



The issue of salience in abolitionist de facto Belize

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Introduction

Belize is a country in Central America, bordered by Mexico, Guatemala and the Caribbean Sea. It is relatively small, hosts c. 400,000 inhabitants (at a very low population density) and its economy primarily relies on agriculture (citrus, sugar) and tourism.¹ It is also a land of contradictions: it has been labelled by businessman John McAfee a 'banana republic' and by travel pamphleteers a 'jewel,' it is Anglophone and culturally Caribbean despite being part of the Latin American mainland, and its people often express pride at having been both a British colony and an independent nation. Prominent among these contradictions is Belize's death penalty regime: the state has not executed a person since 1985, passed down a capital sentence since 2005, or held a prisoner on death row since 2015.² Yet it still maintains capital punishment in both its constitution and criminal code. It is

therefore classified by the United Nations as abolitionist de facto (ADF).³ Research demonstrates that support for retaining the death penalty in ADF jurisdictions is usually weak.⁴ Why has Belize resisted the formal abolition of capital punishment in its law? And how can abolitionist advocates best pursue change to that end?

This article presents one obstacle to formal abolition in the country: that the death penalty is simply *not a pressing problem*. A good deal of literature has been written about the salience of capital punishment among the publics of retentionist states, but, so far, no Belizean analysis.⁵ Only one paper, by Roger Hood and Florence Seemungal, has focused on the media's role in producing discourse on/awareness of capital punishment in the Caribbean.⁶

This paper will proceed as follows. First, it will examine media coverage of the death penalty in

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Belize at the last peak of coverage (the early 2010s), uncovering four themes that dictated discussion and debate at that moment: public sentiment, deterrence, international influence and criminal justice dysfunction. Second, it will detail the subjects that now outcompete capital punishment for press attention: the River Sarstoon border, violent crime and criminal justice dysfunction. Third, it will depict how, due to silence on the issue, Belizean politicians and opinion formers are able to leave the current ADF status quo unchallenged. In each section, this article will consult leading Belizean newspapers, as well as TV and radio stations (Channel 5 and 7 News, LOVE FM, the *San Pedro Sun* and *Amandala*).⁷ Such a selection—though it excludes, by nature of their online inaccessibility, the major political parties’ papers—constitutes a representative geographic and ideological sample.

1. Coverage and commentary in the Belizean press and public

Whilst the death penalty currently occupies a peripheral position in the Belizean press and politics, the anecdotes, quotes and motifs that constructed previous media coverage can help illuminate the penumbras of popular opinion today. Over five years have passed since a major Belizean paper published (online) an editorial on capital punishment: ‘Cruel Irony: our country’s guilt,’ written by *Amandala*’s once-Editor-in-Chief Russell Vellos.⁸ This 2019 editorial expresses themes that defined coverage of the sanction when it last seized popular consciousness: public sentiment, international influence, the inefficacy of Belizean criminal justice and the deterrent potential of death.

The editorial begins by suggesting that the “next person who is brought before the court for a

‘revenge murder’ should sue the state for negligence in delivering justice, ... [since] all too often [their] murder ... is in retaliation for a murder that went unpunished.”⁹ To understand the phenomena of ‘revenge murder,’ Vellos develops a rather tidy narrative of foreign involvement and domestic incompetence. An uptick in retaliatory killings—and the ineffectual prosecutorial infrastructure it is said to represent—was a product of Belize “fully enlist[ing] in the Americans’ war against drugs.”¹⁰ The jurisdiction’s anti-drug efforts at the behest of a stronger government “caused the murder rate ... to skyrocket,” and ultimately proved feckless because police and prosecutors struggled to deliver justice at scale.¹¹ An arrest for murder transformed from an “almost automatic conviction” to “almost a show.”¹² Belize also received pressure from Europe with respect to policing and punishing fatal violence. The European Union (EU) attached to its aid and trade a philosophy—namely, in Vellos’ exaggeration, “that it is better for ten, even a hundred murderers to go free than for one innocent person to be hung [*sic*].”¹³ Still, Vellos notes that, on the issue of capital punishment, “Belize [has] full[y] compli[ed] with orders from abroad and local consciences ... since 1985.”¹⁴ (The concession that some ‘local consciences’ might favour progressive restriction is unusual; for, as we will soon see, the press and politicians largely presume popular support for retention and the obsolescence of the death penalty and foreign interests is a regularly-propagated connection.) Such compliance, the piece concludes, is the root of the revenge problem. To resolve its quagmire of international origins and to deter retaliatory killing, the state ought to deliver fatal, final justice:

