to the UN Special Rapporteur on Executions. In response to this complaint, four UN Special Rapporteurs issued a joint statement expressing alarm about the scheduled execution, which they warned would "result in a painful and humiliating death", and appealed to federal and state authorities to halt the execution.

The case, and the UN experts' statement, received media coverage from [The Guardian](#) on 3 January, which included quotes from Professor Yorke. [The New York Sun](#) (paywall) also covered the case on 10 January, quoting Professor Yorke, as did an earlier article on the [JURIST website](#) in late December. Professor Yorke and Dr Zivot also spoke at two panel events in London and Oxford to discuss the legal and ethical issues surrounding the case.

VISIT TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, STRASBOURG

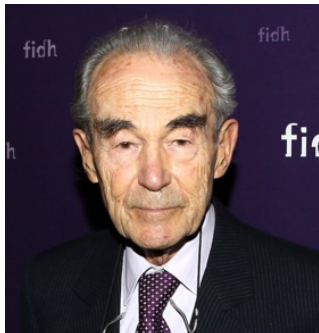


In June 2024, Carolyn Hoyle and Parvais Jabbar of the Death Penalty Project visited the Strasbourg headquarters of the Council of Europe (CoE), the 46-member intergovernmental organisation focused on the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe.

During their visit, arranged at the invitation of the CoE's Directorate of Human Rights, Carolyn and Parvais presented findings from DPRU-DPP research on the theme of deterrence and the death penalty.

Image: Carolyn Hoyle and Parvais Jabbar (DPP) speaking in Strasbourg.

CAROLYN HOYLE PUBLISHES REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF ROBERT BADINTER



*Image: Robert Badinter.
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In February 2024, Carolyn Hoyle published a reflection on the life of the French lawyer and politician Robert Badinter (1928-2024), considering his contributions to the abolition of the death penalty in France and around the world.

As Justice Minister in the government of Francois Mitterand, Badinter was responsible for guiding legislation for abolition of the death penalty in France through the National Assembly and the Senate, leading to its enactment in September 1981. The last execution in France was carried out in 1977 (by guillotine) and the last death sentence imposed in 1981 (with the prisoner ultimately re-sentenced to life imprisonment and released on licence in 2000).

Carolyn highlighted Badinter's conviction that it is possible for democracies to achieve a broad measure of consent for abolition, even when it is widely believed that a majority of the public are in favour of retention. Following the path suggested by Badinter, the DPRU and the Death Penalty Project's work in retentionist jurisdictions often seeks to explore what the public really thinks about capital punishment, notwithstanding governments' assertions that public opinion supports retention.

In the decades since abolition, France has become a vocal opponent of capital punishment, consistently voting for a worldwide moratorium on executions and encouraging the global movement for abolition. The experience of France, as of other abolitionist nations, suggests that political leaders elsewhere could take the lead in abolishing capital punishment, without fear that the public will rise up against them or punish them at the polls.

Carolyn's article can be read in full on [the DPRU website](#).

CAROLYN HOYLE PRESENTS ON WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS IN JAPAN AT UN COMMISSION



Image: Carolyn Hoyle (second from right) speaks at the UN CCPCJ in Vienna, May 2024.

In May 2024, Carolyn Hoyle presented to the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in Vienna on the topic of 'Wrongful Convictions and the Death Penalty', alongside other speakers invited by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations.

Her presentation focused on the failures of procedural safeguards in Japan to protect those sentenced to death, examining the Nagayama standards, the lay judge system, the role and effect of victim participation, and the lack of mandatory post-conviction review.

CELEBRATING ABOLITION IN ZIMBABWE

On 31 December 2024, President Emmerson Mnangagwa assented to legislation to abolish the death penalty in Zimbabwe, making it the 128th country to end capital punishment. Zimbabwe had not carried out an execution for almost 20 years and so had previously been categorised as an abolitionist de facto (ADF) state. Its courts were still handing down death sentences and more than 60 prisoners were being held on death row. All of these former death row prisoners will now be resentenced; some are likely to be released without the need to serve further time in prison.

The process of legal abolition in Zimbabwe began with the introduction of a Private Members' Bill in 2023, seeking to amend Zimbabwe's criminal law to remove the punishment. The legislation was adopted by the Cabinet in February 2024 and approved by the Senate in December 2024.



Working together with local partners including the NGO Veritas as part of the movement for abolition, the DPRU's Carolyn Hoyle and our partners at the Death Penalty Project (DPP) engaged with Zimbabwean authorities to discuss efforts towards abolition. A joint report by the DPP and Veritas on the views of opinion leaders in Zimbabwe on capital punishment, '[Time to Abolish the Death Penalty in Zimbabwe](#)', was published in 2020. The report was authored by Carolyn Hoyle, with President Mnangagwa providing a foreword which expressed his support for abolition.

On 19 December 2024, Carolyn Hoyle and the DPP's Parvais Jabbar appeared on [The Conversation Weekly podcast](#) to discuss Zimbabwe's journey towards abolition. Carolyn and Parvais also reflected on the abolition process in an article published [on the DPRU Blog](#).

