

# GAZETA

## VALSASSINA

SCHOOL PUBLIC SPEAKING

IMMIGRATION  
LANGUAGE  
ABORTION  
LGBTQ+  
RIGHTS  
CITIZENSHIP  
EUTHANASIA  
**DEBATE**  
RELIGION  
JUSTICE  
SAFETY  
ETHICS  
SOCIETY  
DEMOCRACY  
**2025**  
**2026**

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## Editorial

João Gomes Diretor pedagógico

**“Promover o debate  
no espaço escolar  
significa reconhecer  
que o ato educativo  
não se limita à  
transmissão de  
conhecimentos.”**

Ao longo do ano letivo 2025/2026, a comunidade Valsassina foi desafiada a Descobrir (o) Tempo como espaço de crescimento, de escolhas e de transformação. Entre desafios, aprendizagens e conquistas, procurámos valorizar cada instante como uma oportunidade para sonhar, para criar e para construir futuro. Neste percurso, voámos em conjunto com coragem, responsabilidade e compromisso, fortalecendo laços, preservando valores e abrindo novas perspetivas sobre o mundo. Foi nesse voo partilhado que encontrámos sentido, liberdade e inspiração para continuar a desenhar os sonhos que nos movem.

É neste espírito que se inscreve o projeto *Public Speaking*, um convite a transformar a curiosidade e o espanto em pensamento estruturado, em expressão fundamentada e em comunicação consciente. Assente em metodologias como o *Task-Based Learning* e o *CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)*, o projeto desafiou os/as alunos/as a assumirem-se como agentes de mudança, capazes de traduzir ideias em discurso, desenvolver confiança e comunicar eficazmente em língua inglesa.

Os/as alunos/as do 11.º ano aceitaram o desafio de debater em inglês. Muito mais do que um exercício de competência linguística, o debate revelou-se uma poderosa ferramenta de formação integral. Argumentar implica organizar ideias, mobilizar conhecimento, pensar criticamente, escutar com respeito e responder com rigor. Num contexto marcado pela rapidez da informação e pela crescente disseminação da desinformação, aprender a questionar, analisar evidências e sustentar posições assume-se como uma competência essencial para o exercício de uma cidadania responsável.

Os textos reunidos nesta edição da Gazeta Valsassina refletem esse percurso. São o resultado de uma aprendizagem que ultrapassa os limites da sala de aula, dando voz a inquietações, a convicções e perspetivas diversas sobre os desafios do presente e do futuro.

Promover o debate no espaço escolar significa reconhecer que o ato educativo não se limita à transmissão de conhecimentos. Educar implica formar cidadãos capazes de interpretar criticamente a realidade, de transformar a informação em conhecimento e de exercer a criatividade intelectual na construção de soluções para um mundo em permanente mudança. O exercício da argumentação constitui, por isso, um passo decisivo para o desenvolvimento pessoal, cognitivo e ético dos jovens e para a consolidação de uma sociedade plural, democrática e participativa.

O verdadeiro desafio da escola não é ensinar mais, mas criar as condições para que todos/as aprendam melhor. Aprender exige tempo para pensar, liberdade para questionar, segurança para errar, espaço para descobrir a própria voz e oportunidades para escutar, colaborar e crescer. Porque é precisamente desse tempo — vivido, partilhado e transformado em aprendizagem — que construímos o futuro.

# Debater em Sala de Aula: Construindo vozes globais na disciplina de Inglês no 11.º Ano

Maria Inês Almeida e Maria João Godinho Professoras de Inglês

Debater em inglês no Ensino Secundário é muito mais do que um exercício de proficiência linguística. É, fundamentalmente, um ensaio para a vida. Ao trazer o debate para a sala de aula, proporcionamos aos/às nossos/as alunos/as do 11.º ano um espaço seguro para desenvolverem o seu pensamento crítico, a sua autoconfiança e a sensibilidade necessária para encontrarem sentido num mundo onde frequentemente são confrontados/as com desinformação. De facto, a integração do debate em inglês em sala de aula é já sustentada por investigação recente que aponta para benefícios claros no desenvolvimento da argumentação, do pensamento crítico e da comunicação oral de alunos/as que aprendem inglês como língua estrangeira. El Majidi et al. (2021) concluíram que a implementação em contextos letivos de atividades de debate tem um efeito positivo em vários componentes estruturais e da argumentação escrita e oral dos/as discentes, reforçando a ideia de que esta metodologia favorece aprendizagens linguísticas e cognitivas mais exigentes. Deste modo, mais do que expandir o vocabulário, este projeto desafia os estudantes a estruturar o pensamento de forma lógica, a ouvir o outro e a comunicar com clareza e respeito.

Assim, o projeto deste ano letivo assentou num trabalho colaborativo em grupo e desenvolveu-se ao longo de um percurso estruturado em cinco grandes etapas:

## 1. A Escolha dos Temas

Tudo começou com a auscultação dos/as alunos/as. Estes/as foram convidados/as a discutir entre si e a propor temas da atualidade que lhes despertassem curiosidade, dúvidas ou até mesmo inquietação.

## 2. A Formação de Grupos

Com base nos temas escolhidos e nas convicções pessoais de cada um/a, criaram-se grupos de debate compostos por alunos e alunas com perspetivas intencionalmente divergentes sobre o mesmo assunto.

## 3. A Metodologia do Debate

Os/As alunos/as mergulharam na tradição e nas regras do debate em inglês, compreendendo a sua linguagem específica, tempos e estrutura formal.

## 4. A Escrita Guiada

Sob a orientação atenta e contínua das professoras, os grupos foram construindo e refinando os seus argumentos por etapas, num processo de escrita partilhada.

## 5. O Debate

Os debates ganharam vida na sala de aula. Contudo, estes não foram recebidos de forma passiva pela turma. Através de um processo de heteroavaliação, onde os/as próprios/as alunos/as aplicaram critérios de avaliação previamente definidos, as palavras de cada um/a dos/as interlocutores foram atentamente ouvidas e os/as vencedores apurados/as.

Como em qualquer processo de aprendizagem genuíno, o caminho não foi isento de obstáculos. Houve momentos de incerteza, dificuldade em hierarquizar argumentos, hesitação na expressão oral e necessidade de rever posições à luz de contra-argumentos inesperados. Ainda assim, foram precisamente esses desafios que enriqueceram a experiência dos/as nossos/as alunos/as, levando-os/as a confrontarem questões éticas com a força dos factos e com a importância de saber discordar sem desrespeitar.

Esta Gazeta que agora têm em mãos é o testemunho escrito de todo este percurso. O entusiasmo, a entrega e o orgulho visível da grande maioria dos/as alunos/as ao longo do projeto não só nos surpreenderam, como transformaram de forma contagiante o ambiente nas nossas salas de aula.



Preparar estes jovens para o “mundo real” é o nosso maior objetivo. Sendo o inglês a língua global por excelência nos contextos académico, profissional e intercultural, dominar a arte de debater neste idioma prepara-os/as diretamente para futuros exames, entrevistas e carreiras internacionais. Acima de tudo, ao aprenderem a discordar de forma construtiva e a praticar a escuta ativa, os/as nossos/as alunos/as saem deste projeto não apenas melhores estudantes, mas cidadãos mais tolerantes, seguros e preparados para o futuro.

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A ESCOLHA  
DOS TEMAS

A FORMAÇÃO  
DE GRUPOS

A METODOLOGIA  
DO DEBATE

A ESCRITA  
GUIADA

O DEBATE

# Abortion: Legal and ethical debates

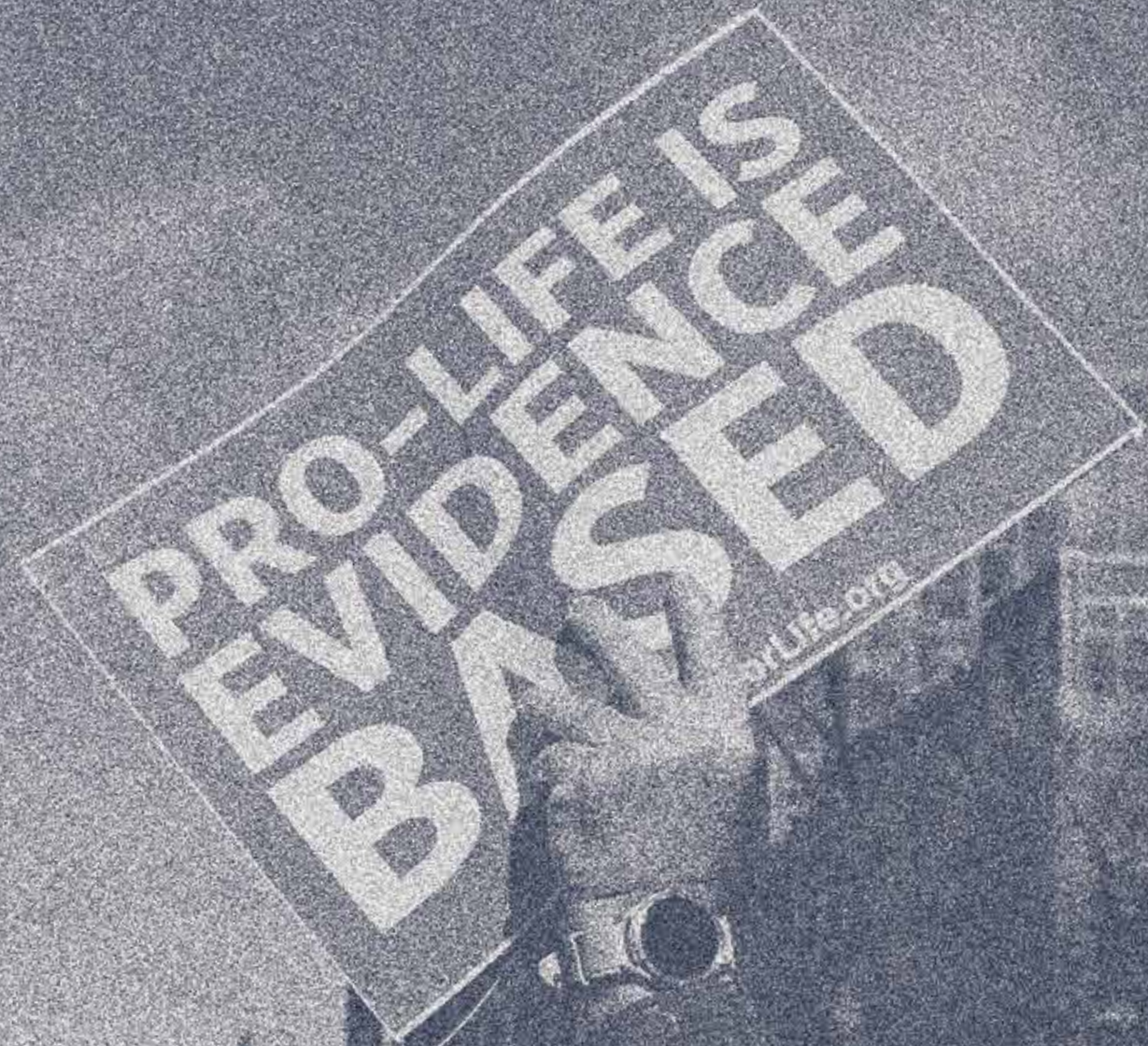


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# Should abortion be legal?

## Proposition

Júlia Cardoso, Lourenço Dourdil and Rodrigo Paradinha 11.º 1C

Greetings, ladies and gentlemen, today, we are here to support the motion that abortion should be legal under all circumstances. Our thesis can be summed up through a powerful statement by Margaret Sanger, pioneer of birth control: “No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body” (Sanger, 1920). Before presenting our arguments, it is important to acknowledge that according to the World Health Organization (2024), nearly 45% of all abortions worldwide in 2024 were unsafe, leading to thousands of preventable deaths. So, we must ask ourselves: should a woman’s life be put at risk simply because she lacks access to safe, legal medical care? Our team firmly believes that abortion should be legal, and no woman’s life should ever be put at risk or have their fundamental rights denied.

To clarify, abortion refers to the deliberate termination of a pregnancy through medical or surgical procedures, and “legal” means that this medical service is permitted, regulated, and safely provided under national law. With this in mind, we present three key arguments: the right to bodily autonomy; the importance of public health and safety; and the social and economic factors that ensure individuals can make responsible decisions about their futures.

Our first argument concerns bodily autonomy. Every individual has the fundamental right to make informed decisions about their own body and life. Forcing someone to continue a pregnancy violates these rights — particularly their dignity and personal autonomy. This is evident in the case of a 14-year-old rape victim in Guatemala who was compelled to carry her pregnancy to term, a situation widely condemned as a violation of her human rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2025).

The scale of this issue is global. According to UNICEF (2023), over 2 million girls under the age of 15 give birth each year, with most of these pregnancies resulting from rape. These cases demonstrate how the rights to dignity, safety, life, and freedom from torture or inhumane treatment are routinely violated. And since girls are human beings with the same fundamental

rights as adults and as men, these violations are both unacceptable and dangerous.

The opposition may argue from a moral standpoint, yet their position ultimately ignores the basic human right to reproductive autonomy. A society that forces women — and even young girls — to continue unwanted or unsafe pregnancies fails to protect their dignity, well-being, and humanity. If we believe individuals should have control over their own bodies and futures, then supporting legal abortion is not merely an opinion — it is a matter of human rights.

**“Every individual has the fundamental right to make informed decisions about their own body and life. Forcing someone to continue a pregnancy violates these rights.”**

Our second argument addresses public health. Illegal or restricted abortion does not eliminate abortion — it eliminates safe abortion. This is clearly illustrated by the historical case of Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime, where banning abortion led to a dramatic spike in maternal deaths due to unsafe, clandestine procedures. Once abortion was legalized again, maternal mortality rates dropped sharply, proving that access to safe care saves lives (Hord et al., 1991; Ceaușescu, 1966–1989).

The same pattern appears globally today. In countries where abortion is legal and medically regulated, the mortality rate is fewer than 1 per 100.000 procedures, making it significantly safer than childbirth itself (World Health Organization, 2024).

This demonstrates that when women have access to legal abortion, they can make reproductive decisions without facing life-threatening risks or fatal infections. Therefore, when abortion is criminalized or heavily restricted, the procedure does not disappear. Instead, it is driven underground, forcing countless women into unsafe and unregulated environments where their lives and health are put at risk. This statistic reflects a harsh reality: denying access does not eliminate abortion — it eliminates safe abortion.

By opposing legal abortion, the other side is effectively defending a system that endangers women, pushes them into back-alley clinics, and criminalizes their attempts to control their own reproductive health. Such a position is not grounded in compassion or public responsibility — it is one that actively jeopardizes the well-being of citizens. Ultimately, we assert that legal abortion is essential to maintaining safe healthcare standards, protecting women’s medical autonomy, and preventing avoidable deaths. To deny this right is to ignore the basic duty of our public health institutions and government: to safeguard the lives of its people.

Finally, our third argument concerns social and economic equality. Abortion restrictions disproportionately harm economically vulnerable individuals. This reality is clearly demonstrated by the Turnaway Study in the United States: women who were denied abortions were significantly more likely to fall into debt, drop below the poverty line, and face long-term financial instability. In contrast, women who received abortions were more likely to maintain employment, economic security, and stable living conditions (Foster et al., 2018).

Further evidence strengthens this point. According to the ANSIRH (n.d.) fact sheet, being denied an abortion increases the likelihood of poverty by 400%, whereas accessing abortion increases women’s chances of maintaining stable income, employment, and housing. These outcomes reveal a serious structural inequality: individuals with financial means can still obtain safe procedures — even by travelling abroad — while those without such resources face two dangerous alternatives: carrying an unwanted pregnancy that worsens their economic situation or resorting to unsafe methods.

The opposition may claim moral high ground, but their stance ignores the deep inequalities created by forced pregnancy. Prohibiting abortion produces a

society where only the wealthy have real reproductive choice. Whether intentional or not, such a position protects inequality rather than life. If we believe in equal opportunity, and the right to shape our future, then supporting legal abortion is not only justified — it is essential.



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In conclusion, the choice before us is not complicated. It is a choice between safety and danger, equality and inequality, rights and violations. The evidence is clear: abortion does not stop it — it only makes it unsafe, endangering women’s lives and deepening social injustice (World Health Organization, 2024). Legal abortion, on the other hand, protects health, dignity, and freedom. If we claim to value human rights, we cannot deny women the right to control their own bodies. If we claim to value equality, we cannot defend a system that only the wealthy can escape. And if we claim to value life, we cannot support policies that put women at risk. Protecting bodily autonomy, safeguarding public health, and promoting social and economic equality all lead to one consistent and just conclusion: abortion must be legal under all circumstances. This is not simply a matter of personal belief — it is a matter of human rights, safety, and justice.