There must be sufficient punishment for the crime of murder, punishment sufficient to discourage the need for individuals to seek revenge. It is stunning, cruel irony that

what started out as a fear of putting an innocent man to death has led to the murders of many, and made murderers of many who would be free of blood on their hands if the state had done its duty.¹⁵

The narrative of the 2019 editorial coalesces many of the themes that characterised the last zenith in death penalty coverage, in the early 2010s. Several factors contributed to the vigour with which capital punishment was discussed then, including murders with victims from vulnerable classes (children, women and minorities) and resultant public demonstrations, Prime Minister Dean Barrow proposing a constitutional amendment to facilitate executions (exhibiting the mutual reinforcement of popular action, political overtures and press attention) and rulings from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) (like *Maxo Tido v. R* [2011] UKPC 16) that strengthened the worst-of-worst/'no possibility for reform' standard.¹⁶

From 2011 to 2013, at least three broadcast segments and an editorial highlighted the influence of international norms on Belize and its death penalty.¹⁷ This reportage mostly situated 'foreign' human rights discourse in juxtaposition to domestic public opinion. In a quote broadcast by 7 News, PM Barrow asserted that an amendment moved by his government—to eliminate execution challenges "on the basis [of a] constitutional right" against the sanction—was "going to be extremely popular with the public."¹⁸ He ceded the prospect of "difficulty internationally," especially amongst the "western European democracies," but reasoned defiantly that "they don't live in the small society that we live in."¹⁹ Similarly, a 2013 *Amandala* editorial blamed the threat of an EU citrus fruit boycott for the unlikelihood of a referendum on reintroducing executions: "It is not the will of the people that forms the basis in this aspect of our penal

system."²⁰ Notably, when contrasting international norms to local attitudes, both the 7 News segment and *Amandala* editorial attributed to the public a deterrent rationale for retention. Barrow claimed the aforementioned amendment was "what we have to do for the protection of citizens in our society"; more directly, the editorial observed that "the majority of Belizeans might think that [capital punishment] would reduce the incidence of murder and save lives."²¹

Throughout the same early 2010s period as above, at least one broadcast segment and three articles documented the Belizean public's sentiments and actions concerning the death penalty.²² In these pieces, the public often emphasised deterrence, but, at times, they tempered—or supplemented—their support for capital punishment by advocating for improved criminal justice institutions and processes. Following the murder of two Chinese women in Belize City, 7 News covered an April 2011 assembly in front of the High Court of Belize. President of the Bze-Chinese Association Edmund Quan, when prompted by correspondent Jules Vasquez to provide a message on behalf of the raucous protestors, stated, "We want the death penalty."²³ And Phillip Ying, another member of the crowd, underscored the significance of "send[ing] a message that crime is punishable, [because] if murderers can walk free in one or two months, we cannot stop crime."²⁴ A year later, after the death of University of Belize student Suzenne Martinez, over one hundred residents of the twin towns of San Ignacio and Santa Elena gathered to "show support to [the] grieving family ... and call on authorities to ... authori[se] the return of the death penalty."²⁵ Though one attendee maintained that "drastic situations call for drastic measures," a *San Pedro Sun* report on the demonstration depicted the crowd's commitment to less dramatic capacity-building.²⁶ Those rallied demanded "that Belize have

its own forensic laboratory, the police be properly equipped, ... a registry for sex offenders be created, [and] a Police Station ... be built in Santa Elena Town."²⁷ Expectedly, abolitionists cited the shortcomings of Belizean criminal justice, too. In a 2013 *Amandala* feature about Anglican opposition to capital punishment, Canon Leroy Flowers lamented "the way things are done ... with law enforcement"; their procedures, he surmised, would increase the chance 'an innocent person [was] executed."²⁸