AMANDA CLIFT-MATTHEWS NAMED AS THE TIMES 'LAWYER OF THE WEEK'



On 7 November 2024, barrister and DPRU DPhil candidate Amanda Clift-Matthews was named as 'Lawyer of the Week' by *The Times* newspaper. Amanda was recognised for her role in an appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) brought by the Death Penalty Project (DPP), involving a murder case from Bermuda.

Amanda was counsel for Julian Washington, who in 2014 was convicted of murder and attempted murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of 30 years. On appeal to the JCPC, it was found that a miscarriage of justice had occurred and the panel formally quashed Washington's conviction. He is now a free man after spending more than 10 years wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. As a result of this case, the Bermudan government is now reviewing nearly 250 other cases to identify other potential miscarriages of justice.

Alongside her practice at the Bar, Amanda is currently completing DPhil research with the DPRU on capital drug trafficking cases in Singapore. Her interview is available on [The Times](#) website (paywalled) and further details about the case are available on [the DPP website](#). The case also received media coverage from [The Justice Gap](#) and [The Royal Gazette](#).

MATTHEW GOLDBERG HOLDS INTERNATIONAL LECTURE SERIES

In September and October 2024, DPRU DPhil student Matthew Goldberg held the first two in a series of three international lectures reflecting on the process of universal abolition of the death penalty, collectively titled 'Expecting an End to the Death Penalty'.

Since 2021, Matthew has been President of the [World Coalition Against the Death Penalty](#), and often represents the World Coalition before United Nations forums and other regional bodies. He draws upon experience as a criminal barrister and Australian civil society representative to the UN Human Rights Council.

Co-hosted by the DPRU and the World Coalition, the lecture series was arranged to coincide with the UN General Assembly's 2024 resolution for an international moratorium on the death penalty, in order to imaginatively rearticulate the global vision for abolition.

The arguments made in the lectures seek to counteract the proposition that expectations of international consensus on abolition should be scaled down in the current political climate. Matthew intends for a philosophy of urgency to emerge from the lectures that may be translated into major legal reform.



Image: Matthew Goldberg speaks at Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne.

Matthew's first lecture, on the theme of 'idealism and naivety', was hosted at Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, introduced by Professor Florence Bellivier. The second, on the theme of 'hyper-rationality', was hosted at the Bonavero Centre, University of Oxford, introduced by Professor Kate O'Regan. The third and final lecture in the series is due to be held at Columbia University, New York, in early 2025.

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT CHALLENGE TO THE DEATH PENALTY IN TAIWAN

In March 2024, Carolyn Hoyle contributed expert evidence in a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the death penalty in Taiwan, in conjunction with the Death Penalty Project (DPP). The challenge was brought before the Constitutional Court by the [Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty \(TAEDP\)](#) on behalf of 37 individuals on death row in the country. Taiwan retains the death penalty for over fifty offences, including murder, robbery and drug trafficking, and last carried out an execution in 2020.

The DPP was invited to provide legal analysis and expert evidence by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Taiwan, who intervened in the proceedings. The DPP argued that Taiwan's use of the death penalty fails to uphold the fundamental rights provided for under its Constitution and its international obligations.

The DPP instructed Carolyn Hoyle and Professor Jeffrey Fagan, of Columbia University, New York, to provide expert academic evidence in support of their arguments. Professor Fagan's evidence showed that death sentences and executions have no deterrent effect on serious crime compared to other punishments. Carolyn's evidence made clear that the death penalty in Taiwan is inherently arbitrary and therefore inconsistent with the right to life.



Image: The national flag of Taiwan.

Photo credit: Matthew Fang via [Flickr](#). Licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0.

After holding a hearing in April 2024, the Constitutional Court delivered its judgment in September 2024. The court concluded that whilst sentences of death are lawful in Taiwan, its current use of the death penalty was unconstitutional. This decision means the state can only seek the death penalty in a narrow category of very serious cases, and fewer people will now face the threat of execution. However, despite imposing wide-ranging limitations, the court refused to strike down the penalty completely.

The DPP described this outcome as a “missed opportunity”, while Carolyn commented: “I am disappointed by the decision of the Constitutional Court not to abolish the death penalty but I am proud to have supported DPP and TAEDP’s efforts to end the use of capital punishment.”

DPRU AND DPP HOST 'THE DEATH PENALTY: THE NEXT 10 YEARS' ROUNDTABLE

On 15 November 2024, the DPRU and our partner organisation the Death Penalty Project (DPP) hosted a one-day roundtable meeting on the future of the death penalty at the DPP's headquarters in London.

Bringing together academics, legal practitioners, policy and medical experts, and research students, the event was intended to take stock of the status of the death penalty worldwide today and consider how further academic research could assist participants' work in advocacy, campaigning and legal challenges to the death penalty over the next decade.



Image: Participants at the DPRU-DPP roundtable on the future of the death penalty, 15 November 2024.

In the afternoon session of the roundtable, Oxford Criminology research students and graduates Aimee Clesi, Amanda Clift-Matthews, Matthew Goldberg, Amelia Inglis, Lucrezia Rizzelli, Vittorio Sassi and Serene Singh each provided briefings on their research work on the various theoretical and empirical aspects of death penalty.

The event was made possible by generous financial support from Professor Michael Radelet of the University of Colorado Boulder.