## Opposition

Frederico Brehm, Tomás Marques and Rita Lourenço 11.º 1C

Good morning, we are the opposition for the proposed motion, and we consider that abortion should not be legalized. Murder, as defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is the crime of intentionally killing a human being (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Said human being’s life begins at conception and carries inherent, equal moral worth, as it is impossible to quantify or compare the value of one life against another. Therefore, no ethical argument can justify intentionally ending a human's life and it fits in the category of murder, making it a crime punishable by, at minimum, 8 years, in any first world country. Furthermore, legalizing abortion diminishes society’s respect for life and promotes a culture where existence itself becomes negotiable. In short, to defend our position, we have three arguments: “equality of human life”, “abortion as a crime” and “cultural consequences”.

Firstly, our equality of human life argument states that moral worth must not depend on traits and characteristics, like consciousness, ability, or awareness, since these vary and would unjustly exclude many humans (infants, disabled and/or unconscious, for example), all humans therefore must possess equal moral worth by virtue of simply being human. A fetus is a human being with the same inherent potential for personhood as any other human. To prove this, we can, for example, imagine a hypothetical scenario where you are an unemployed adult, looking for work, and your friend offers to talk to his boss to get you a job interview. If you go through with the interview, you might or might not get the job, but if you, for any reason, don't show up to the interview at all, you will for sure not get the job. Just because you didn't go to the interview doesn't mean the job has any less value, the same is true for abortion, if you kill the fetus while they are still developing, the fact that you are taking away its chance at living doesn't change, it is just like if you kill any other human. You might try to argue that abortion is permissible in a situation where the mother’s life is in danger but, taking these facts into account, ending one life to save another assumes some lives are more valuable, which is untrue and unethical.

As Dr. Jerome Lejeune (French doctor and geneticist, known more famously for his work on chromosome abnormalities) once said: “The right to life is the first right mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every human being, born or pre-born, is entitled to this fundamental right (...) [this right] is not given by governments, to continue to exist civilization must conform to natural morality” (Lejeune, as cited in New Daily Compass, n.d.). Therefore, abortion is morally and ethically impermissible.

Moreover, following the conclusions of the first argument and applying them to the existing laws, abortion constitutes an act of killing equivalent to murder. This is our abortion as a crime argument and as shown in our introduction, murder is the crime of killing another human without justification or valid excuse. Unfortunately, there is no valid justification for this vile act, thus, abortion is morally equivalent (and we consider it should be legally equivalent) to murder and should not be permitted to happen without consequences. Mother Theresa even stated in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech that:

The nations who have legalized abortion, they are the poorest nations. They are afraid of the little one, they are afraid of the unborn child, and the child must die because they don’t want to feed one more child, to educate one more child, the child must die" (Nobel Prize Outreach AB, 1979).



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Furthermore, our cultural consequences argument is based on the fact that legalizing abortion opens a precedent to legalizing other practices that terminate human life and this could lead to the normalization of said practices. This normalization fosters and permits a mindset in which life is viewed as conditionally expendable, leading to a society that views some lives as disposable, which has a risk of eroding its overall respect for human dignity and moral responsibility.

Consider a hypothetical country or society that holds its national parks or nature reserves as something to be protected and maintained, some exceptions are permitted though, like building trails and ranger stations, for example. However, the legalization or acceptance of commercial logging introduces a new category of exception, one that's rooted in an inherently evil act, exploitation of the forest's resources. This act sets a crucial precedent that the park’s resources are conditionally expendable, and this precedent is then used by other interests to justify further resource extraction, leading to the normalization of commercial use of the parks. The societal mindset ultimately shifts from viewing the park as an inviolable sanctuary to a resource to be compromised, weakening the overall ethical standard of conservation. Our society should protect life the same way that this hypothetical nation protects its national parks, and just like permitted commercial logging, legal abortion might weaken the notion that life is not expendable, therefore undermining societal respect for human life and negatively altering collective ethical standards.

Given the evidence, the answer to the analysed ethical problem is obvious: abortion is a crime, a homicide, akin to murder or manslaughter, an ethical nightmare, and should not, under any circumstances, be legal. This logic is irrefutable, human life begins at conception and possesses a universal and inherent right to continue, a fetus is as valuable as any other person, as we have already shown. Therefore, intentionally ending that life is not a “choice”, it is an act morally indistinguishable from murder. Any attempt to justify this act based on a fetus’s stage of development, consciousness, or ability is a catastrophic ethical

failure. It directly violates the foundation principle of equal moral worth for all human beings. To permit abortion is not merely a personal failing; it is a societal collapse, establishing a dangerous legal precedent that will inevitably somewhat erode the collective notion for human life and dismantle the very ethical standards upon which a just society must depend.

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## Should abortion be legal?

### Proposition

M<sup>a</sup> Madalena Matias, Gonalo Fernandes and Guilherme Conchinhas 11.º 2

Good morning, we are the proposition team and, today, we stand firmly in support of the belief that abortion should be legalized. Every two minutes, somewhere in the world, a woman dies due to unsafe abortion practices (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). That is not just a statistic, it is a human tragedy, repeated thousands of times every year. I would like to ask you: should a woman's right to life and safety depend on where she lives, her income, or her circumstances?

But first, let's get our terms right. By "abortion" we mean the deliberate medical termination of a pregnancy. By "legalized" we mean that it should be permitted by law under safe, regulated, and accessible medical conditions. We defend that it is only acceptable that every woman should have the fundamental right to make decisions about her own body and it's clear that if abortions aren't legalized, they will just keep happening outside health institutions, which would be an unsafe practice (WHO, 2024). Thus, legalizing abortion reduces deaths and complications from unsafe procedures and having access to legal abortion protects vulnerable women from being trapped in cycles of poverty and inequality (ANSIRH, n.d.).

**“When abortion is illegal, it does not stop people from seeking it. It only pushes the procedure into unsafe, unregulated conditions.”**

A woman is a human being with feelings and she should have the right to decide what to do with her own body in her current health situation and it's not the possibility of a fetus being born that should overrule that, since it's not even guaranteed that it will be born, and, even if it is, nothing guarantees that it will be in a healthy situation. A fetus is only a possibility of life, nothing more.

Let us begin by clearing up that women should have bodily autonomy and human rights. A woman's body is her own. No government, religion, or social institution should have the power to dictate what she must do with it. Denying a woman the right to choose is not a neutral act, it is an act of control. The World Health Organization and the United Nations both recognize reproductive rights as part of basic human rights (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2021; WHO, 2024). Plus, legal abortion does not encourage it. It simply ensures that when the choice must be made, it is made safely, legally, and with dignity. Besides that, abortion should also be legal so that each woman can decide according to her own moral values and religious beliefs, without those who oppose it taking away her right.

Legalizing it does not mean forcing anyone to have an abortion but ensuring that everyone can reflect and choose what makes sense for them and their moral values. If we respect individual freedom in every other aspect of life, why should a woman's right to decide about her own body be any different? Forcing a woman to carry a pregnancy to term is imposing control over her body, which is incompatible with the principles of a free and democratic state.

Secondly, we would like to explain why abortion, and legalizing it, is not only a matter of personal choice but also a critical issue of public health, safety, and socioeconomic justice, as restricting access mainly hurts the most vulnerable women and communities. It's also a fact that every two minutes a woman dies due to unsafe abortion practices. So I ask you, would legalizing abortion be bad for society or would it reduce the number of female deaths? When abortion is illegal, it does not stop people from seeking it. It only pushes the procedure into unsafe, unregulated conditions. Without access to trained medical professionals, sterile equipment, or proper follow-up care, people are far more likely to experience life-threatening complications such as severe infection, hemorrhage, or internal injury (WHO, 2024).

As a result, countries with strict abortion bans consistently have higher rates of unsafe abortions and significantly more deaths from preventable complications (WHO, 2024). In short, illegality doesn't reduce abortions. It just makes them far more dangerous, leading to increased mortality among women and others who can become pregnant. Women who suffer most from abortion restrictions are those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as wealthier women can travel to countries where it is legal or pay for private clinics, while the most vulnerable resort to unsafe methods. Legalization ensures equal access to healthcare and dignity for all women (ANSIRH, n.d.; Foster et al., 2018).

We should prioritize a grown woman's life over the possibility of life. What we mean by this is that a pregnant woman is a full human being with emotions, rights, and immediate health needs, and she should be able to make decisions about her own body. The potential future of a fetus should not override the reality of her current well-being, especially when pregnancy does not guarantee a healthy birth. In fact, an estimated 10–20% of recognized pregnancies end in miscarriage (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists [ACOG], 2023), and approximately 3–5% of babies are born with congenital anomalies (World Health Organization, 2023).

These uncertainties show that a fetus represents a possibility of life, not a guaranteed one, while the woman's life and health are certain and present. Therefore, respecting her autonomy is essential. More clearly, what we want to say is that the potential for life, which is the fetus, should never outweigh the life that already exists. An embryo is not a legal or moral person unlike the woman that carries it; it has no social existence, consciousness, or identity, only potential. Ethical and legal law protection belongs to those who already exist, who feel, think, and suffer which is not the case for the fetus. And even if opponents want to argue that the embryo has a heartbeat and human DNA, science shows that the brain structures and neural pathways required for consciousness and perception do not develop until much later so embryos

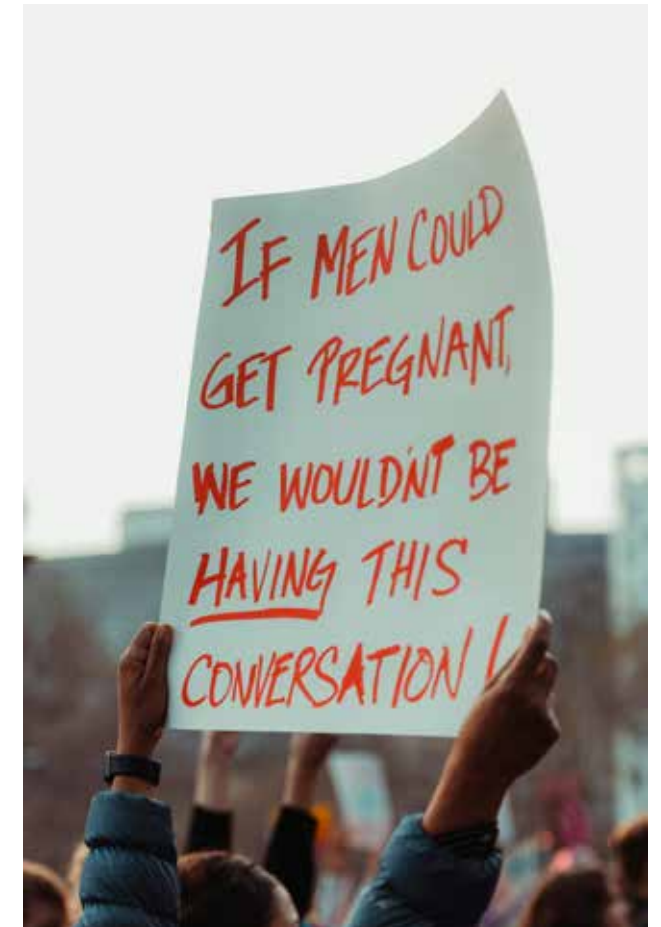


Photo by Colin Lloyd on Unsplash

cannot be considered a conscious life (Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [RCOG], 2022).

In addition, a fetus is entirely dependent on the pregnant woman for its survival and cannot exist independently outside the womb. For this reason, it cannot be regarded as an autonomous individual in the same way as a born person. Consequently, equating abortion with murder is not a valid comparison. Murder ends the life of a conscious, autonomous person who is capable of thinking, feeling, and acting. By contrast, abortion terminates a potential human life at a stage of development in which there is no consciousness and, in the earliest stages of pregnancy, no fully developed

brain, lungs, or nervous system. Because a fetus cannot survive independently outside the womb during these stages, it cannot be considered a person in the same moral or legal sense as a living, conscious human being. Therefore, its interests should not override the rights, bodily autonomy, and well-being of the pregnant woman.

We understand that the opposition may argue that abortion is immoral or that it devalues life. But let us be even more clear: supporting legal abortion does not mean we celebrate it. It means we recognize that protecting women's lives and giving them the power to choose is the most moral stance we can take. Outlawing abortion doesn't stop it, it only makes it dangerous (WHO, 2024).

In conclusion, we reaffirm that this debate is not about promoting abortion but about protecting women, preserving their rights, and ensuring that no one is forced into silence, suffering, or danger. We, the proposition, firmly believe that abortion should be legalized for the sake of safety, equality, and justice. And as Colleen McCullough (1977), an Australian writer and trained neuroscientist, said: "Women should not be held hostage by their biology." From rape to systemic oppression, women suffer every day, reminding us why we should defend the slogan: "My body, my choice."

## Opposition

Diogo Casimiro, Gustavo Efe and Leonor Conceição 11.º 2

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective today and to listen respectfully to the arguments of the proposition. We are here to oppose the motion supporting abortion.

Every year, an estimated 73 million abortions take place worldwide, which is nearly 200.000 every single day (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). This shows that abortion is not a rare event, but a reality that affects every society, regardless of culture, religion, or economy. We understand and respect the idea that every person has the right to make decisions about their own body. However, pregnancy is different. During pregnancy, there is not just one human involved, there is also a developing human being with its own value and right to life. Therefore, while autonomy is important, it cannot justify ending the life of another human being. Today, we will show that the fetus is a distinct human being and deserves protection from conception.

To talk seriously about abortion, we need to start with a fact, not an opinion: the fetus is a human being. It is not just a cell from the mother, not an organ, and not "just a potential." It is a living organism of our species, with its own DNA, independent metabolism, heartbeat, and sometimes a different sex from the mother. It is a separate organism, not part of the mother's body. Every human being has the right to life just for being human, not because of consciousness, independence, age, or location. Newborn babies have very little awareness; people in a coma or under anesthesia do not lose their rights; people with severe disabilities still have value. Denying rights to a human based on development is as unfair and discriminatory as denying rights because of race, sex, or age.

History clearly shows the dangers of deciding who is "human enough" to have rights: jewish people, black people, disabled people, and slaves were denied their rights, leading to oppression and genocide (BBC Bitesize, n.d.). Making exceptions for "humans without rights" repeats the same mistakes. Human



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development is continuous. There is no clear moment when a human goes from “no rights” to “has rights.” Therefore, the most consistent and fair position is that the right to life begins at conception. Finally, the argument about a woman’s body does not justify killing another human being. Autonomy does not give the right to end someone else’s life. The fetus is not an organ; it is a separate human being. Every human being has the right to life. The fetus is a human being. Therefore, the fetus has the right to life. Denying this right because the fetus is small, dependent, or still developing is discriminating against a human being and goes against the very foundation of human rights.

Legalizing abortion does not solve social problems like poverty, inequality, sexual violence, or the lack of support for women. These are complex issues that cannot be solved simply by allowing abortion. For example, in cases of rape. A rape is a brutal crime, and the woman needs real support, medical care, psychological help, and justice. But punishing the child for the crime of the aggressor does not fix the harm done. The focus should be on punishing the rapist, protecting and supporting the victim, and not ending an innocent life.

Instead of legalizing abortion, the state should focus on real support for women and families. This includes measures such as prenatal care and full medical support, ensuring health and safety for both mother and child; social programs and financial support to help vulnerable families overcome economic difficulties; shelters and protection for mothers at risk, including psychological support and social guidance; and encouraging adoption, offering alternatives for women who do not feel able to raise the child.

Additionally, it is important to note that what actually reduces maternal deaths is improving public health, not legalizing abortion. This includes sexual education, prenatal care, access to contraceptives, and comprehensive support for women. In many countries where abortion is restricted, maternal mortality is low because of strong healthcare system. For instance, Finland has reduced abortions among

young people under 19 by 66% between 2000 and 2023 through effective public policies. The country provides free contraceptives for teenagers and mandatory sex education in schools, giving young people access to information and safe reproductive health. Additionally, Finland’s social welfare system offers economic, psychological, and social support to young and vulnerable mothers (Reuters, 2024). This combination of prevention, education, and support demonstrates that well-planned policies can reduce unwanted pregnancies and help women make empowered choices without resorting to abortion.

**“Denying rights to a human based on development is as unfair and discriminatory as denying rights because of race, sex, or age.”**

Abortion can have serious psychological and emotional consequences for women. Many report trauma, regret, and guilt after terminating a pregnancy, even when it is legal. Studies show that women who have abortions have a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and long-term emotional suffering compared to women who carry their pregnancies to term. For example, a study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that women who had abortions showed higher levels of sadness and regret than those who chose not to terminate their pregnancy. Society should focus on supporting women’s mental health and providing alternatives that protect both the mother and the child, such as counseling, shelters, adoption programs, and the practical help provided by the organizations mentioned above.