Before we conclude, as some politicians and opinion formers might, that the Belizean public once approved/still approves of retention and resuming executions, we should acknowledge that popular outcry, political overtures and press coverage are mutually reinforcing. Demonstrations are likely to challenge the status quo—which, in the early 2010s, progressively restricted the death penalty—and to generate a political (if symbolic) response in turn. And both public and political action are press fodder. Regrettably, scholars have not formally assessed the attitudes of the Belizean public on capital punishment. We can, however, refer to a rather anecdotal poll administered by Channel 5 in October 2012. The poll suffers from obvious methodological flaws: it received few responses (39), it offered a leading question ('Do you believe the death penalty will deter crime?') and its sampling technique attracted only motivated respondents. Still, its results do not indicate overwhelming approbation for retention and executions. Thirteen respondents (33%) strongly supported capital punishment and attempted to justify their position; six (15%) strongly supported capital punishment but did not attempt to justify their position; six (15%) supported capital punishment but expressed minor reservations; and fourteen (36%) did not support capital punishment or only supported it if

substantive procedural modifications and fairness were guaranteed.²⁹ The less-than-decisive outcome of the poll should be further moderated by the existing literature on public opinion, which exhibits that popular favour towards the death penalty is not firmly entrenched, nor based on extensive knowledge.³⁰

Nevertheless, comments on the Channel 5 poll display that the four themes of the media's capital punishment coverage mirror a once-vibrant public debate. Some commenters, like 'BELIZEAN,' voiced hostility to international interlopers: "Do we only listen to what Europe says? Are we being puppetted [*sic*] because we want foreign aid?"³¹ Others, like 'belmopaneze,' tasked the government with "put[ting] the question of the death penalty to the people"; another commenter cautioned that Belizeans "must all be sure ... [renewed executions are] something that [the] majority of the population truly want."³² On the motifs of deterrence and criminal justice failings, 'Storm' claimed the death penalty would prevent "at least [career] killer[s] from doing in more victims," whilst 'Fair Justice' objected that "with [the] percentage of convictions they [would] still walk free."³³ This is all to say: these themes are important to recognise and address should abolitionists wish to return the issue of capital punishment to a more prominent place in Belizean politics and society.

2. 'Salience-stealers': the border, violent crime and criminal justice dysfunction

At present, however, there are matters more immediate to the average citizen—and the media infrastructure competing for their attention—than Belize's atrophied capital punishment regime. Indeed, one of the most persistent topics in

Belizean press and politics is the border dispute with Guatemala.

In the nineteenth century, Guatemala quarrelled diplomatically with British Honduras (the name of colonial Belize) and asserted a right to the territory between the Rivers Sibun and Sarstoon, about half the area of Belize today.³⁴ Guatemala has never reneged on its claim, so resolving the dispute—or, more accurately, projecting force at the Sarstoon border—remains invaluable popular and electoral currency.³⁵ Governmental efforts to this effect are publicised extensively. In late 2016, the United Democratic Party, as “one of several initiatives ... to safeguard and protect Belize’s sovereignty,” constructed a forward operating base on the north bank of the River Sarstoon.³⁶ When the base succumbed to erosion in 2023, and the Belize Defence Force evacuated during its refurbishment, a vigilante group, the Belizean Territorial Volunteers, seized the area. In symbolic defiance of the Guatemalan Armed Forces, the Belizean Territorial Volunteers planted national flags in Sarstoon Island.³⁷ After Guatemalan troops removed the flags, a firestorm ensued. Belize’s Leader of the Opposition, Shyne Barrow, released a statement placing on the governing administration “blame for this latest [territorial] violation” and criticising their “neglect and abandonment of the Sarstoon.”³⁸ More recently, in April 2024, the Belize Defence Force brought members of the media to the repaired forward operating base. The visit occasioned a stand-off between the defence force—who, reporters in tow, attempted to patrol the Sarstoon by boat—and Guatemalan troops—who trailed the Belizean vessel and castigated its pilot for entering foreign territory. Like the flag episode, this dramatic showdown catalysed a period of sustained, border-oriented coverage. Channel 5 alone broadcasted eight Sarstoon segments from late April to early May.³⁹ Love FM,

7 News and *Amandala* also published stories on the incident, as well as its potential diplomatic and political fallout (“It was surely an embarrassment—some say an emasculation,” announced 7 News).⁴⁰

Why, then, is the border such a salient issue? First, despite the ostensible proximity of a resolution (the International Court of Justice will soon rule on Guatemala’s claim), the Sarstoon dispute is a long-standing component of Belizean identity. Second, border confrontations are understood through both diplomatic and political discourse. Therefore, whilst the governing party might urge a patient response, its opposition could, to garner electoral favour, attack bilateral conciliation as weakness. That the border question implicates both statecraft and electioneering causes the scale of its associated content to swell. Third, the frequent flare-ups at the Sarstoon intersect with other key concerns—gang violence and drug trafficking, fishing, forestry and immigration, to name a few. Fourth, the Sarstoon is a way for Belize (its press and politicians alike) to assert its sovereignty to the international community. This functional dimension might clarify why, its general prominence notwithstanding, the border wrestles the spotlight from capital punishment (another shorthand for sovereignty).

Violent crime is the only other topic which currently generates reportage as voluminous and consistent as the border. Violence can be characterised as a ‘salience-stealer’ insofar as it no longer triggers reflection on the death penalty. Rather, it primarily highlights the dysfunction of the Belizean criminal justice system. Take, for instance, the fatal shooting of Shawn Robert Palacio by Jahstar Wassani Gonguez in 2021. It was the sort of offence that might have provoked debate on capital punishment in the early 2010s: Palacio, well-regarded in his community, met his sudden, unprompted demise simply walking down the street.⁴¹ Instead, on 10

May 2024, the Director of Public Prosecution closed the state's case against Gonguez, freeing him from remand. The (well-documented) decision not to prosecute was a product of the main witness refusing to testify after her safety could not be guaranteed.⁴² Moreover, since the last peak in death penalty discourse, violent murders and public demonstrations have continued—just without mention in the press of, *inter alia*, resuming executions. Mapping the nuances of this profound shift would necessitate computational text analysis beyond the scope of the present project.⁴³ (Still, I have confidence in the observation, formed through my daily consumption of Belizean news and commentary.)

The practical realities of capital punishment in Belize have broken the media link between violent crime and discourse on the death penalty. In 2001, the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeal abolished mandatory capital sentences, and the JCPC followed suit in 2002. By the mid-2010s, the JCPC had heavily restricted the sanction in line with the international prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment. Moreover, by 2015, PM Barrow's efforts to resume executions had failed, Belize's death row stood empty and its local courts had gone a decade without returning a death sentence. The current abolitionist *de facto modus operandi* thereby disentangles fatal violence from fatal recompense; this new framework renders discussions of executions (and formal abolition) in the press implausible and/or less urgent. Capital punishment has become a non-issue.⁴⁴

3. Limited salience breeds acceptance by habit and inertia

The relegation of the death penalty to a non-issue allows Belizean politicians—whether ardent

retentionists or, more commonly, abolitionists—to leave the ADF status quo unchallenged.