From an ethical perspective, legalizing abortion can trivialize human life, creating a culture where the fetus

is seen as disposable. There is also a risk of opening the door to practices like sex-selective abortion, abortion based on disability, or genetic characteristics, raising serious moral concerns. As a fundamental ethical principle states: When we start deciding who deserves to live, we stop protecting human dignity. Protecting life encourages responsibility, empathy, and solidarity, strengthening society and promoting a healthier and fairer environment for everyone.

In conclusion, abortion is not a solution to social problems, and it violates the most fundamental right of all: the right to life. It does not address issues like poverty, inequality, or lack of support for women, and it can cause serious psychological and emotional harm to those who undergo it. Ethically, it risks trivializing human life and opening doors to morally dangerous practices. Instead of eliminating innocent lives, society should focus on real solutions: supporting women through healthcare, counseling, shelters, social programs, and adoption, and punishing the real perpetrators of crimes like rape. Protecting life encourages responsibility, empathy, and solidarity, creating a society that values both women and their children. Ending a life does not solve suffering; eliminating the causes of suffering does. Choosing life is not just a moral duty, it is a path to a stronger, more compassionate, and more just society.

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## Should abortion be legal?

### Proposition

Mateus Silva, Beatriz Roberto and Rui Luís 11.º 1A

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, respected audience, opposition and moderator. We are here today to discuss if abortion should be legal.

Let's start with a fact: according to reliable sources, unsafe illegal abortions are one of the leading causes of maternal mortality, accounting for approximately 13% of maternal deaths worldwide. We highlight this fact because criminalizing abortion does not eliminate the practice; instead, it often drives people to seek unsafe procedures. Rather than adding to the number of preventable deaths caused by illegal abortions, it would be safer to legalize abortion and ensure access to regulated medical care. By "abortion" we mean the intentional medical termination of a pregnancy and by "legal" we mean that it should be safe, accessible, and protected by law, not hidden in fear or shame. Our team believes abortion should be legal because there are real situations where it's not just a choice, it's a necessity.

Our arguments will focus on the social, economic, and health consequences of a world in which abortion is not available. We will examine its impact on survivors of sexual abuse, on individuals who lack the financial or personal resources to raise a child, and on situations in which continuing a pregnancy poses a serious threat to the mother's life. In these circumstances, we argue that abortion should remain legal and accessible. We understand that this is an emotional and moral issue. But laws should protect people's health, dignity, and freedom, they should not punish them for making difficult decisions. Let's start with our first argument.

Each year, according to the United Nations, about one in three women worldwide experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Many of those assaults result in unwanted pregnancies. Now, imagine being a teenager or even a child and being told that after being raped, you must carry and give birth to your rapist's child. That's not justice. That's cruelty. Legal abortion offers a way out of that nightmare. It allows victims to regain control of their lives and their futures. It prevents the trauma from deepening and gives them a chance to heal. Now, the opposition might

argue that "two wrongs don't make a right," or that "every life deserves a chance." But we must ask what about the life that already exists? The woman, the girl, the survivor, her life, her body, her future. Others might say adoption is an alternative. But adoption doesn't erase the physical and psychological pain of carrying a pregnancy caused by rape. It doesn't make a 14-year-old's trauma disappear. For many victims, forcing pregnancy is a continuation of the violence. So, when we talk about protecting life, we should start by protecting the lives of those who are already living and suffering.

We all know that having a child isn't just an emotional choice. It's a long-term social and economic responsibility. And the truth is, many families simply do not have the conditions to raise a child with dignity. Before the pandemic, around 356 million children lived in extreme poverty, lacking food, sanitation, and healthcare, according to the World Bank and



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UNICEF. Millions of adults still live on the edge of survival as well. These are not rare situations; they are the everyday reality of countless families. So, when someone who is already struggling is forced to continue a pregnancy, the consequences are serious. Their education might stop, their health can worsen, and the child may grow up in a cycle of poverty that's very hard to break. Legal abortion allows people to

make responsible decisions about when they are ready to be parents, so that children are born into stable, supportive conditions. That isn't selfish. It's realistic, responsible, and compassionate.

Now, the opposition may say that life begins at conception and that abortion is always morally wrong. We respect that belief, but the law must protect real people in real situations. A living person's health, safety, and future are directly affected by a pregnancy. A policy that forces someone into deeper poverty or long-term hardship doesn't protect life. It harms it. They might also say that adoption is a solution. But adoption doesn't erase nine months of physical risk, emotional stress, and financial strain. Pregnancy itself carries consequences that adoption cannot fix. When we discuss what truly protects life, we must look at the people who are already here, already struggling, and already in need of support. Thus, legal abortion is not about avoiding responsibility. It's about giving families the chance to have children when they are genuinely able to provide for them. It protects vulnerable people and reduces avoidable suffering.

Finally, abortion must be legal when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. This is one of the clearest, least debatable reasons for legal abortion. No law, no moral code, should force a woman to die to give birth.

According to the World Health Organization, over 800 women die every single day from preventable pregnancy and childbirth-related complications, that's about one every two minutes. In many countries with strict abortion bans, doctors are afraid to intervene even when the mother's life is in danger for fear of prosecution.

Let's be clear, pregnancy is not a risk-free condition. Complications like preeclampsia, ectopic pregnancy, and severe bleeding can kill without quick medical response. Sometimes, the unsafe treatments permanently affect the mother, for instance, causing infertility, not allowing her to have a child ever again. If abortion is illegal, doctors may hesitate, and hesitation

can cost a life. Therefore, when we say abortion should be legal, we're not defending convenience. We're defending the right to survive. Saving a life instead of risking two.

Now, the opposition might argue that, even in these cases, medical technology can always save both lives, or that abortion is never truly necessary. But the evidence says otherwise. Doctors around the world confirm that sometimes the only way to save the mother's life is to end the pregnancy. For example, in cases of ectopic pregnancy, where the embryo grows outside the uterus, it's physically impossible for the fetus to survive, and continuing the pregnancy will kill the woman. There is no "miracle" or "alternative treatment" here. The opposition may also claim that "these cases are rare, so abortion shouldn't be generally legal." But that misses the point: human rights don't depend on statistics. If even one woman's life can be saved, the law should protect that option.

While our motion focuses on saving the mother, this also connects to another real situation, when doctors know the baby will be born with untreatable or fatal health problems. Even though we won't develop that as a separate argument, it reinforces our point: abortion should be a safe, legal medical decision guided by doctors and families, not by politicians or fear.

**"(...) it would be safer to legalize abortion and ensure access to regulated medical care."**

This debate isn't about abstract theories or philosophical puzzles. It's about real people, facing real situations, with consequences that last a lifetime. We began with victims of sexual abuse, people who have already had control ripped away from them. We

showed you that forcing them to continue a pregnancy caused by violence is not morality. It is cruelty. We then explained the harsh reality many families face: the lack of conditions to raise a child. Not every baby is born into love, stability, or safety. Legal abortion gives families the ability to choose the right moment, when they can truly give a child a chance, not just a birth. And finally, we demonstrated one of the clearest cases of all: when a pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. No civilized society should demand that a woman gamble with her life. When doctors say the only way to save a patient is to end the pregnancy, the law must allow them to do their job.

The opposition may have spoken about potential life, about ideals, about what “should” happen in a perfect world. But we do not live in that world. We live in a world where pregnancies can be dangerous. Where women are assaulted. Where poverty is real. Where medical complications don’t care about moral slogans. Our opponents have given you theories. We have given you the truth.

Legal abortion doesn’t force anyone to choose it, but banning abortion forces everyone to suffer its absence. A law that denies choice does not protect life. It endangers it. Before I finish, I want to leave you with a quote from someone who dedicated her life to women’s rights: Margaret Sanger — an American nurse and activist who founded the birth control movement and fought for women’s reproductive freedom at a time when even discussing it was illegal. She said: “No woman can call herself free who does not control her own body.” That idea is at the heart of this debate. Legal abortion isn’t about encouraging anything. It’s about guaranteeing safety, dignity, and the freedom to choose the path that protects your life and your future. That’s why we stand firmly for the legalization of abortion.

## Opposition

Beatriz Almeida, Beatriz Neves, Duarte Baltazar and Érica Xia 11.º 1A

Good morning, esteemed guests, we are the opposition, and we are here to defend that abortion should be illegal apart from certain instances. Furthermore, we believe that priority should be given to educating people through sexual education, to stop couples from making preventable mistakes.

As Pope Francis (2018) once said, “The right to life is the first among human rights.” This reminds us that protecting life is fundamental, and that every individual must be responsible for their own actions and that other lives should not be conditioned by these actions. To support our position, we will be using the arguments of responsibility, morality, and the dangers of abortion.

**“(...) we maintain that when a pregnancy results from a consensual relationship and both partners are responsible for it, abortion cannot be justified solely as a means of avoiding that responsibility”**

With that in mind, we turn to our first argument: responsibility. Firstly, we argue that voluntary termination of pregnancy should be illegal in cases where the couple is responsible for their actions, i.e. when they are aware of the risks and consequences of their actions when having sexual intercourse. It should be noted that contraceptive methods are distributed free of charge in all health centres in Portugal, which makes safe sexual relations a free option for all Portuguese citizens.

According to Federação Portuguesa pela Vida (2024), out of the 17.124 abortions performed in 2023 (47 abortions per day), 16.559 (96,7%) were performed at the woman's own initiative, which highlights the very

low number of abortions due to medical complications. It is also important to emphasize that a law is made for the majority and never for the minority. According to Direção-Geral da Saúde (2022), 28,5% of abortions in Portugal were not the mother’s first abortion, which reinforces the idea that many cases reflect repeated situations where the mother didn’t take personal responsibility for her actions.

In addition, a study by the Universidade da Beira Interior regarding contraceptive use among young women shows that many unintended pregnancies occur not from a lack of access to contraceptives, but from a lack of information. The study found that 67,8% of the women surveyed had taken the morning-after pill at least once, and 81% of them relied on friends or the internet for information, sources which are often unreliable. Key reasons for using emergency contraception included insecurity about their regular method (30%) and simply forgetting to take their birth control pill (16,8%). These are situations that could be prevented with proper knowledge. It is also important to note that repeated use of the morning-after pill reduces its effectiveness, meaning frequent reliance on it significantly increases the risk of an unintended pregnancy (Hospital Oswaldo Cruz, n.d.). These patterns highlight the need for sexual education and to take personal responsibility, rather than normalizing abortion as a solution for preventable circumstances.

It is true that there are instances where a woman’s pregnancy is not her responsibility, such as in cases of rape, and in those, after a proper investigation, we argue that the woman has the individual right to seek an abortion, as her individual rights such as freedom, safety and personal integrity, as defined in the Portuguese constitution, have been violated. Therefore, we maintain that when a pregnancy results from a consensual relationship and both partners are responsible for it, abortion cannot be justified solely as a means of avoiding that responsibility. Our position is not intended to punish women or couples; rather, it seeks to encourage a culture of responsibility, accountability, and prevention.

According to Trent Horn (2017), licensed in theology, philosophy, and bioethics: “It is wrong to intentionally kill innocent biological human beings; a foetus is an innocent biological human being; abortion intentionally kills a foetus; therefore, abortion is wrong”. Prominent moral philosophers in academia who discuss the moral and/or legal acceptability of abortion conclude that fetuses are biological human entities. In his book, *A Defence of Abortion*, David Boonin (2003) states:

The most straightforward connection between you and me and every human foetus is this: we are all living members of the same species, *Homo sapiens*. A human foetus, after all, is merely a human being at a very early stage of development.

If you believe that to be true, then you are morally obligated to oppose abortion. You were also once an organism in your mother's womb, and if it's generally wrong to kill you now, it was also wrong to kill you then. Besides, abortion also creates a culture where it is acceptable to dispose of life when it is unwanted by a person. Furthermore, one can't argue that a foetus is not a person and their life doesn't matter and therefore can be killed due to someone's whim, since in the past the same argument was used to commit unspeakable atrocities to certain groups, like in the case of slavery and genocide. Those moments in history are now seen as very dark times. This will possibly be the way we will see abortion in the future.

Lastly, we must consider the Future Like Ours (FLO.) argument. This philosophical argument, proposed by Marquis (1989), states that killing is morally wrong because it deprives an individual of the valuable experiences, opportunities, relationships, and achievements that their future would have contained. According to the FLO argument, the value of human life lies not only in the present but also in the potential of the future. Therefore, a foetus possesses moral value because it has the potential to enjoy a future similar to that of any other human being. From this perspective, abortion is considered morally wrong because it



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deprives the foetus of that future and of all the experiences and accomplishments it could have had.

Ever since the introduction of abortion in our health system, many benefits have been noted. But very few talk about risks and harm caused by abortion. The advocates for abortion talk about how abortion can help the mother, but they do not seem to bother themselves with what happens to her after said abortion, nor with all the lives that will be forever changed after that.

Firstly, very few women are educated on the anatomical risks of their abortion, that it can cause complications like perforations of the uterine wall, which can lead to the mother having to have her uterus taken out; infections, which can block the fallopian tubes, making it hard for the egg to pass through, decreasing the possibility of having a biological child; and, pelvic adhesions, which can lead to miscarriages in future pregnancies (Clínica Plena, n.d.).

Besides, abortion also has consequences on the woman's mental health. According to Ana Claudia Brandão, a renowned psychologist: “The truth is that we found that women are the second victim of abortion. They suffer the harmful effects of this practice both in their mental health and in their relationship with the environment.” In the post-abortion period, there is a

set of psychological symptoms that affect the mother, such as low self-esteem, nightmares, family imbalance, or, in more severe cases, suicidal thoughts or attempts.

In fact, research has shown that abortion is associated with a higher risk of mental illnesses. A meta-analysis conducted by Coleman (2011) concluded that the risk of developing mental disorders is significantly higher among women who have had an abortion. Within this study, women who underwent abortion showed elevated risks of anxiety, depression, alcohol misuse, and suicidal behaviours (Coleman, 2011). Although the distress tends to decrease over time, it may continue to accompany the woman for a long period.

If we really consider the harms to maternal health, we realize that abortion, although it may seem like a solution to an unwanted pregnancy or difficult situation, also carries many risks. For example, considering the 2023 data on abortion-related deaths in the United States, it was concluded that 6,8% of one million abortions resulted in deaths. If we compare it to pregnancy related deaths, which is 6,5% in four million pregnancies, we have to conclude that abortion still represents a slightly higher risk within a much shorter period of time, as pregnancy related deaths can result from complications before birth, during childbirth, or even after childbirth, so for a much longer period of time. Therefore, while abortion might appear to solve an immediate problem, it may, in fact, expose the mother to greater physical and emotional risks.

Having said that, we consider abortion to be a deliberate attack on both the life of an innocent being and the physical and mental health of the mother. Moreover, it's also impossible to defend abortion from an ethical standpoint since no moral action should ever compromise an individual's right to life, a human right that was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). We do recognize that in some specific instances, for example in the case of rape and medical complications that endanger the mother's life, one might need to have an abortion, as we have disclosed earlier. However, these instances represent a small portion of abortions, a minority and

not the majority, which is, in fact, the main focus of our speech here. Furthermore, the possibility of creating a law that covers up people's irresponsibility cannot be considered, as this would create a society where irresponsibility is not corrected, but rather concealed. We have mentioned multiple arguments that show the violent and irresponsible nature of most abortions, and before ending this debate we would like to leave you, our audience, with one final quote by Pope John Paul II (1995): “A nation that kills its own children is a nation without hope.”

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# Euthanasia: Rights and responsibilities

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## Should euthanasia be legal?

### Proposition

Diana Marques, Gonalo Matias and Santiago Martins 11.º 2

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we are the proposition team, and today we strongly support the motion that euthanasia should be legal. Every day, around the world, people face severe pain from illnesses that cannot be cured. They know there's no hope of recovery, only endless suffering. So, we ask you: shouldn't they have the right to choose a peaceful and dignified end to their life? Our position is clear: we firmly believe that legalizing euthanasia is not only necessary but morally justified.

Does anyone know where the word "euthanasia" comes from? It comes from the Greek words *eu* meaning "good" and *thanatos* meaning "death." So, it literally means "a good death." And that's exactly what this debate is about, giving people the right to a peaceful, humane end instead of intense pain. When we talk about euthanasia, we mean the act of ending someone's life painlessly, with their full consent, to relieve suffering caused by an incurable illness. This debate is not about promoting death, it's about protecting choice, dignity, and compassion.