The ease with which Belizean opinion formers can elude scrutinising capital punishment is contrasted by a Caribbean neighbour, Jamaica. Though subject to the same legal regulations as Belize, and despite no recorded death sentences last year and an empty death row, Jamaica's politicians regularly comment on the sanction. (I do not have space for a detailed explanation of this phenomenon: suffice to say that the Jamaican Director of Public Prosecutions still pursues the death penalty, albeit without success, and some politicians emphasise the rhetoric of penal sovereignty and severity. This in turn generates media attention and further commentary from opinion formers.) Let us take as an example the aftermath of a high-profile 2023 triple-murder, in which two young children were killed along with the intended target. Invited to opine on a morning radio programme, Senator Sapphire Longmore urged Jamaica to resume executions: "Put it as the priority, just like how we had emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic and ... what was necessary to be done to protect the public [was done]."⁴⁵ The *Observer*, meanwhile, reported that Leader of the Opposition Mark Golding was "prepared to once again listen to arguments for and against Jamaica enforcing the death penalty."⁴⁶ Also quoted in the *Observer* piece was Prime Minister Andrew Holness, who remarked, "My own view ... has evolved. ... [T]he more I study this matter and begin to understand the minds of the criminals, [I realise they have] no soul ... they have no heart; they need to be removed from among us."⁴⁷ On the other hand, Justice Minister Delroy Chuck expressed his opposition to capital punishment whilst opening debate on a Joint Select Committee review of criminal justice.⁴⁸ And, asked to counter the perspective of Senator Longmore, Anglican priest Sean Major-Campbell

suggested Jamaica should “seek to become a more highly evolved society in terms of becoming a more peaceful people, ... modelling peace and love and rehabilitative approaches ... to address a culture of violence.”⁴⁹

In a different media climate and jurisdiction, politicians and opinion formers are obliged to evaluate their conscience and advocate for their preferred outcome on the death penalty. Meanwhile, in Belize, public statements, whether on resumption or formal abolition, are now exceedingly rare. Even the 2022 posthumous pardon of Nora Parham—the only woman ever executed by Belize, in what was widely considered a miscarriage of justice—did not inspire politicians to evaluate the statutory retention of the practice that assured her demise.⁵⁰ Some Belizeans believe there is an established culture of silence. Marcel Bedran, a participant in protests over the killing of the Suzanne Martinez (see section 1), criticised his compatriots for “be[ing] afraid to ask the tough questions to our authorities, particularly on ... capital punishment.”⁵¹ “Why is it so secretive,” he wondered, “why can’t we talk about it? How long are we going to continue?”⁵² Bedran’s frustration notwithstanding, a national conspiracy of silence is unlikely; Belize’s press, public and opinion formers were once willing to talk about the death penalty (again, see section 1). However—especially concerning formal abolition—it is probable that politicians’ quiet originates with a desire to “let sleeping dogs lie” (so to speak), and to avoid jeopardising electoral prospects by reinvigorating a polarising topic. Criminologists Roger Hood and Florence Seemungal tasked one hundred opinion formers from the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and Barbados—all ADF states, like Belize—with ranking options that explain ‘why the death penalty has not been abolished’ in their jurisdiction. Forty respondents selected ‘because

politicians think support for abolition would make them unpopular AND/OR stir up opposition in the media’ as a relevant reason; a further 21 (13% of retentionists and 29% of abolitionists) chose this option as *the primary* reason.⁵³ The latest manifestos of the Belizean United Democratic Party and People’s United Party⁵⁴ contain no references to retention, nor abolition. Instead, capacity building and (implicitly) human rights appear central to their aims: professionalising and demilitarising the police, improving forensics and crime scene investigation, involving the community in crime prevention and even introducing “sentencing guidelines and innovative and appropriate restorative, reparative and rehabilitative penalties.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

The death penalty was once a vibrant concern amongst Belize’s public, press and politicians, although even then, support for it was not overwhelming. Today, it is overshadowed by the border, crime and shortcomings of the criminal justice system, while politicians and opinion formers are hesitant to revitalise a dormant debate by pushing for formal abolition. It is likely, in sum, that Belize “retains the death penalty out of habit, convenience and simple inertia.”⁵⁶

The case study outlined in this article contributes to a line of thought first expressed by Ron Dudai, which problematizes the putative teleological destiny of global abolition. Rhetorical assurances that capital punishment “is a thing of the past” disguise the stubborn maintenance of the death penalty in the present—even if, as in Belize, the sanction continues largely because it is non-existent in public life. Moreover, presuming that capital punishment is ‘anachronistic and so will crumble easily’ belies the strength of its symbolic and communicative dimensions.⁵⁷

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References

¹ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'Belize' (*The World Factbook*, 26 August 2024) <<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belize/#geography>> accessed 29 August 2024.