One of the most basic human rights is autonomy: the freedom to make decisions about our own bodies and our own lives. We are allowed to choose how we live, what we eat, where we work, even whether we accept medical treatment. So why, when suffering terribly, are we suddenly told we cannot choose the way to end our pain? Euthanasia gives back control to those who have lost everything, their health, their strength, and often their dignity. It allows them to say, "this is my life, and I decide when enough is enough." Legalizing euthanasia means recognizing that every person should have the freedom to make such a deeply personal and moral decision for themselves.

Now, I already know what the opposition will say. They'll argue that euthanasia disrespects life, or that some people might be pressured into choosing it. But that's not true. Respecting someone's decision is not the same as encouraging death, it's about compassion and trust. When euthanasia is legal, there are strict procedures: doctors must confirm the patient's condition, consent must be clear, and the decision

must be entirely voluntary (Reuters, 2024; World Population Review, 2025).

To prove our point, we draw your attention to the study *Potential Number of Organ Donors After Euthanasia in Belgium*, which evaluated the number of potential organ donors among people who underwent euthanasia (Ysebaert et al., 2011). In 2015, 1,288 people were on the Belgian organ transplantation waiting list. Researchers estimated that up to 10,1% of patients undergoing euthanasia could potentially donate at least one organ, making approximately 684 organs available for transplantation. In the same year, 260 deceased-donor kidneys were transplanted, meaning that kidneys donated after euthanasia could potentially have more than doubled that number (Ysebaert et al., 2011). So, this is a win-win situation, while getting rid of the unbearable pain that most of the patients in terminal conditions suffer, you can also save the life of another person.

This first argument shows that legalizing euthanasia ultimately respects personal autonomy while ensuring that each decision is voluntary, medically verified, and fully protected by law. By giving patients control over their own suffering, and even allowing some to save other lives through organ donation, legalization strengthens both individual freedom and collective wellbeing.

Let's move on to our second point, ending unnecessary pain and allowing people to die with dignity. For many patients with terminal illnesses, life becomes constant pain, weakness, and complete dependence. Their days are not defined by living, but by suffering. Modern medicine can treat many things, but it cannot always remove the physical and emotional pain that comes with certain conditions (Bollen et al., 2017).

Dignity is something every human being deserves. When someone is no longer able to walk, speak, eat, or even breathe without assistance, they often feel that they have lost control over their own body and identity. Euthanasia gives these people the chance to



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make a final decision that reflects who they are, not just their illness. It allows them to choose a peaceful, controlled, and calm end.

They may argue that suffering can make people stronger, or that there are always treatments available to relieve pain. But that is simply not the reality for many patients. Not all pain can be controlled, and not all illnesses can be improved. Telling someone in unbearable agony that they must continue "because suffering has value" is not compassion, it is cruelty. They might also say that choosing euthanasia is "giving up". But for many patients, it is the opposite. It is a final act of courage, choosing peace over pain, control over helplessness, and dignity over deterioration. Euthanasia does not end a meaningful life, it ends

meaningless suffering. And giving someone that choice is one of the most compassionate things a society can do.

We know that many of you might not know how it is to live with this suffering, so we brought the testimony of a person that went through this type of pain. Cancer is the main disease that leads to euthanasia (Pereira, 2011). Carmen is a woman from Australia who suffered from breast cancer. She said that the worst part of having cancer was the relentless pain she had to endure. She explained that it struck without warning, sometimes waking her at night and other times making the simplest movements unbearable. She described it as a deep, constant pain that invaded every moment of her day and drained her strength. Carmen emphasized

that living with uncontrolled pain made life feel like a continuous battle for the next minute. She added that only when the pain was finally treated did, she regain some sense of herself and the ability to live with dignity (Bollen et al., 2017).

Carmen's experience shows us the brutal reality of what many terminal patients face: constant, relentless pain that slowly erodes their dignity. Her story proves why euthanasia is not about giving up, but about ensuring that no one is forced to endure suffering that serves no purpose. Even in places where assisted dying is available, stories like Carmen's remind us how essential it is to protect this right and extend it to all patients who need it. Her resilience is admirable, but resilience should never be the only option when a

## **“This debate is not about promoting death, it’s about protecting choice, dignity, and compassion”**

peaceful and dignified end could exist.

Our third point is that legalizing euthanasia makes the whole process safer and more responsible. When euthanasia is illegal, people do not stop wanting it. Instead, many turn to unsafe and unregulated alternatives, because there is no official or medical pathway they can follow. As José Pereira, a professor in the University of Ottawa, explains, in countries where euthanasia is illegal, people still attempt to end their lives, but they often do so through dangerous methods, such as unassisted suicide or clandestine assistance. Without medical supervision or proper sedation, these situations involve far greater suffering and risk. Illegality does not prevent these deaths; it simply makes them more traumatic (Pereira, 2011).

Legalization changes this by creating a clear and supervised medical process. Patients receive guidance

from trained professionals, who act within the law and follow strict standards designed to protect their wellbeing. There are concerns that legalization is dangerous or that it may “open the door” to irresponsible decision-making. But the reality in countries where euthanasia is already legal, such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Canada, shows the opposite. These countries apply rigorous safeguards: multiple medical evaluations, a mandatory reflection period, mental capacity assessments, independent review of each case, and the possibility for the patient to withdraw their request at any time (Reuters, 2024; World Population Review, 2025). Legalization is what makes these protections possible. Without it, we don't prevent suffering, we create it.

In conclusion, we have shown that legalizing euthanasia is a necessary, humane, and responsible decision. In our first argument, we defended the right to personal autonomy, explaining that every individual should have the freedom to decide what happens to their own body and to their own suffering, as long as that decision is informed, voluntary, and carefully regulated. In our second argument, we demonstrated that euthanasia helps end unbearable and unnecessary suffering, allowing terminally ill patients to die with dignity instead of being forced to endure constant pain with no hope of recovery. Finally, in our third argument, we explained that legalization makes the process safer and more ethical by establishing strict laws, medical supervision, and clear safeguards that prevent abuse and protect vulnerable patients.

Therefore, by respecting personal choice, reducing suffering, and ensuring safety, the legalization of euthanasia reflects a society built on dignity, compassion, and human rights. As Viktor E. Frankl (2006) said, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, Holocaust survivor, and the founder of logotherapy: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.” For all these reasons, we strongly support this motion.

## **Opposition**

Inês Santos, João Falcão and Rui Martins 11.º 2

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, today, we are here to oppose the motion that euthanasia should be legal.

Firstly, for those who are unfamiliar with the term, euthanasia is the intentional act of providing someone a painless death to relieve suffering caused by an incurable or painful disease (World Health Organization, 2020). As it is an act that painlessly ends a person's suffering, it has become increasingly popular and used. However, it is a widely controversial and discussed subject, as it has its advantages and disadvantages. That's what we are going to discuss in today's debate, telling you why we believe that Euthanasia should be illegal. In fact, did you know that in the Netherlands, 5.516 deaths by euthanasia were recorded in 2015 and 6.091 in 2016? Likewise, Belgium recorded 1,924 cases in 2014, 2.021 in 2015, and 2.025 in 2016 (Emanuel et al., 2018). These statistics show that euthanasia has become increasingly common over the years and is no longer an exceptional practice.

In legalizing euthanasia, the Government sends us the message that some lives matter less than others, putting at risk human dignity. It creates a system of determining which people are considered acceptable to euthanize (which, therefore, determines which people are more worthy of a life than others). People who are vulnerable, such as the chronically ill, the elderly or people with disabilities will most likely feel pressure to see euthanasia as the correct or selfless act, simply not to be considered a burden.

Studies show that 56% of people in Washington State and 54% in Oregon who requested physician-assisted death reported feeling like a burden to their family, friends, or caregivers as one of the reasons for their decision (Oregon Health Authority, 2024; Washington State Department of Health, 2023). Monique Arend is a widely publicized example of a young woman with severe psychiatric problems who considered euthanasia. She thought that her existence was “a big problem for everyone” and that she did not want to be a burden to others. Although she did not go through with it, her story shows how feelings of being

a social burden can influence life-or-death decisions (The Free Press, 2023).

In addition, the Government, by allowing the use of euthanasia and giving institutions the authority to administer it, is in direct violation of its most fundamental obligation, which is to protect human life. By authorizing death, the Government is no longer the protector of human life, but instead an arbiter of death. How do you respond to this?

Euthanasia shouldn't be legal and we can look at this issue from two sides: the moral side and the economic side. We fully believe that, by allowing euthanasia, we are violating the dignity of the person in question, which, for many people, is unacceptable, since life has a sacred value and should not be determined by external factors. From our point of view, a person, especially the elderly, may realize that, in order to continue living, they are a very large expense for public health and, pressured by this, may end up preferring euthanasia. No one should feel that their life is worth less simply because they need medical care or long-term support.



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Nicholas Tonti-Filippini was an Australian man with a chronic illness who explained that he received letters from the health insurance company reminding him how much his treatment cost, which obviously caused him anxiety and made him feel like a “burden” to society (Tonti-Filippini, 2010). This is a testimony that shows how even administrative messages can make someone feel less valued because of their cost.

This goes against fundamental moral principles that defend equality and respect for all human beings, regardless of age, health condition or economic impact. If we allow doctors to end life intentionally, even out of compassion, where do we draw the line between mercy and murder?

The normalization of euthanasia is one of the most concerning consequences of its legalization. The Netherlands and Belgium account for most reported euthanasia cases worldwide, showing that what was originally intended as an exceptional measure has become increasingly common (Emanuel et al., 2018). In Belgium, there are cases where French citizens or citizens from neighboring countries where euthanasia is illegal travel to Belgium to request it. Despite being a minority, the requests have been increasing (Emanuel et al., 2018).

When euthanasia begins to represent a growing percentage of total deaths, it stops being seen as a last source and becomes the easier and faster response, and a socially accepted solution, changing how death

is perceived in society. People are normalizing what was meant to be a very specific alternative, when in fact it's obviously a very serious matter. Considering the statistics presented, what do you think will happen in the coming years?

To conclude, we believe that the use of euthanasia should not be legal and, although we understand that every person should have the right to make their own decisions about their life, legalizing euthanasia would have serious consequences that people sometimes forget to consider. This is not just about ending pain; it also changes how society values human life.

Firstly, legalizing euthanasia leads to the devaluation of life, especially for the most vulnerable people. When death becomes a legal option, people may feel pressured to choose euthanasia, so they are not seen as a burden. This puts human dignity at risk and sends the message that some lives matter less than others.

Secondly, the use of euthanasia raises serious moral and economic concerns. A person's life should never be judged by how much it costs or how useful it is. No one should feel pushed to die because they need more care or support. Allowing doctors to end life on purpose, even out of compassion, weakens the moral values that protect human life.

Finally, we discussed the normalization of euthanasia. In countries where it is legal, the number of cases continues to rise. What was meant to be a last option is slowly becoming normal. Instead of offering death, our society should invest in better medical care and emotional support. True compassion means caring for people until the end of their lives, not ending their lives. As the physician and ethicist Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement, famously said: “You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life” (Saunders, 2006). For these reasons, we strongly believe that euthanasia should not be legal.

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# Gun Ownership: Balancing rights and safety



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## Should gun ownership be legal?

### Proposition

Guilherme Medeiros, Maria Francisca Varela, Rafael Duarte and Valéria Ferreira 11.º 1A

Good morning, audience, moderator and opposition, we are here to support the motion that gun ownership should be made legal. By “gun ownership”, we do not mean unrestricted access, but the possession of firearms paired with legal responsibilities and defined rights. An individual should be legally allowed to have a gun if they follow the rules for keeping it and using it safely. This does not mean someone can use a gun without laws, limits, and responsibilities. According to *The New York Times*, Switzerland voted to tighten gun laws within the Schengen area. Even in a country with a long tradition linked to firearms, their regulation and legislation is still reinforced (Buchanan et al., 2018). This example shows that legalization and responsibility for guns can go hand in hand with improve public safety.

Our first argument emphasizes the right to self-defense, reducing vulnerability. The second highlights how strict gun laws ensure safe and responsible ownership. Lastly, we explore the cultural, recreational, and social value of firearms.

Let's start off with the first argument. Consider a quiet neighborhood around midnight. The streets are empty and dark. A family sleeps peacefully, when suddenly, a window breaks. In such cases, having a legal firearm can mean the difference between fear and safety, providing crucial means of protection.



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A PubMed study on firearms ownership motivation among United States (US) adults found that 78,8% own them for self-defense. In addition, the study revealed a correlation between protection-motivated ownership and minority groups. For example, almost 100% of Black and Asian women exhibited this correlation in American society (Schehl et al., 2024). This highlights how guns can empower vulnerable groups in society.

People have a fundamental right to protect themselves, their families and their property. This is especially important for certain groups, such as women, groups of color and the elderly.

Now, picture another situation: a bear breaks into your home and starts attacking you. What would you have done? In California, in 2021, a homeowner faced a bear that broke into his home; fortunately, he possessed a legal gun and was able to protect himself by shooting the animal (ABC News, 2021). This does not mean that our goal, by legalizing guns, is to kill animals. However, in some remote areas where residents are exposed to dangerous wildlife, firearms are a precaution. A gun nearby is helpful because it allows individuals to respond immediately, protecting themselves and their surroundings.

While critics argue that legalizing guns fuels division, evidence suggests that with proper regulation, it can promote stability and responsible ownership. Offenders may be less likely to attack when they know their potential victims could be armed. Moreover, thieves will always have access to guns illegally. Allowing civilians to have them creates a balance of power, reducing their vulnerability.

As Aristotle points out: “The good citizen should be capable of defending the community.” History supports this idea. Some countries used firearms to defend themselves from authoritarian governments. During World War II, Switzerland relied on an armed group of civilians to defend itself against a German invasion. This example shows that, without guns, the population would have been oppressed by tyrannical governments.

Continuing with the second argument, in other aspects, most developed countries have very strict laws regarding gun possession. For instance, in Japan, ranked 16<sup>th</sup> safest countries in the world, to obtain a firearm, you have to go through a thirteen-steps verification. These consist of tests, background checks (psychological and criminal, including domestic violence records), classes, police verification, and more. New Zealand, the 8<sup>th</sup> safest country, also requires a long background check, followed by multiple inspections and a waiting period for approval. In Austria, one of the safest countries in Europe, in order to request a gun, applicants must show serious physical danger. Applicants must complete a mental health survey, and a course on safe gun handling and storage. In other cases, in countries like Yemen, where the security situation is highly unstable, individuals do not go through any kind of check, test, verification or classes. This results in a lot of armed conflicts, unsafe population, terrorism, kidnapping and other crimes (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Consequently, regulated laws result in safe use and storage, which can reduce crime and vulnerability. Therefore, a correlation is found between developed countries with low crime rates and regulated laws for gun ownership.

The opposition defends that by legalizing guns, there will be an increase in murders and violent crimes. However, with all the background checks and training, that risk is low. We defend gun ownership through a method that considers individuals’ backgrounds, health situations and intentions regarding gun control.

Finally, we would like to add that firearms are not only used in a social context. Many long-standing culturally significant activities require their use. Competitive shooting, like target and Olympic shooting in the US, Europe and Japan, is another great example. Another case is recreational hunting. This is a common practice in Portugal, the US and Canada, and it includes deer and wild boar hunting. If we remove gun use from the practices in these societies, we erase many years of traditions and the bonds between people, taking away their identity. This individuality has created the character and history of nations over centuries; thus,

we cannot erase these aspects simply because we believe guns are unsafe to hold.

Taking everything into account, legal gun ownership involves rights, safety, responsibility, and traditions, while addressing potential risks of violence. It allows citizens to defend themselves, their loved ones and what’s theirs, balancing power in a society. This means that, in times of danger, holding a gun can be crucial. Don’t you think that the man whose house was invaded by a bear acted correctly? Also, we would like to reinforce that criminals and powerful groups will always have access to firearms. Consequently, allowing citizens to possess guns during situations of political and social instability helps balance threatening power in society. When it comes to its legalization, in safe and developed countries, such as Japan, New Zealand and Austria, gun acquisition laws are considerably stricter than in less regulated contexts (Deutsche Welle, 2022). With proper regulation, gun ownership can be safe.

**“With proper regulation, gun ownership can be safe.”**

To conclude, guns should be allowed, out of respect for cultural and recreational traditions. In other words, respecting the country's identities. Removing these arms would erase parts of a nation's history. For these reasons, we strongly assert that gun ownership should be legal, but with restrictions when acquiring them. It is a fundamental right that safeguards life, freedom and security. As John Locke once stated: “Self-defense is a part of the law of nature; nor can it be denied the community, even against the king himself”.

## Opposition

Leonor Peres, Maria Carvalho and Tiago Silva 11.º 1A

Good morning esteemed guests, my name is Maria, and these are my colleagues Leonor and Tiago. Today, we stand here to discuss the issue of legal gun ownership, in opposition to the idea of widespread civilian gun possession, because it brings more risks than safety, as history has been teaching us over time.

Our position is not based on supposition, opinion or ideology, but simply on evidence and facts. Across the developed world, one pattern is clear and unmistakable: 1 - more guns lead to more deaths; 2 - gun availability increases homicide and suicide rates; and 3 - guns rarely provide effective self-defense, but instead lead to the proliferation of violence in societies.

To begin, I would like to ask you a simple question: Do guns in society really make us safer? Because, if guns truly made us safer, then why do the countries with the most guns suffer the most deaths?

I would like to state, once again, that more guns lead to more deaths, not just because it is something we firmly believe in, but also since higher levels of gun ownership are consistently linked to higher levels of gun-related deaths. This pattern is not affected by culture, politics or geography, instead, it remains constant as the mechanism behind it is simple: when highly fatal weapons' access is simple, everyday conflicts and emotional crises become more likely to end in aggression and death (Anglemyer et al., 2014).

Countries with strict gun regulation such as Japan, the United Kingdom and Portugal, offer the clearest evidence to support this argument, as, due to their strict firearm regulation, they are able maintain extremely low levels of citizen firearm possession and, as a result, experience some of the lowest gun death rates globally, and report firearm death-rates drastically lower than countries known for the legal gun possession. To further illustrate my point, according to the National Vital Statistics System in the United States, Japan records around 0,02 gun deaths per 100.000 people, while the United Kingdom reports

approximately 0,2 per 100.000. Portugal, which also has strict regulation, maintains an equally low rate. These scenarios are not just slightly better, but they are much lower than the firearm death rates seen in heavily armed societies, such as the United States. I would like to highlight that in 2018 a Small Arms Survey report stated that there were approximately 393 million civilian firearms, meaning that 120 guns were roughly available per 100 US residents, which is the highest rate of private gun possession worldwide (Karp, 2018).

Imagine being in a room where all of the people around you were armed. Would you feel safe? Or would you feel surrounded by danger? Maybe you said safe, but what if all the people inside the room had something against you? Would you feel safe then?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2023, the United States recorded around 12 firearm deaths per 100.000 people, making its firearm mortality rate 60 times higher than the United Kingdom's and over 500 times higher than Japan's. This difference cannot be justified by culture, crime, or mental-health statistics, as it is directly connected to the availability of guns in a society.

**“(...) if guns truly made us safer, then why do the countries with the most guns suffer the most deaths?”**

Records show that gun prevalence is one of the strongest predictors of gun deaths. In other words, the number of firearms in a society directly affects the probability of deadly consequences. I would like to emphasize that even when comparing countries



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with similar crime rates, economic development, or social structures, the availability of guns can dramatically change homicide rate results. When a significant number of individuals legally own guns, everyday arguments, robberies, domestic disputes, and impulsive decisions are far more likely to end in irreversible and sometimes deadly consequences. Alternatively, societies where gun supply is short, have far less drastic consequences, when facing the same kind of situations (Anglemyer et al., 2014).

For these reasons, our first argument is clear: the more guns a society has, the more people die from them. It is important to remember that the evidence that supports this argument is transversal to every continent, decade, and culture, and it consistently leads to the same conclusion: limiting access to guns is one of the most effective ways to reduce violence and, overall, to protect lives.

Secondly, before presenting our second argument we would like to ask you a question: How many lives are lost everyday either because someone was mentally struggling or because an argument turned deadly simply because a gun was nearby?

We thoroughly believe that irreversible actions, such as keeping guns at home or using the death penalty,

can turn short moments of crisis into permanent and sometimes lethal consequences.

Many gun-related dangers happen not only in public places, but inside people's homes. Research shows that the risk of suicide increases noticeably when guns are present inside the homes. According to the CDC, more than 50% of all reported gun-related deaths in the United States are suicides. These statistics reveal the harmful impact of firearms in domestic settings, especially when individuals face moments of crisis.

To reinforce my point, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center found that simply having a gun inside a home increases the risk of suicide by three to five times (Harvard Injury Control Research Center, n.d.). Suicidal crises often happen quickly and when a gun is nearby, a short moment of emotional instability can quickly turn into a deadly action. Unlike other methods of self-harm, the death rate of a gun suicide attempt is extremely high, with studies showing that 85–90% of suicide attempts with guns result in death, compared to only 2–5% with other methods. This means that, when a gun is present there is almost no chance of survival or time for the victims to get help. To put it another way, firearms can turn a crisis that someone could recover from into a tragedy that cannot be undone.

We can observe a similar pattern when looking at domestic violence rates. As reported by studies conducted at Johns Hopkins University, women are five times more likely to be killed by an abusive partner when a firearm is present in the household (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, n.d.). Domestic violence situations are often unstable and unpredictable, but having a firearm considerably increases the chance of a deadly outcome. As a matter of fact, studies have shown that gun violence is responsible for more than 50% of all domestic homicides in the United States.

Therefore, the presence of guns in the home does not keep individuals safer; it puts them at much greater

risk of violence and death. In addition to that, a 2013 study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* stated that access to firearms makes it more likely for both victims and aggressors to escalate violence (Anglemyer et al., 2014). The presence of a gun inside a home does not prevent violence; instead, it tends to transform violent conflicts into lethal ones.

In fact, research from the Violence Policy Center found that homes with guns are 3 times more likely to have a deadly domestic violence incident than those without guns.

Consequently, the presence of guns in the home does not make people safer, it puts them at much higher risk of violence and death. How can we justify the presence of guns inside our homes? Perhaps to protect ourselves... But to what extent do people really use guns as means of protection and not to simply harm others?

Our third argument states that the idea of guns providing real protection is an illusion. A common argument in favor of legal gun possession is the belief that guns offer protection and allow people to defend themselves. However, evidence consistently shows that using a gun for self-defense is extremely rare, often ineffective, and frequently increases the danger to the gun owner and people surrounding them, instead of minimizing it.

According to the US National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), guns are successfully used in self-defense in about less than 1% of violent crimes. This means that in most cases, people facing threats do not rely on guns to protect themselves, either because the situation does not allow it, or because using a gun would increase the danger, instead of minimizing it. In addition to that, even studies that estimate higher rates of defensive gun use have been proven to rely on unverified self-reports that cannot be confirmed and frequently contradict records provided by actual authorities.

Furthermore, research published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that individuals who resort to guns as a means of self-defense are more likely to be injured than those who do not resist or who use other strategies (Branas et al., 2009). These situations are filled with chaos, stress and unpredictability. Instead of protecting the defender, having a weapon often increases the risk of injury.

If civilian gun ownership truly made individuals safer, then the country with the highest number of guns owned by citizens, the United States should logically have the lowest rates of violent crime and gun-related harm. Yet the opposite is happening.

“Instead of protecting the defender, having a weapon often increases the risk of injury.”

According to the CDC, the United States has one of the highest gun mortality rates among developed nations, despite its extremely high rate of gun ownership. This shows that the presence of guns does not provide effective protection. Instead, the opposite happens, it increases the danger by increasing the chances that everyday confrontations or criminal incidents end in serious injury or death.

The belief that guns provide reliable self-defense is a comforting idea; however, it is not supported by evidence. As we demonstrated previously, research shows that guns fail to protect people in many violent situations and expose owners to greater risks (Branas et al., 2009; Anglemyer et al., 2014). Instead of offering safety, widespread gun possession creates a society where threats become deadlier, conflicts escalate faster, and tragedies become more common.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, the evidence is undeniable: legal gun ownership does not make society safer. On the contrary, it increases risks and costs lives. The number of guns present in a society directly increases the amount of gun deaths everywhere. Being surrounded by guns will not make us feel safer; it will only make us feel frightened. As research demonstrated, guns are far more likely to contribute to violence, self-harm, and accidental deaths than to provide meaningful protection (Anglemyer et al., 2014; Branas et al., 2009).

Let us create a society where arguments do not turn into homicides, let us create a society where our kids will be safe at school and on streets, let us create a society that is not violent, let us create a society that relies on authorities. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “Nothing good ever comes of violence. Revenge and retaliation always perpetuate the cycle of anger, fear and violence.”

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## Should gun ownership be legal?

### Proposition

Afonso Ribeiro, Inês Santos, Julieta Machado and Manuel Melo 11.º 2

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we will defend the motion that gun ownership should be legal. For those who don't know, ownership means the act, state or right of possessing something legally. For us, gun ownership should be legal because it brings protection to ourselves and for those we love.

Firstly, we defend that everyone should have the right to own a firearm because it allows people to defend themselves and their loved ones from immediate danger, home invasions, or other violent crimes. Switzerland permits firearm ownership under a regulated licensing system for most adults who meet legal requirements (Swissinfo, n.d.). It is also consistently ranked among the world's safest countries (National Geographic Portugal, 2024). From our perspective, this shows that responsible gun ownership can coexist with a safe society.

In fact, there are real-life examples that are anything but hypothetical, where the question of life or death is placed before the victims. A citizen becomes lost and questions the use of weapons, in certain cases, the danger is so great that people have to use a bladed weapon to choose life over death, this is called self-defense, and unfortunately, nowadays many people must resort to weapons to survive.

A specific example of this type of situation comes from the testimony of a mother who recounted that, after spending three months with her newborn son in the neonatal intensive care unit, she was finally able to bring him home. At the time, she was temporarily living with her parents, together with her newborn, her three-year-old son, and her father.

One afternoon, the family heard a loud noise coming from the back door. A man, reportedly under the influence of drugs and carrying a firearm, had jumped over the fence and was attempting to force his way into the house. The woman's father, a former member of the military, retrieved a firearm, confronted the intruder outside, and successfully restrained him at gunpoint while the family called the police.

Although the house was located only three blocks from the nearest police station, officers reportedly took more than fifteen minutes to arrive. Upon hearing the approaching sirens, the intruder attempted to escape but was apprehended with the assistance of a police dog. The family later learned that he had been under the influence of methamphetamine and was searching for drugs. Although he was armed, he was unable to use his weapon because the father had kept him immobilized throughout the incident.

According to the mother's account, her father never fired his weapon. She concludes that the experience reinforced her belief that having a firearm at home made her family safer and strengthened their support

for the right to bear arms (Quora, n.d.). This example shows that it's not always necessary to actually shoot and use the weapon, sometimes simply showing that you have a weapon, demonstrating a certain level of security, can pose a significant risk to the life of a captured criminal. Weapons instill fear in criminals and provide security to victims, who only use them when truly necessary.

Our second argument is related to the ineffectiveness of gun control. Currently, gun control does not end the illegal use of weapons. In fact, laws won't stop a desperate person from buying a gun, as citizens continue to acquire weapons through their sources. Therefore, the danger on the street continues, but it

is worsened when no one expects the use of a weapon (since it is considered illegal). For example, a citizen on the street does not expect to encounter a criminal with a weapon, however, if gun ownership were legalized, all citizens would expect the worst and know that they might encounter criminals with weapons. It is better to own weapons than to possess them illegally and unexpectedly, this would possibly cause even more deaths, as citizens who follow the rules and the illegality of weapons would not be able to defend themselves.

We have the example of Chicago and New York, where even with strict gun control, the crime rate continues to rise. In Chicago, shooting and murder rates increased by 50% in 2020. A similar event occurred in New York, leading us to understand that the solution to the gun problem is not gun control, but crime control. Guns can be legal if people are taught from a young age what is correct and that they should only be used for self-defense:

Studies have shown that homicide rates tend to rise when law-abiding citizens are unable to own and carry firearms for self-defense. [...] And the recent statistics from some of the countries' most anti-gun cities confirm this conclusion. (NRA Institute for Legislative Action [NRA-ILA], n.d.).

There is evidence that crime control really works, a good example is Project Exile launched in Richmond, Virginia, in 1997. Faced with an extremely high homicide rate, they began to enforce existing gun laws rigorously, imposing long sentences on drug traffickers and other criminals who illegally carried firearms, the project was a huge success. Law enforcement seized hundreds of illegal weapons, and the homicide rate dropped significantly. Other cities implemented the program and achieved similar success and in a short period of time Project Exile demonstrated, without a doubt, that focusing on criminals who use weapons, rather than imposing an undue burden on law-abiding citizens, is the best way to curb violent crime and ensure the safety of the American people.



Photo by Remy Gieling on Unsplash

It is true that the United States has a lot of gun problems, but we also need to recognize that there are many other countries that allow gun ownership and do not have the same kind of problems. After investigating, we realized that the United States is also one of the countries with the highest rates of mental health issues, so, if they implemented proper evaluations to determine when someone is mentally fit to own a gun, just like many other countries do, there would be less problems involving guns (Yahoo Finance, 2023). Opponents may say that despite more education and fewer gun control laws, weapons continue to be a great danger to society, which we refute by saying that the problem is men, not weapons.

Our third argument is historical: the claim that disarmament can facilitate tyranny. When citizens are legally permitted to own firearms, governments may be less able to monopolize the use of force and suppress fundamental rights without resistance. Supporters of the right to bear arms argue that an armed population can serve as a safeguard against authoritarian rule by helping to preserve the balance of power between the state and its citizens (Ammo.com, n.d.).



Photo by Chip Vincent on Unsplash

One historical example often cited in support of this argument is the regime of Idi Amin in Uganda. Amin used existing laws and the state's overwhelming military power to identify, isolate, and eliminate political opponents. By ensuring that only the military and his loyal supporters had access to weapons, he created a severe imbalance of power. The regime possessed overwhelming force, while ordinary citizens had virtually no means of defending themselves against state violence. At its most fundamental level, the right to self-defense is a basic human right, encompassing the right to protect oneself, one's family, and one's community from unlawful aggression, whether committed by ordinary criminals or by state-sponsored forces.

From this perspective, the history of Uganda under Idi Amin illustrates how the concentration of armed power in the hands of an authoritarian government can leave citizens vulnerable to oppression. In this context, gun ownership is viewed not merely as a means of self-defense against crime, but as a safeguard for the broader principles of individual liberty and limited government. The Ugandan experience serves as a stark reminder of the dangers that can arise when citizens are left without the means to resist a tyrannical regime. As Abraham Lincoln famously stated, government should be "of the people, by the people, for the people," rather than one that becomes their master and executioner (Lincoln, n.d.).

An armed population that is prepared to defend itself is often viewed as an important safeguard against the concentration of unchecked governmental power. Supporters of this position argue that citizens should retain the means to protect not only themselves and their families, but also the principles of liberty and democracy, should a government abandon its constitutional limits and evolve into an authoritarian regime.

Historical examples are frequently cited in support of this argument. During the twentieth century, numerous authoritarian governments were

responsible for the deaths of millions of their own citizens. Advocates of civilian gun ownership also point to regimes such as that of Benito Mussolini in Italy, which imposed strict controls on civilian access to firearms while consolidating political power and suppressing opposition (Ammo.com, n.d.). From this perspective, an armed and united population may be better positioned to resist tyranny than one that is entirely dependent on the state for its protection.

**"When citizens are legally permitted to own firearms, governments may be less able to monopolize the use of force and suppress fundamental rights without resistance."**

Supporters further argue that governments cannot always guarantee the safety of every individual. Indeed, courts in several jurisdictions have ruled that law enforcement agencies generally do not have a specific legal duty to protect each individual citizen from harm (*Warren v. District of Columbia*, 1981). Consequently, they contend that citizens should retain the right to defend themselves when immediate assistance is unavailable. If the state cannot always provide protection, they argue, individuals should not be deprived of the means to protect their own lives, their families, and their freedoms. Taken together, these historical examples and legal arguments are presented as evidence that civilian firearm ownership can serve not only as a means of self-defense against crime but also as a safeguard against the abuse of governmental power.

The lack of resources on the part of the police and security guards also supports the argument that the presence of weapons should be legalized; that is, since those who should protect us don't have the resources and power to do so, citizens, who continue to need security and protection, should have weapons: "If you believe in the right to life, then you must believe in the right to have the means to defend that life" (Reese, as cited in Ammo.com, n.d.).

In conclusion, we maintain that legal gun ownership brings more benefits than harms. As we have shown, the relationship between firearm ownership and homicide rates is far more complex than is often assumed, and strict gun control alone does not necessarily prevent violent crime or mass shootings. More importantly, responsible citizens have a fundamental right to defend themselves, their families, and their freedoms when immediate protection is unavailable.

Ultimately, the problem is not the existence of firearms, but the actions of those who misuse them. The focus should therefore be on preventing violent crime, enforcing the law, and keeping weapons out of the hands of dangerous individuals, rather than restricting the rights of law-abiding citizens.

For these reasons, we firmly believe that responsible gun ownership should remain legal. Thank you for your attention.

## Opposition

Mariana Silva, Matilde Ricardo and Miguel Almeida 11.º 2

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, moderator, and fellow debaters. Imagine a world where every disagreement, every moment of anger, could end with the pull of a trigger. That world isn't fiction; it's the reality we risk when the possession of firearms becomes legal and widespread. Are we solving violence or simply legalizing it? We represent the opposition and stand firmly against the legalization of gun ownership.