² Advocates for Human Rights (AHR), *Belize Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review: The Death Penalty* <<https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/AHR%20Belize%20UPR%20Death%20Penalty%20Final%202.pdf>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³ ADF countries 'retain the death penalty *de jure* but have not carried out an execution for at least 10 years, or if so, have within that period announced an official moratorium, or ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.' Roger Hood, 'The Enigma of *de facto* Abolition of Capital Punishment' in Rosario de Vicente Martínez *et al* (eds), *Libro homenaje al profesor Luis Arroyo Zapatero: un derecho penal humanista* (Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado 2021). An alternative phrase is 'suspended retention.' Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, 'Abolishing the Death Penalty Worldwide: The Impact of a "New Dynamic"' (2009) 38(1) *Crime and Justice* 1. I prefer this term because it reveals the precarity of non-*de jure* abolition; yet ADF is more prevalent, so I use it exclusively.

⁴ Carolyn Hoyle and Lucy Harry, *The Death Penalty in Kenya: A Punishment that has Died Out in Practice, Part Two - Overwhelming Support for Abolition Among Opinion Leaders* <<https://deathpenaltyproject.org/knowledge/kenya-part-two/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

⁵ Roger Hood, 'Is Public Opinion a Justifiable Reason Not to Abolish the Death Penalty? A Comparative Analysis of Surveys of Eight Countries' (2018) 23(2) *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law* 218; Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, 'Towards the Global Elimination of the Death Penalty: A Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Punishment' in Pat Carlen and Leandro Ayres França (eds), *Alternative Criminologies* (Routledge 2018), 406; Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, 'Deterrence and Public Opinion' in Ivan Simonovic (ed), *Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Arguments, Trends and Perspectives* (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2015).

⁶ Roger Hood and Florence Seemungal, *Sentenced to Death Without Execution: Why capital punishment has not yet been abolished in the Eastern Caribbean and Barbados* <<https://deathpenaltyproject.org/knowledge/sentenced-to-death-without-execution-why-capital-punishment-has-not-yet-been-abolished-in-the-eastern-caribbean-and-barbados/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

⁷ I should mention that, in citing *Amandala*, I do not seek to normalise its reprehensible editorial stances, e.g., its dogmatic homophobia. It is simply the nation's largest paper. See: Southern Poverty Law Center 2013, *Dangerous Liaisons: The American Religious Right & the Criminalization of Homosexuality in Belize* <https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/splc-report-dangerous-liaisons.pdf> accessed 29 August 2024.

⁸ As the piece is uncredited, this is my best sense (according to the paper's archives) of the Editor-in-Chief at publication.

⁹ Editorial, 'Cruel Irony: Our Country's Guilt' *Amandala* (Belize City, 25 May 2019) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/cruel-irony-countrys-guilt/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ These standards, elaborated in *Hughes and Spence v. R* [2001] ECSC J0402-1 and *Reyes v. R* [2002] UKPC 11, hold that "(a) the imposition of the death penalty requires special justification, (b) it should be reserved for the worst of the worst cases and (c) only where there is no possibility of reform and social re-adaptation of the offender." Edward Fitzgerald and Keir

Starmer, *A Guide to Sentencing in Capital Cases* <https://www.deathpenaltyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/A_Guide_to_Sentencing_in_Capital_Cases.pdf> accessed 29 August 2024.