Countries that allow legal gun ownership have significantly higher firearm-related death rates than countries where guns are illegal or tightly controlled (BBC News Brasil, 2024; Low, 2017). First, we compared the United States and Japan to demonstrate that firearm-related deaths are much higher in countries where civilian gun ownership is widespread than in countries where firearms are heavily restricted. In the United States, for every one million people aged 1 to 19, there are 36,4 firearm deaths, compared with 0,3 deaths per million in Japan for the same age group (BBC News Brasil, 2024).

According to a 2022 report, in the United States a total of 48.204 people died from firearm injuries, including suicides, homicides, and accidental deaths (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). In the country, 54% of adults or their families have experienced a firearm incident, 21% have been threatened with a firearm, 19% have family members who have been killed by firearms, 17% have witnessed a shooting, 4% have used a firearm for self-defense, and 4% have been injured by a firearm (BBC News Brasil, 2024). The firearm mortality rate in the United States is 11,4 times higher than that of 29 other high-income countries, making this an especially American problem (BBC News Brasil, 2024).

Japan is now one of the safest countries in the world regarding firearm violence, with extremely low rates of gun-related deaths. In 2014, for example, there were only six firearm deaths recorded in the entire country, compared with 33.599 deaths in the United States during the same period (Low, 2017). This result is the product of a strict gun-control system

officially established in 1958, but based on traditions that had already limited firearm circulation long before (Low, 2017; Gan, 2022). To legally obtain a firearm, applicants must complete a full-day training course, pass a written examination, and demonstrate a minimum accuracy of 95% in a shooting test. They must also undergo psychological and drug testing, as well as a thorough criminal background investigation (Low, 2017).

Japanese law severely restricts the types of firearms allowed — essentially only hunting rifles and air rifles — and ammunition purchases are also tightly controlled, requiring buyers to return spent cartridges before purchasing new ones (Low, 2017). The few licensed gun shops are closely monitored, and in some prefectures there are only a handful of authorized dealers (Gan, 2022). After purchase, firearms must be securely stored, and the police conduct regular inspections to verify compliance. Licenses remain valid for only three years, after which applicants must repeat the entire certification process (Low, 2017).

In addition to these strict regulations, there is a strong cultural component that reinforces public safety. The Japanese population generally does not consider firearm ownership a fundamental right, and consequently there is very little political support for relaxing gun-control laws (Gan, 2022). Even police officers rarely discharge their firearms; in 2015, for example, officers fired only six shots nationwide (Low, 2017). Consequently, the combination of strict legislation, rigorous enforcement, and a culture that discourages firearm ownership explains why Japan has virtually eliminated gun violence.

Finally, in 2017, only about 377.000 firearms were owned by civilians in Japan, a country of approximately 125 million people. This corresponds to 0,25 firearms per 100 inhabitants, compared with approximately 120 firearms per 100 inhabitants in the United States, according to the Small Arms Survey (Low, 2017). Additionally, gun ownership has increasingly become an issue of political identity, with ideology shaping whether people support gun rights or stricter regulation. Gun



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ownership is therefore not merely a public safety issue; it is also a matter of social policy because attitudes toward firearms in countries such as the United States are strongly influenced by political identity and cultural beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2019).

In many southern states, where conservative ideology and support for Republican values are more prevalent, citizens tend to defend gun ownership as a fundamental constitutional right and resist restrictions. According to surveys, 86% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents support stricter gun laws, compared with only 31% of Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2019). In contrast, northern and

northeastern states, which generally vote Democratic and embrace more liberal political values, strongly support stricter firearm regulations (Pew Research Center, 2019).

This demonstrates that gun policy is often influenced less by empirical evidence than by political loyalty, cultural identity, and ideology (Pew Research Center, 2019). As a result, the country remains deeply divided, with some states defending highly permissive gun laws while others advocate much stricter regulation. This ideological divide makes it extremely difficult to develop coherent national policies capable of reducing firearm violence. Therefore, gun ownership is not simply a matter of personal freedom; it also creates serious challenges for public policy because political identity frequently outweighs evidence.

Having guns stored in homes, especially when they are easily accessible, greatly increases the risk of tragic accidents involving children and raises the likelihood of domestic violence and suicide. These harms are preventable and result from easy access to firearms, not simply from "bad luck" (CDC, 2023; CDC, 2024). Between 2003 and 2021, there were 1.262 fatal unintentional firearm injuries among children aged 0–17 in the United States. Most of these deaths occurred in or around the child's home, and in most cases the firearms were loaded and unlocked. Many of these tragedies happened when children were playing with a gun or showing it to others, unaware of how deadly it could be (CDC, 2023).

A recent news report from Texas illustrates the serious risks associated with keeping firearms in the home, particularly when children have access to them. According to investigators, a 14-year-old boy was fatally shot by his 12-year-old sibling, who was playing with a rifle when it accidentally discharged. At the time of the incident, their parents were away from home, another sibling aged 17 was present, and multiple firearms were found in the house (Miller, 2025). This tragic case demonstrates how firearms can turn a moment of curiosity or carelessness into a fatal accident. It also highlights the increased risk that easily

accessible guns pose in what should be safe family environments, especially when children are involved.

However, this problem extends beyond homes and families. School shootings have increased dramatically over the last two decades. Between the 1997–1998 and 2021–2022 school years, there were 1,453 recorded school shootings in K–12 schools across the United States. In the 2021–2022 school year alone, 328 incidents were reported, demonstrating that children and adolescents are increasingly at risk even in places where they should feel safest (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2024). Would you ever feel safe leaving your child at school, knowing that when you return to pick them up, you might never see them again? This is the harsh reality for too many families living in a country where easy access to firearms makes these tragedies possible.

Guns inside homes also heighten the risk of domestic violence and suicide. Studies show that access to firearms makes impulsive acts of violence and self-harm far more likely to result in death (CDC, 2024). In 2022 alone, more than 48,000 Americans died from firearm-related injuries, many of which were suicides and domestic homicides (CDC, 2024). Living in a household with an unsecured firearm does not only put the gun owner at risk, but also children and other family members.

In Connecticut, a tragic domestic-violence incident ended with three people dead. On the evening of March 27, 2025, David Cote Sr., aged 59, shot and killed his estranged wife, Michelle Cote, aged 55, and their 34-year-old son, David Cote Jr. The violence occurred during a heated argument while the family was in the process of moving belongings following divorce proceedings. Authorities recovered 26 legally owned firearms from the residence, all legally purchased (CT Insider, 2025).

At the time, the son and one of his friends had returned to the home to help with the move. When shots were fired, the friend, who was legally armed, returned fire, killing Cote Sr. (CT Insider, 2025). Police

interviews with neighbors described Cote Sr. as “aggressive” and “constantly surveillance oriented.” Despite these concerns, there had been no previous reports of domestic violence at the residence (CT Insider, 2025).

Therefore, even if someone appears nonviolent and has no previous history of domestic abuse, we can never fully predict what may happen during moments of anger, stress, or conflict. Having a firearm in the home dramatically increases the likelihood that these situations will become fatal. Firearms do not merely reflect people's intentions; they amplify the consequences of impulsive decisions and ordinary disagreements.

**“(...) legalizing gun ownership increases violence, threatens public safety, and undermines the very sense of security it claims to provide.”**

These examples clearly demonstrate one fact: widespread civilian gun ownership, combined with easy access and unsafe storage, creates preventable tragedies. Children, families, and communities suffer the consequences, and many of these deaths could have been avoided through stricter regulations and safer firearm storage.

A study conducted by researchers at Stanford University, analyzing data from 17.6 million adults over a 12-year period (2004–2016), found that living in a household with one or more firearms more than doubled the risk of dying from homicide compared with households without firearms. When the homicide involved firearms, the risk increased to nearly three

times higher, while in cases of domestic violence the presence of a firearm was associated with a sevenfold increase in homicide risk. The study also concluded that owning firearms did not reduce the risk of death during burglaries or home invasions, challenging one of the most common arguments in favor of household gun ownership (Yoneshigue, 2022).

Even beyond the statistics, human stories reveal the same pattern of risk. Consider Charlie Kirk, a well-known conservative political activist who strongly defended the constitutional right to own firearms. Although he consistently argued that responsible gun ownership was safe and necessary, his own life ended in a fatal shooting. His death illustrates the irony that personal belief in firearms cannot eliminate the risks associated with their widespread availability. Like many advocates of gun ownership, he likely believed such violence would never affect him personally. This tragic case reminds us that no one is immune to firearm violence, regardless of political convictions.

The circulation of firearms, whether legal or illegal, also contributes directly to the number of deaths in armed conflicts by supplying weapons that ultimately reach non-state actors and criminal organizations. This intensifies violence, increases civilian casualties, and destabilizes entire regions (Antunes and Freitas, 2024; Manfrin, 2025). This phenomenon is aggravated by the lack of transparency within the international arms trade. Even when firearm sales are legal and regulated, governments cannot guarantee that these weapons will always be used responsibly.

Legal firearm ownership may provide individual protection, but it can also contribute to broader violence, as demonstrated by armed conflicts where legally manufactured weapons eventually reach war zones. The legal arms trade also indirectly fuels illegal markets. Firearms that are legally sold may later be stolen, lost, or diverted into criminal networks. The more firearms circulate legally, the greater the likelihood that some will eventually enter illicit markets, making law-enforcement efforts considerably more difficult.

For example, international demand for firearms has generated hundreds of billions of euros in revenue. Courts have confirmed illegal transfers of weapons, including exports to Saudi Arabia, while the United Nations has reported that firearms legally manufactured in Brazil were later trafficked illegally and used during the conflict in Yemen (Manfrin, 2025; Antunes and Freitas, 2024).

The United States alone accounts for nearly half of all major global arms exports, supplying countries involved in active armed conflicts, including Israel. Approximately 66% of Israel's imported major conventional weapons have originated from the United States, including combat aircraft, missiles, bombs, and armoured vehicles used during the ongoing conflict in Gaza (Antunes and Freitas, 2024). The result is a vicious cycle: legal arms sales increase the number of weapons in circulation; some are diverted into illegal markets; and eventually they reach terrorist groups, criminal organizations, or armed militias, further escalating violence.

**“The circulation of firearms, whether legal or illegal, also contributes directly to the number of deaths in armed conflicts by supplying weapons that ultimately reach non-state actors and criminal organizations.”**

This demonstrates that the widespread circulation of firearms, whether through legal ownership or international trade, does not guarantee security. Instead, it increases the likelihood of violence and places civilian populations at greater risk. Guns are not tools of protection; they are instruments capable

of causing irreversible harm. The presence of a firearm inside a home significantly increases the probability that someone living there will eventually be injured or killed. Communities with fewer firearms consistently experience lower homicide and suicide rates (BBC News Brasil, 2024; CDC, 2024). True safety does not come from arming every citizen. It comes from effective legislation, responsible policing, strong public institutions, and social trust. A society that depends on firearms for protection is, ultimately, a society that has lost confidence in its own institutions.

As the opposition, we have shown that legalizing gun ownership increases violence, threatens public safety, and undermines the very sense of security it claims to provide. From tragic accidents involving children, to rising homicide and suicide rates, to the global circulation of firearms fueling wars and armed conflicts, the evidence consistently points in the same direction: guns create more harm than safety. If guns truly made us safer, why do countries with higher civilian gun ownership consistently experience higher firearm death rates? When a single moment of anger can end a life forever, can we still call that self-defense? Are we preventing violence — or simply legalizing it?

For these reasons, we firmly oppose the motion "Should gun ownership be legal?" because the evidence demonstrates that widespread legal gun ownership does not create a safer society; it makes society considerably more dangerous.

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# Immigration: Citizenship and belonging



Photo by Kyle Glenn on Unsplash

## Does immigration do more harm than good?

### Proposition

Francisco Bailão, Matilde Pinto and Zihao Li 11.º 1A

Let me begin with a striking fact: the United Nations reports that over 280 million people worldwide currently live outside their country of birth. This highlights the scale of global migration and shows why it is important to debate its impacts on both host countries and migrants themselves.

To ensure we are all on the same page, by immigration we mean the permanent settlement of people in a foreign country. While often seen as a symbol of opportunity and freedom, immigration can also present serious economic, social and cultural challenges that deserve careful attention.

As the proposition, we firmly believe that immigration does more harm than good, not because movement itself is inherently negative, but because when it is unmanaged or too rapid, it produces consequences that can damage both host nations and migrants alike. By the end of this debate, we hope to show why immigration, despite good intentions, often results in more harm than benefit. Our case rests on three main arguments: housing shortages and urban overcrowding; labour-market displacement and wage suppression; and cultural challenges with social fragmentation.

Firstly, in many countries, large-scale immigration puts significant pressure on housing markets and urban infrastructure. When population growth outpaces construction and urban planning, demand rises faster than supply, leading to higher rents, overcrowded neighborhoods and reduced living standards. This outcome is particularly visible in major cities, where immigrants tend to concentrate in search of work.

An example of this can be found across the European Union, where non-EU migrants face markedly higher housing burdens than nationals: roughly 22% of non-EU citizens are overburdened by housing costs compared with about 8% of nationals; and about 33% of non-EU citizens live in overcrowded conditions compared with roughly 14% of nationals (Eurostat, 2023). These gaps show how migration can concentrate housing pressures in certain places. International examples confirm the pattern: in several countries,

rapid migration has been linked to falling vacancy rates and rising rents in major cities (EU Commission, 2024).

To reinforce my point, in Australia, rapid immigration combined with limited housing supply has led to sharp price increases, with a 1% rise in immigration linked to a nearly 1% yearly rise in housing costs, and vacancy rates in megacities hover near 1%, causing rents to rise by 10–35% in some areas.

Finally, median rent in Lisbon rose from about €10,64/m<sup>2</sup> in 2017 to roughly €15,93/m<sup>2</sup> in 2024. Meanwhile, net permanent immigration to Portugal increased substantially between 2017 and 2023. The combined effect of higher demand and limited short-term supply has pushed young Portuguese families out of central areas and added pressure to transport and municipal services.

Our second argument concerns the impact of immigration on native labor markets, one of the most widely discussed drawbacks worldwide. When many foreign workers enter a country, particularly in low-skilled sectors or industries, there is increased competition for jobs, and they frequently accept lower wages or less favorable working conditions. This situation can suppress wages and threaten job security for native workers.

While immigration can address specific labor shortages, excessive or poorly managed immigration undermines local employment stability and widens economic inequality. Consider the following: In Portugal, sectors such as construction, agriculture and hospitality show higher shares of foreign workers: for example, recent Randstad Research data indicates that foreigners represent a larger share in agriculture (6,2%), hospitality (18,3%), administrative (20,8%) and construction roles (12%) compared with Portuguese nationals (respective shares of only 2,4%, 8,7%, 9,8%, and 8,4%). This can encourage employers to depend on lower-cost labor rather than improving pay and conditions for all employees. This situation creates a paradox: Portugal experiences both high immigration and high emigration, attracting cheap labor while



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losing its own skilled workforce abroad.

Likewise, there is a similar pattern seen internationally: a joint study by DIW Berlin (2021) and the Institute of Labour Economics found that, between 1994 and 2015, the hourly wage gap between foreign-born workers and native Germans ranged from 13,6% to 17,6%, with naturalized immigrants earning 10% to 16,4% less per hour. Additionally, Italian National Institute of Statistics' 2024 data shows that approximately 382.071 foreigners migrated to Italy, compared with 155.732 Italian citizens migrating abroad, highlighting the dual pressures of attracting cheap labor and losing local talent.

Finally, we turn to the social dimension. It is widely argued that immigration can sometimes create cultural and social tensions when newcomers bring habits, beliefs or social norms that differ significantly from those of the host country. To begin with, such differences may clash with established traditions,

political values or local ways of life and, consequently, produce divisions within society.

To further illustrate my point, when large groups arrive rapidly and integration does not keep pace, communities can begin to live side by side without truly mixing. In other words, parallel communities emerge: neighborhoods where people share the same streets but maintain separate languages, services and social networks (shops, schools, places of worship). These parallel structures limit everyday contact, reduce mutual understanding and concentrate disadvantage: children meet fewer native peers at school, adults have fewer chances to practice the local language at work or in public life, and local institutions struggle to serve distinct, isolated populations. The result is reinforced separation.

Across the European Union, this spatial separation is widespread: around 28% of immigrants live in highly segregated neighborhoods, a pattern that promotes

parallel communities and weakens everyday social contact. Public perception mirrors these tensions: in the United Kingdom, the British Social Attitudes Survey (2023) found that 45% of respondents believe immigration reduces social cohesion, indicating that many citizens already feel their sense of shared identity under strain. Moreover, in Portugal, about 27% of students from immigrant backgrounds report speaking a different language at home, and these students tend to lag behind their native peers in attainment, revealing uneven integration and interaction in schools.

Socio-economic data deepen the concern: non-EU citizens in the EU face a much higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than nationals, a gap that fuels disadvantage and makes segregated neighborhoods more fragile (Eurostat, 2023). Therefore, although cultural diversity can be enriching when managed properly, unless it is accompanied by strong integration policies and time for adaptation, large-scale immigration may weaken social cohesion and reduce confidence in public institutions, slowing down long-term development.

What's important to remember is that these divisions harm everyone: immigrants risk isolation and limited opportunities, while native residents may feel their communities and traditions are changing too quickly. Thus, unless we pair migration with robust language support, education policy and community integration programmes, rapid inflows can unintentionally fragment society rather than strengthen it.

Overall, we are not condemning those seeking shelter, opportunities or a better life. Our call is for honesty, responsibility and moderation. At this stage, I would like to run over the main points. First, rapid immigration places a heavy stress on housing and local infrastructure. As more people concentrate in cities and popular regions, affordable housing becomes scarcer, rents climb, and families are forced to move further from work and school. The result is not only overcrowded flats but longer commutes, stretched public transport and increased pressure on local services: problems that reduce everyday living standards for native residents.

**“(...) we should not attribute structural problems, such as housing shortages, strain on healthcare services, or wage stagnation to immigration. These are complex challenges resulting from inadequate public policies and investment choices, not from immigrants.”**

Second, it intensifies competition in the labor market. Immigrant workers often accept lower wages and harsher conditions, which enables some employers to exploit them and replace local workers. That dynamic pushes local professionals to seek better opportunities abroad, encouraging emigration and hollowing out domestic skills.

Third, sudden cultural change combined with weak integration policies damages cohesion. Poor integration leaves immigrants isolated and labelled as “outsiders”, while native communities feel disconnected. When groups live side by side but do not work together, both sides lose trust, unity and opportunity.

These issues are real and documented. The OECD warns that countries facing sudden immigration surges suffer the sharpest rises in housing pressure, wage competition and social tension. As the economist Paul Collier (2013) cautioned, “rapid migration can fracture social cohesion faster than any government can repair it.” When immigration grows faster than planning, services and integration can manage, it doesn't unite, it divides; it doesn't strengthen, it strains.

Before concluding, I ask you to reflect on what we have shown: Do you still believe immigration does more good than harm?

## Opposition

Pedro Dias, Rita Pereira, Rodrigo Pissarra and Tiago Fragoso 11.º 1A

Good morning esteemed guests and fellow debaters, welcome to today's debate. Today we are opposing the motion that immigration does more harm than good.

Let's start by defining immigration. Immigration is the process of people moving from one country to another to live, work, or study. It has been a part of human history for centuries, driven by reasons such as seeking better opportunities, escaping conflict, or reuniting with family. It plays an important role in shaping societies, bringing cultural diversity, new skills, and different perspectives. However, it can also create challenges related to integration, identity, and social policies.

History provides us with several examples of what immigration does to a country. Every single historical economic power, without exception, was built on the back of mass immigration! All of them adopted all sorts of cultural, intellectual and professional backgrounds. Let's take the example of Britain after World War II, when immigrants from the Caribbean and South Asia, for example, helped rebuild cities and supported transport operations and hospitals. Thus, we strongly believe that, overall, immigration does more good than harm.

Firstly, immigration is an important economic driver, especially in countries with older populations. Most immigrants are of working age and contributing to Social Security that pays for pension and public services to retirees. In 2024, the number of non-native contributors to Social Security was up 15,1% with over 1 million non-native contributors (RTP, 2025; SIC Notícias, 2025). This growth was needed and contributed to a decline in Portuguese national contributors. If there were no immigrants, contributors would have begun a decline of their own. Immigrants also hold jobs, on behalf of employers, in the agriculture, construction, and care sectors where young Portuguese labor is extremely difficult for employers to find. For instance, the 2023 *Annual Report on Immigration, Borders, and Asylum* published by SEF (now AIMA), the Immigration and Borders Service, indicates that foreign workers are a key

component of the agricultural labor force and during harvests, with often over 90%, coming from foreign countries, primarily India, Nepal and Bangladesh (European Migration Network, 2024). Immigrants are net contributors to the economy. By consuming their wages, their own businesses are contributing to the local economies of their own communities (RTP, 2025; SIC Notícias, 2025).

The opposing view that immigration has no positive economic impact, and that the influx of immigrants creates a long-term financial liability through the extensive use of public services is incorrect. It claims that the model is unsustainable and creates discord among the citizens, thus eroding the cohesion of society. The counterargument ignores the data provided on the immigrant contribution rates and the job shortages occurring in the labor market. The assertion that there is a “fiscal burden” imposed by immigrants is merely an unsupported claim that is directly opposed by the evidence demonstrating that immigrants support and contribute to the economy as net taxpayers, thereby actually preserving rather than draining the resource pool used to support the nation's public systems (RTP, 2025; SIC Notícias, 2025).

Thus, immigrants form a critical pillar of their country's economy now and into the future, sustaining public systems, bolstering critical industries, and advancing sustainable development. Therefore, failing to recognize the benefits of migration is to overlook the reality that migration is more than a burden: it is a public good, it is an investment in collective prosperity.

Secondly, the cultural diversity fostered by immigration should not be viewed as a problem but rather as a valuable source of social, cultural, and economic enrichment. Multicultural societies tend to be more creative, dynamic, and open, due to contact with different perspectives, traditions, and ways of thinking, that promotes innovation and creative problem-solving. For example, a seminal McKinsey report, *Diversity Wins*, found that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity were 36% more likely to outperform their competition, profitability



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wise (McKinsey & Company, 2020). This proves there is a direct link between diversity and better problem-solving and financial performance. In addition, a study by the National Foundation for American Policy found that 55% of U.S. startup companies valued at \$1 billion or more were founded by immigrants. Furthermore, in more than 80% of these “unicorn” companies, an immigrant was either a founder or performed a vital leadership role (Anderson, 2018). As for Portugal's situation, our thriving tech hub, particularly in Lisbon, is a direct consequence of its open and multicultural policies like the D7 visa and the Tech Visa program. Those programs have attracted international talent and entrepreneurs (Jobbatical, n.d.; Get Golden Visa, n.d.).

Moving on from the economic, we could say this cultural exchange enriches everyone's life, in gastronomy, the arts, music, and language itself, making society more interesting and inclusive. Our cuisine has been profoundly enriched by immigration, with its representatives being visible everywhere. As for our music, it has also been very influenced by Brazilian samba, pagode, funk and angolan kuduro.

Nevertheless, the argument could be made that forced cultural diversity destroys a society's unique identity and hampers its social integrity; consequently, it creates discord, rather than inspiration, by taking cultural norms and standards and replacing them with conflicting ones. As a result, the genuine expression

of culture is supplanted by a commodified version, and this leads to societal destabilization. However, the conclusion drawn from such an argument is erroneous as it confuses correlation and causation, placing culpability for societal strife on the presence of diversity, rather than upon inadequate integration policies. In addition, the assertion fails to consider that diverse work teams generate superior performance to their homogeneous colleagues, thus confirming the economic benefits of diversity, as well as its positive cultural impact (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Finally, we will demystify common prejudices against immigrants. Many common stereotypes about immigration remain undermined even in the face of clear evidence. A common stereotype is the idea that immigration relates to the crime rate. However, the *2023 Annual Report on Internal Security*, once again found no correlation between immigration and increases in crime. The report even suggests that the number of crimes committed against immigrants (including human trafficking and crimes of hate), demonstrates that immigrants are, too often, victims of crime rather than criminals themselves (República Portuguesa, 2024).

In addition, we should not attribute structural problems, such as housing shortages, strain on healthcare services, or wage stagnation to immigration. These are complex challenges resulting from inadequate public policies and investment choices, not from immigrants. Blaming immigration is merely a convenient escape used mostly by conservative individuals, that diverts attention from the need for governments to invest strategically in national infrastructure to serve the entire population. Another common misconception is that immigrants rely on state benefits. However, in terms of real data, evidence does not support it in Portugal. Immigrants contribute positively to the Social Security system, financially maintaining its balance, and the Portuguese state does not offer specific subsidies to attract immigrants, with the exception consisting of a few refugee beneficiaries, less than three thousand in 2023, who are part of a

refugee program financing from the EU rather than the national state (RTP, 2025; SIC Notícias, 2025).

Another myth easily deconstructed by data is that immigrants “steal” jobs. Labor statistics keep track of realities fueled by political rhetoric. Portugal's unemployment rate is low, around six (6,1%) percent in June 2024, while the employment rate is at record highs (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2024). In fact, our country maintains a workforce deficit in several key industries. Restaurants, construction, and agriculture commonly have pent-up demand for labor and that demand, most of the time, finds its solution in immigrants. Rather than “stealing” jobs from locals, immigrants fulfill labor demands that would go unattended if their labor option wasn't available, benefiting the employer and, consequently, the whole economy. In the case of housing, the sharp rise in prices in cities like Lisbon and Porto is not primarily caused by immigration. It is driven by the expansion of short-term tourist accommodation for digital nomads and other foreigners with high purchasing power. The state didn't keep pace with the price increases and it's now causing an unstable inflation with the population accommodations.

**“(...) unless we pair migration with robust language support, education policy and community integration programmes, rapid inflows can unintentionally fragment society rather than strengthen it.”**

These facts illustrate that immigration is not a burden but an important contributor to the country's economy and social fabric. Far from increasing crime or straining public resources, immigrants often strengthen the workforce, support economic growth, and enrich society.

In conclusion, everything we have presented shows that immigration brings far more benefits than problems. Economically, immigrants help fill labor shortages, contribute to Social Security, and support essential sectors of the country (RTP, 2025; SIC Notícias, 2025; European Migration Network, 2024). Culturally, they enrich society with new ideas, traditions, and ways of thinking, making it more creative, open, and diverse (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Anderson, 2018). Furthermore, many common prejudices about immigration are not supported by real evidence. Data shows that immigrants do not increase crime, do not "steal" jobs, and are not responsible for issues like housing or pressure on public services (República Portuguesa, 2024). In fact, they are often the ones most affected by these problems. For all these reasons, we conclude that immigration is not a burden but an opportunity for economic, social, and cultural growth. Therefore, we firmly believe that immigration does more good than harm to society. Remember, "migrants are not a threat. They are an opportunity. They bring diversity, they bring skills, they bring energy and they renew the societies they join".

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## Does immigration do more harm than good?

### Proposition

André Enes, Benedita Rodrigues and Madalena Silva 11.º 1C

Did you know that wealthy immigrants spend about 70% more than your average Portuguese citizen in housing? This statistic is not just a simple number, it's a symptom of the crisis we are living through, and a direct consequence of the unmanaged immigration we will be discussing today (ECO, 2023).

My esteemed audience, this is just one of the many problems created by excessive immigration. We stand firmly on the belief that immigration is more harmful than beneficial to Portugal. My colleagues, Madalena Silva, Benedita Rodrigues and I, stand before you supporting the motion that immigration brings more harm than good with robust arguments, like the housing crisis, the worsening of intellectual prowess in our population and the overload of public services. Contrary to what others would say, immigration is the real issue today and as such it's paramount to talk about the impact of excessive and unmanaged immigration in Portuguese society.

Now, you might be thinking, "but don't those wealthy foreign 'investors' occupy the houses they purchase?" Well, the answer is that they do, in fact, occupy their property; for a couple of weeks! The statistics I just mentioned are referring to immigrants that don't officially live in Portugal. In other words, those houses are simply vacation homes for the rich, how do I know that? About 150.000 homes, just in Lisbon, are vacant and even if we assume that about 10% of those are uninhabitable, that still leaves us with 135.000 vacant homes (Caetano, 2023). So, while Portuguese families struggle to find a home, we have hundreds of thousands of units being held as speculative "investments".

The opposition might argue that the property tax being paid by those wealthy immigrants and their contribution to the local economy, during their stay, offsets and even contributes to our economic growth. But let's be honest, this contribution is nothing but a drop in the ocean compared to the societal cost of an "abandoned" city, where no teachers, nurses, or police officers can afford to live. The economic "benefit" of a vacant property is nothing more than a fantasy that ignores the devastating reality.

Consequently, this so-called "investment" does not build our community nor economy, rather it only exacerbates a profound social crisis, preventing Portuguese citizens from living in their own cities. This exclusion, in turn, forces them to spend a crippling percentage of their income into an equally inflated rental market, forever denying a security many would call a dream.

Secondly, we must address a critical yet often overlooked problem of the current immigration status, the alarming trend of diminishing intellectual ability. While Portugal suffers a "brain deficit" as approximately 70.000 of our best and brightest young adults leave seeking better opportunities abroad, we are simultaneously experiencing a record-breaking influx of 134.000 immigrants, most of which are, in fact, far less qualified than our leaving population. The current system replaces what would be our highly qualified population with a predominantly lower-skilled one, leading to a degradation of Portugal's human capital.

This isn't an unsolvable dilemma. Even though the problems don't directly come from immigration itself, but rather from the unmanaged situation we face, we are still capable of conjuring up a solution. Therefore, our proposed answer, to this problem, would be to filter the



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individuals by level of qualification and age. We would also demand a job contract, so that every new arrival, contributes to our economy. To enter our country one must have good academic or job qualifications and be an active citizen, meaning an individual, who works or studies, and is engaged in their community and its social life. Ultimately, our principle couldn't be simpler. To earn the right to build a life in Portugal, one must show the capacity to actively participate not only in the economy but also in the community. We should prioritize individuals who work, study, pay taxes and are engaged in all the branches of our nation.

Finally, there is still a critical point to be made regarding the overwhelming pressure on our services. It's a fact that Portuguese public services are at a breaking point. It's a matter of turning on the TV and watching for a few minutes until we hear news about how a mother had to give birth to her child in the back of an ambulance because the closest maternity ward was closed (CNN Portugal, 2025). Furthermore, many of us often experience overcrowded buses and subways, where the sheer number of people downgrades the whole experience (Público, 2023). This pressure isn't only on our transports, it also expands critically to our education where immigrant students represent about 15% of all students (Público, 2025; Eurostat, n.d.) and, as it's regularly documented, we have a huge problem regarding the shortage of teachers in our public school system (Expresso, 2025).

Our opponents might argue that the ones to blame for these inefficient services are the government, not the immigrants. And on this, we totally agree. We completely acknowledge that the system has been suffering from systematical mismanagement and chronic underinvestment. But that's precisely our point! You don't add passengers to a sinking ship while you're still patching the holes. Our priority should be securing the quality of life for those who are already on board. A responsible government is one that's capable of managing intake and capacity of its public services.

The more immigrants we add to the system, that's already failing us, the more the system will break down,

## **“The path forward is not of isolation but rather of smart management.”**

and even though that might not be an immigration issue, it still doesn't undermine the fact that we can't give everyone the proper conditions yet, citizens and immigrants alike. Therefore, when they eventually come, we won't be ready to give them their proper rights, they will simply overload our services, be it health, transportation or even our schools. Portuguese citizens have the right to expect their country's public services to function at the highest level. We must fix the foundation before adding any more floors to the structure.

In conclusion, it's important to highlight the fact that our stance wasn't born out of personal prejudice or bias, but of a clear judgment of the facts. The evidence presented today leads us to one final verdict: Immigration, at its current form, brings more harm than good. We have demonstrated that it fuels a housing crisis, turning dreams into speculative assets for the wealthy. We have also shown how it exacerbates a “brain drain”, replacing our brilliant professionals with a less skilled workforce. And finally, we have proven how it places unsustainable pressure on our, already on the verge of breaking, public services, degrading their quality for everyone.

It's a fact that we have a problem, and modern problems require modern solutions. We advocate that there should be some restrictions to regulate the entering of foreigners, such as job promises and qualifications. Furthermore, there should be restrictions when buying houses, as to not exacerbate our blinding housing crisis.

The path forward is not of isolation but rather of smart management. Right now, the sensible choice is to focus on the well-being of those already here and to ensure that future immigration contributes, rather than strains our beautiful country. For a strong and prosperous Portugal, we need to have the courage to accept the truth and act accordingly.

## **Opposition**

Daniel Marques, Joana Parreira and Tomás Ministro 11.º 1C

We wish to talk to you about a topic that has been very controversial for the past few years in our country. The question is: Does immigration bring more harm than good? We strongly believe that it doesn't. In fact, it brings far more benefits than drawbacks, meaning that most immigrants contribute positively to their new communities.