¹⁷ 'Amendment Would Make Death Penalty Enforcement Possible' (*7 News* 2011)

<<https://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=19637>> accessed 29 August 2024; 'Human rights group sends message against death penalty' (*Channel 5* 2011) <<https://archive.channel5belize.com/archives/58695>> accessed 29 August 2024; 'To kill or not to kill? Death penalty is still in the books' (*Channel 5* 2013)

<<https://archive.channel5belize.com/archives/83303>> accessed 29 August 2024; Editorial, 'Ideas and Opinions—Why referendum?' *Amandala* (Belize City, 30 August 2013) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/ideas-opinions-referendum/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

¹⁸ 'Amendment Would Make Death Penalty Enforcement Possible' (n 17).

¹⁹ Ibid. The predicted 'difficulty' indeed arrived: both the Death Penalty Project and the Human Rights Commission of Belize brought the matter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, leading to a withdrawal by Barrow. Amnesty International, *Death Penalty in the English-Speaking Caribbean: A Human Rights Issue* <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/amr050012012en.pdf>> accessed 29 August 2024.

²⁰ Editorial, 'Ideas and Opinions—Why referendum?' (n 17).

²¹ 'Amendment Would Make Death Penalty Enforcement Possible' (n 17); Editorial, 'Ideas and Opinions—Why referendum?' (n 17).

²² 'Four Murders In 24 Hours; 2 Chinese Women; Chinese Lead Defiant Protest' (*7 News* 2011)

<<https://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=19357>> accessed 29 August 2024; 'Cayo residents call for the death penalty!' (*Amandala* 2012) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/cayo-residents-call-death-penalty/>> accessed 29 August 2024; 'Twin towns of San Ignacio and Santa Elena respond to crime' (*San Pedro Sun* 2012) <<https://www.sanpedrosun.com/crime-and-violence/2012/10/08/twin-towns-of-san-ignacio-and-santa-elena-respond-to-crime/>> accessed 29 August 2024; 'Anglicans lead charge against death penalty' (*Amandala* 2013) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/anglicans-lead-charge-death-penalty/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

²³ 'Four Murders In 24 Hours' (n 22).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ 'Cayo residents call for the death penalty!' (n 22).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 'Twin towns of San Ignacio and Santa Elena respond to crime' (n 22).

²⁸ 'Anglicans lead charge against death penalty' (n 22).

^{29,29} Perhaps one respondent—an unidentified double-voter—should be subtracted from the 'support with minor reservations' category. In the 'did not support' category, two respondents recommended harsh alternative punishment: 'They should work for food,' 'Keep them behind bars without any rights.'

³⁰ Carolyn Hoyle, *The Death Penalty in Kenya: A Punishment that has Died Out in Practice, Part One - A Public Ready to Accept Abolition* <<https://deathpenaltyproject.org/knowledge/kenya-part-one-a-public-ready-to-accept-abolition/>> accessed 29 August 2024; Hood (n 5); Roger Hood and Florence Seemungal, *Public Opinion on the Mandatory Death Penalty in Trinidad* <<https://deathpenaltyproject.org/knowledge/public-opinion-on-the-mandatory-death-penalty-in-trinidad/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³¹ 'Do you believe the death penalty will deter crime?' (*Channel 5* 2012)

<<https://archive.channel5belize.com/archives/76919>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³² Ibid; 'To kill or not to kill? Death penalty is still in the books' (*Channel 5* 2013)

<<https://archive.channel5belize.com/archives/83303>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³³ 'Do you believe the death penalty will deter crime?' (n 31).

³⁴ Narda Dobson, *A History of Belize* (Longman Caribbean 1973).

³⁵ See, e.g., the 2008 UDP manifesto, which promised foremost to 'work towards a ... permanent settlement of the discredited and unjust Guatemalan claim to our ... territory.'

³⁶ 'Forward Operating Base at Sarstoon Coming Along' (*San Pedro Sun* 2016)

<<https://www.sanpedrosun.com/government/2016/02/17/forward-operating-base-at-sarstoon-coming-along/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³⁷ 'Opposition Calls for Action After Guatemalan Forces Remove Belizean Flags' (*Love FM* 2023)

<<https://lovefm.com/opposition-calls-for-action-after-guatemalan-forces-remove-belizean-flags/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ According to a search of the station's online archive.

⁴⁰ Quoting 'Guat Military Flexes On Sarstoon, PM Not Looking For A Fight' (*7 News* 2024)

<<https://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=70053>> accessed 29 August 2024. See also 'BDF Commandant Responds to Criticism Over Sarstoon Confrontation' (*Love FM* 2024) <<https://lovefm.com/bdf-commandant-responds-to-criticism-over-sarstoon-confrontation/>> accessed 29 August 2024; Kristen Ku, 'Sarstoon FOB inauguration ends with GAF encounter' *Amandala* (Belize City, 5 May 2024) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/sarstoon-fob-inauguration-ends-with-gaf-encounter/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

- ⁴¹ 'Accused Murderer Walks Free; Main Witness Afraid to Testify' (*Amandala* 2024) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/accused-murderer-walks-free-main-witness-afraid-to-testify/>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁴² Ibid; 'Man Walks from Murder Charge' (*Channel 5* 2024) <<https://edition.channel5belize.com/man-walks-from-murder-charge/>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁴³ Intriguing, but beyond the remit of this article, too, is how life imprisonment might function as a substitute for capital punishment in crime coverage today.
- ⁴⁴ Another, newer *Amandala* editorial (from 2023) speaks as though it were not a subject of interest, nor controversy: "as a society we have come to abhor the taking of life in any form, and thus are reluctant to send anyone to the 'gallows.'"
- ⁴⁵ 'Senator Calls for Death Penalty for Child Killers' (*Radio Jamaica News* 2023) <<https://radiojamaicanewsonline.com/local/senator-calls-for-death-penalty-for-child-killers>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁴⁶ Anthony Lewis, 'Golding Willing to Discuss Death Penalty' *Jamaica Observer* (Kingston, 10 November 2023) <<https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2023/11/10/golding-willing-to-discuss-death-penalty/>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. This seems to express the 'purgative rationale' for retention. See Matthew Kramer, *The Ethics of Capital Punishment: A Philosophical Investigation of Evil and its Consequences* (Oxford University Press 2011).
- ⁴⁸ Editorial, 'Editorial: No hanging, Chuck' *The Gleaner* (Kingston, 20 January 2024) <<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20240120/editorial-no-hanging-chuck>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁴⁹ 'Senator Calls for Death Penalty for Child Killers' (n 45).
- ⁵⁰ Charles Gladden, 'Nora Parham Posthumously Pardoned' *Amandala* (Belize City, 11 June 2022) <<https://amandala.com.bz/news/nora-parhamposthumously-pardoned/>> accessed 29 August 2024. Rather, Parham's pardon heightened focus on improving protections for domestic violence victims, evincing again how criminal justice dysfunction 'steals salience' from the death penalty.
- ⁵¹ 'Cayo residents call for the death penalty!' (n 22).
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Hood and Seemungal, *Sentenced to Death Without Execution* (n 6).
- ⁵⁴ These are the two largest parties. The former governed from 2008 to 2020; the latter, from 2020 to the present. I have used the United Democratic Party's 2015–2020 manifesto, as its 2020–2025 document is hosted on an inaccessible website.
- ⁵⁵ People's United Party, *BLU: #planBelize* <<https://planbelize.bz/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BLU-manifesto-eBOOK.pdf>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁵⁶ Carolyn Hoyle, Lury Harry and Parvais Jabbar, 'Why has Kenya not Abolished the Death Penalty? Habit and Inertia' *The Conversation* (20 September 2022) <<https://theconversation.com/why-has-kenya-not-abolished-the-death-penalty-habit-and-inertia-189955>> accessed 29 August 2024.
- ⁵⁷ Ron Dudai, 'Dead or Alive? Reassessing the Health of the Death Penalty and the Prospects of Global Abolition' (2023) 28(2) *Theoretical Criminology* 139.