According to the United Nations, 280 million people live outside their country of birth (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2024). Why is that even important? Because understanding global migration allows us to see how deeply interconnected our world has become and why the movement of people is a defining feature of modern societies. To support our position we will be using three fundamental arguments: firstly, immigrants bring many economic benefits; secondly, immigrants drive innovation to different areas of knowledge; and finally, immigrants contribute to cultural diversity and demographic benefits.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of immigration is its positive impact on the economy and the labor market. Immigrants play a crucial role in filling essential positions that many native workers are unwilling to take. This is particularly evident in sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and construction. For example, studies by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City indicate that approximately 70% of farmworkers in the United States are immigrants. Similarly, according to the National Health Service (2024) in England, foreign-born workers account for nearly 20% of its workforce.

Evidence from Portugal also suggests a relationship between immigration and labor market performance. Using data collected from the Instituto Nacional de Estatísticas (2025), we found a strong negative correlation between the number of immigrants residing in the country and the unemployment rate ( $r = -0.83$ ). In other words, periods with higher levels of immigration tended to coincide with lower unemployment rates.

Furthermore, our analysis revealed an even stronger positive correlation between the number of immigrants

and the country's workforce capacity, with a correlation coefficient of 0,94. While these correlations should not be interpreted as proof of a direct cause-and-effect relationship, they nonetheless provide valuable insights into broader economic trends. Taken together, these findings suggest that immigrants contribute significantly to economic growth. By participating in the labor force, increasing productive capacity, and paying taxes, they support key sectors of the economy and help strengthen public finances.

Our second argument consists of the fact that immigrants drive innovation to different areas of knowledge. They strengthen economies and fuel technological progress. Think about companies like Google, Tesla and Intel — they were all founded or co-founded by foreign-born residents (New American Economy Research Fund, 2018). Does this ring a bell to you? As we mentioned before, immigrants fill a lot of labor shortages, but they go beyond that. Nearly half of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children. “What is Fortune 500?”, you may ask. Well, this is an annual list, published by Fortune Magazine, that ranks the 500 largest companies in the US based on their total income. These corporations employ and help millions of people (New American Economy Research Fund, 2018). And, as we said, nearly half of them come from immigrant labor (Brookings Institution, 2017; American Immigration Council, 2024)! If this isn't proof that immigrants have helped create many of the country's most successful and powerful businesses, not

**“(…) understanding global migration allows us to see how deeply interconnected our world has become and why the movement of people is a defining feature of modern societies.”**



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only by filling essential jobs but also creating them and giving job opportunities to many people, I would love for you to tell me what it is instead.

You may argue that not all new arrivals are this productive or that not all of them have this kind of impact on their new community, but that leads us back to what we already mentioned, which is that immigrants help fill essential jobs the native-born citizens won't. Following the same line of reasoning as before would mean that immigrants come to our country to steal our jobs, but that's not really true. Immigrants work in areas no other citizens will. Consequently, they will also pay taxes contributing to the country's economy. This way, immigrants do indeed drive and fuel innovation and technology development, contributing to an overall society's growth.

Our third and final argument consists of two parts. For starters, we would like for you to imagine an example of a common day for someone. They wake up, go to work, but instead of taking the bus, they catch an Uber. When lunch time comes, instead of eating at home, they order food from different restaurants each day. What we're trying to say is that immigration is not just a greater number of people in a country, it's already a part of our daily life. Different cuisines and transportation methods are just two of numerous beneficial impacts of immigration.

Take, for example, the influence of South Asian immigration to the UK on the country's cuisine. Today, dishes like chicken tikka masala, biryani, and curries are so integrated into British society that they're considered staples of British cuisine. In fact:

The dish [chicken tikka masala] has taken on large cultural significance in Britain. In 2001, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook gave a speech in which he hailed chicken tikka masala as a 'true British national dish' and a symbol of modern multicultural Britain. He even offered his own simplified explanation of how the entrée evolved: 'Chicken tikka is an Indian dish. The masala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy.' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

Precisely because it reflects the fusion between immigrant culinary traditions and local tastes. These contributions strengthen social connection and make countries more vibrant and interesting places to live, rather than supposedly corrupting them. As the now deceased previous president of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson once said: "The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources — because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples". Therefore, immigration enriches everyday life contributing to a more culturally diverse society.

Secondly, as immigration grows, we are more and more exposed to multiple cultures encouraging tolerance and mutual understanding. Countries like Canada and Switzerland, which have long histories of multicultural immigration, consistently rank among the most peaceful and stable nations. Their cultural diversity has helped build political systems that value negotiation, compromise, and inclusion. When people grow up surrounded by different languages, traditions, and perspectives, it becomes less likely to create unnecessary conflicts. Canada offers one of the clearest examples of how long-term immigration and cultural diversity contribute to social stability and tolerance. In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official federal policy (Government of Canada, 2024). This policy

explicitly protects cultural expression, funds cultural organizations, and promotes equal participation of all ethnic groups in public life (Government of Canada, 2024). This way, immigration promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence. By bringing together different perspectives and traditions, immigrants help build more open, stable, and forward-thinking societies.

One might claim that it's exactly the opposite - immigration fosters intolerance rather than tolerance between societies. When large groups of newcomers arrive within a short period, the host society may feel that its cultural habits, economic stability, or political influence are threatened, leading to fear, suspicion and competition between them. However, if we never bring societies together, the tolerance between them won't ever be promoted, leading to more wars and international conflicts.

In summary, affirming that immigrants bring more harm than good is something we believe to be objectively false. Not only do they help boost the economy working in jobs where scarcity of workers is present, but they also bring innovation in the form of new technological, scientific or even economic perspectives, helping the country progress as a whole in academic terms. And we shouldn't forget the great impact on our culture and the great expansion of experiences, knowledge and creation that comes with the arrival of all those who didn't originally belong to our country. Jimmy Carter once stated: "We [the United States of America] have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams." An immigrant welcoming country is not a threat to its individuality, but rather a sign of trust, enrichment and compassion. So, tell me, ladies and gentlemen, when will we stop mistaking progress for robbery and degradation?

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## Is immigration negatively affecting our culture and language?

### Proposition

Maria Narciso 11.º 3, Leonor Neves and Maria Camarinhas 11.º 4

Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to discuss the idea that immigration risks the preservation of our language and culture. Studies conducted in Germany show that: “Emigration is reshaping the linguistic map of the world. In the United States alone, more than 22% of the population speak a language other than English at home” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).

Do you know when you're outside of your home in a country where you don't know anything or anyone and one day you hear it, the familiar melody that you grew up with, whether it was sharing stories with your friends or whining because of your siblings? These memories have always been with you and it's almost like a weight was lifted off your shoulders when you find someone that shares it with you. It doesn't matter if you've never seen them before or if you don't even talk to them, because knowing that you found someone that shares something so simple yet so heartwarming with you always makes you feel a little better.

That's what our language has done for us. It provides a warm blanket in rough times and unites us in the good. It's an irreplaceable bond that we should honour and respect. As Fernando Pessoa once said: “Minha pátria é a língua portuguesa” (Pessoa, 1989).

That doesn't only apply to us natives. Everyone that lives here must understand that they are not just staying in Portugal, they are stepping into our culture and into what it's like to live every day as a Portuguese person. When immigrants refuse to learn our customs and language, it forces natives to adapt to them, by talking in English and not celebrating our culture because it can be disrespectful, which risks us losing our “portugalidade”. With that, this house believes that immigrations risks the preservation of our language and culture.

Our arguments will focus on three points: how immigrants interact with us and our culture, how we educate and their availability to learn, and the problems with globalization and how others can try to force their values onto us and even change the way our society works.

A study conducted in 1997 tried to see how Hispanic immigrants and descendants living in the US responded when asked how they identified culturally, depending on their personal social networks. After studying the responses, they concluded that the “structural aspects of the social context predict patterns of cultural identification better than pure compositional aspects”. That is, a person's cultural identification varies depending on if they interact with a more diverse group of people (geographically wise) or if they solely interact with the people that share the same ethnic background as them (Repke and Benet-Martínez, 2017).

Another study done in 1999, using the first study as a starting point, proves the same thing. “[S]ocial interaction always decreases identification with the culture ego (the subject) is not interacting with. In that way, engagements with each culture coexist but are not independent from each other” (Repke and Benet-Martínez, 2017). What this means is if we try to implement integration politics and they do work, that might mean that not only is it possible for immigrants to lose their own culture, but natives can also suffer, losing ourselves and what we identify with whilst trying to be the most welcoming we can.

But alas, if they don't work, we risk being seen as hostile hosts by trying to force them to become like us and we don't accomplish anything except fostering resentment among 1.5 million people (Ordem dos Advogados, 2025), which will not end well.

However, there is another problem: with the sheer amount of people that have immigrated in the past 15 years, the average consumer needs have changed. There is nothing wrong with that. I completely understand that businesses need to adapt according to their demographic, but sometimes they overdo it. What once could be defined as traditional establishments where one could feel safe and welcomed, are now generic places where you can't even find the comfort of one's native language.



Photo by Metin Ozer on Unsplash

I will give you a personal example. Right next to my home there has always been a restaurant, it was never traditional Portuguese food based but it has always been Portuguese owned. With good music and good food, it was considered a socializing space by many of the younger generations.

A few months ago, the restaurant was bought and now the conditions have worsened noticeably. The music is no longer what could be considered as “indie Portuguese”, but instead is now solely artificial pop and the employees, who happen to be immigrants, can't speak English, let alone Portuguese and no longer have that employee-costumer bond that you see in many traditional establishments. Such conditions have deterred locals from frequenting the restaurant and residents have lost yet another socializing spot.

You might think that it does not make sense to talk about this, but I, at least, consider socializing while sharing a meal or even a coffee, a big part of traditional Portuguese culture. Most of my childhood memories happened over a shared plate and I'm sure many more will form in the same way. I know that I will never stop the traditions that were brought down on me while I was growing up, but it can absolutely make it more difficult to do the same that my parents did if those places no longer exist.

What I intend to say with this is not that we completely bar everyone from entering and never change, change is good, but honoring our traditions is also important and we should do everything in our power to never forget who we are and where we come from. That is the very essence of being Portuguese,

welcoming everyone, while still understanding the value of what it means to be from Portugal.

Some people may argue that immigrants, when fully integrated, can enrich the receiving country's language and culture. However, the issue is what happens when immigrants do not feel integrated. Language barriers, major cultural or religious differences, or simply a lack of motivation to learn the local language can all make integration difficult. Migrants bring to their receiving countries their traditions, ways of thinking and languages: "As a result, their lives may continue to be determined by their cultural heritage and linguistic framework, which may be inconsistent with that of the receiving country" (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2017). This leads to less unity in society and weakens national identity (the shared sense of belonging created by common language, traditions, and cultural practices).

A 2024 study in Sweden found that 41% of immigrants do not feel integrated into Swedish society. One of the most common suggestions from participants for improving integration was for immigrants to learn Swedish (Integration Norden, 2024). This shows just how important the local language is for becoming part of the national culture. When immigrants struggle to learn the language (a process which is often expensive and time-consuming) they are less likely to participate in the receiving country's cultural life. As a result, separate cultural groups form, and the national culture becomes less dominant in public life. This directly threatens the preservation of the receiving country's language and cultural identity. If this can happen in such a wealthy country like Sweden, imagine what it could do to us.

Furthermore, some people think that globalization enriches culture by allowing ideas and traditions to spread across borders. However, it puts national cultures and languages at risk because it promotes one dominant, global culture instead of protecting local ones. Through global media, films, music, fashion, and especially social media platforms, English-language content becomes far more visible and influential than the receiving country's own traditions. As a result,

young people begin to identify more with global trends than with their own national customs. Local festivals, traditional foods, regional dialects, and national arts become overshadowed by global brands and entertainment. Instead of creating cultural diversity, globalization leads to cultural homogenization, where everything starts to look and sound the same. This weakens the unique identity of the receiving country, proving that globalization does not help preserve culture or language, but instead accelerates their decline.

**"(...) young people begin to identify more with global trends than with their own national customs."**

In conclusion, it is our firm belief that local culture and tradition are worth preserving. To that end, immigration must be contained, and if possible minimized. Otherwise, as we have shown, we risk the destruction of the communities and traditions which we all hold so dear. As such, I urge you to stand with this motion.

## Opposition

Rodrigo Cunha 11.º 1B, Constança Valente and Mariana Diniz 11.º 3

Today, we rise to defend an idea that is not only true, but deeply connected to who we are as a nation. This House believes that immigration is not threatening the preservation of Portugal's culture.

Let's begin with one simple truth: Portuguese culture has never been about building walls, but it has always been about opening doors. Think about the Portugal we know and love: our music, our food, our language, our traditions. None of these were created in isolation. They were shaped by centuries of encounters and cultural exchange. We are the country that sailed across oceans and met the world. For example, as we learned, our language was shaped by the people that were in the Iberian Peninsula before the Romans. The Celtiberian substrate changed our way of talking by changing a "b" for a "p". It also was the reason why some words were created like "cerveja" and "caminho" (UOL Educação, n.d.). This didn't destroy our language, it changed and contributed to the evolution of our language. As Pope Francis said: "Migrants are our brothers and sisters seeking a better life, far from poverty, hunger, and war" (Francis, 2016). Migrants are not a threat; they are just seeking a better life.

**"Portuguese culture has never been about building walls, but it has always been about opening doors."**

So why should we suddenly believe that meeting new people now would destroy us? Immigrants don't erase Portuguese culture, they add new colors to a painting that already belongs to all of us. In 2024, the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum showed that in Portugal the total number of foreign residents exceeded 1.5 million. This is an increase of 47,8% when compared to the year of 2023 (Ordem dos Advogados, 2025). This rise in immigration does not mean that our culture and our language are increasingly threatened,

it reflects Portugal's growing openness; it is through inclusion that a nation's true heritage finds renewal.

Thus, this House believes that immigration is not threatening the preservation of Portugal's culture and language. Our main arguments will focus on the history of our language, the good things that immigration provides and what we believe that can really cause tension between cultures.

Firstly, our culture has always evolved through interaction with other cultures, not through isolation. Our language has influences from Arabic, Latin, African languages, and even Asian languages from the Age of Discovery (RTP Ensina, n.d.). Our food, music, and traditions reflect centuries of cultural blending. Immigration today is simply continuing what has always happened. This shows that culture is not static or fragile. It grows stronger through exchange.

Secondly, immigration strengthens social and economic life given that immigrants contribute to the economy and cultural life of Portugal. For example, they fill gaps in workforce shortages in healthcare, construction, and services (The Portugal News, 2025). More diversity means more innovation, more food variety, more festivals, more art — more life. Many immigrants celebrate Portuguese traditions (Santos Populares, fado, football) while sharing their own. This causes a thriving economy and enriches the cultural scene that keeps Portuguese culture alive, not dying.

Thirdly, the cultural threat comes from fear, not from immigration itself. The biggest danger to culture is fear-driven division. When people isolate or stereotype immigrants, cultural tension grows, but when people integrate, cultural exchange makes society stronger. Fear destroys culture, openness builds it.

The proposition can say immigration can be a problem because immigrants can create ghettos. A ghetto is an area or neighborhood of a city where ethnic, racial, or religious minorities are forced to live, often due to social or economic pressures or discrimination. With all of this we can conclude that ghettos are created

if there is no integration. So, the problem of creating ghettos is not caused by the rise of the number of immigrants, it is caused by the lack of integration, a problem that can be solved if we give immigrants help and opportunities, for example language courses.

In Sweden, an early intervention program was made to help refugees to integrate in the country. The results showed that providing intensive assistance immediately after refugees got their residence permit substantially increased their employment by roughly 15 percentage points (Åslund et al., 2022). This study shows when immigrants have the opportunities, they try to keep their jobs and try to integrate.

The proposition might argue that immigrants bring new beliefs that clash with ours. In Portugal, there are already opposing beliefs, like different religions. However, these people live with each other, showing that coexistence is part of Portuguese society, and it is how the tension that can be caused by different beliefs is solved.

The proposition may suggest that immigrants can outnumber us, in the future, what would cause the loss of our national identity. In Portugal, the number of immigrants, as said before, is 1.5 million (Ordem dos Advogados, 2025). This represents a very small part of the population, so it would be very difficult

for immigrants to outnumber us. Adding to this argumentation, the national identity is not going to change, neither disappear, because immigrants contribute to it, they don't change it. Immigrants learn about our culture, showing that they preserve our national identity.

To conclude, we believe that immigration is not threatening the preservation of Portugal's culture and language, since we believe immigrants contribute to the evolution of our language, not to its disappearance, they preserve our traditions by learning them, they strengthen our economic and social life by filling gaps and also because we truly believe that the idea of a cultural threat comes from fear, caused by the isolation that stereotypes can create, it does not come from immigration.

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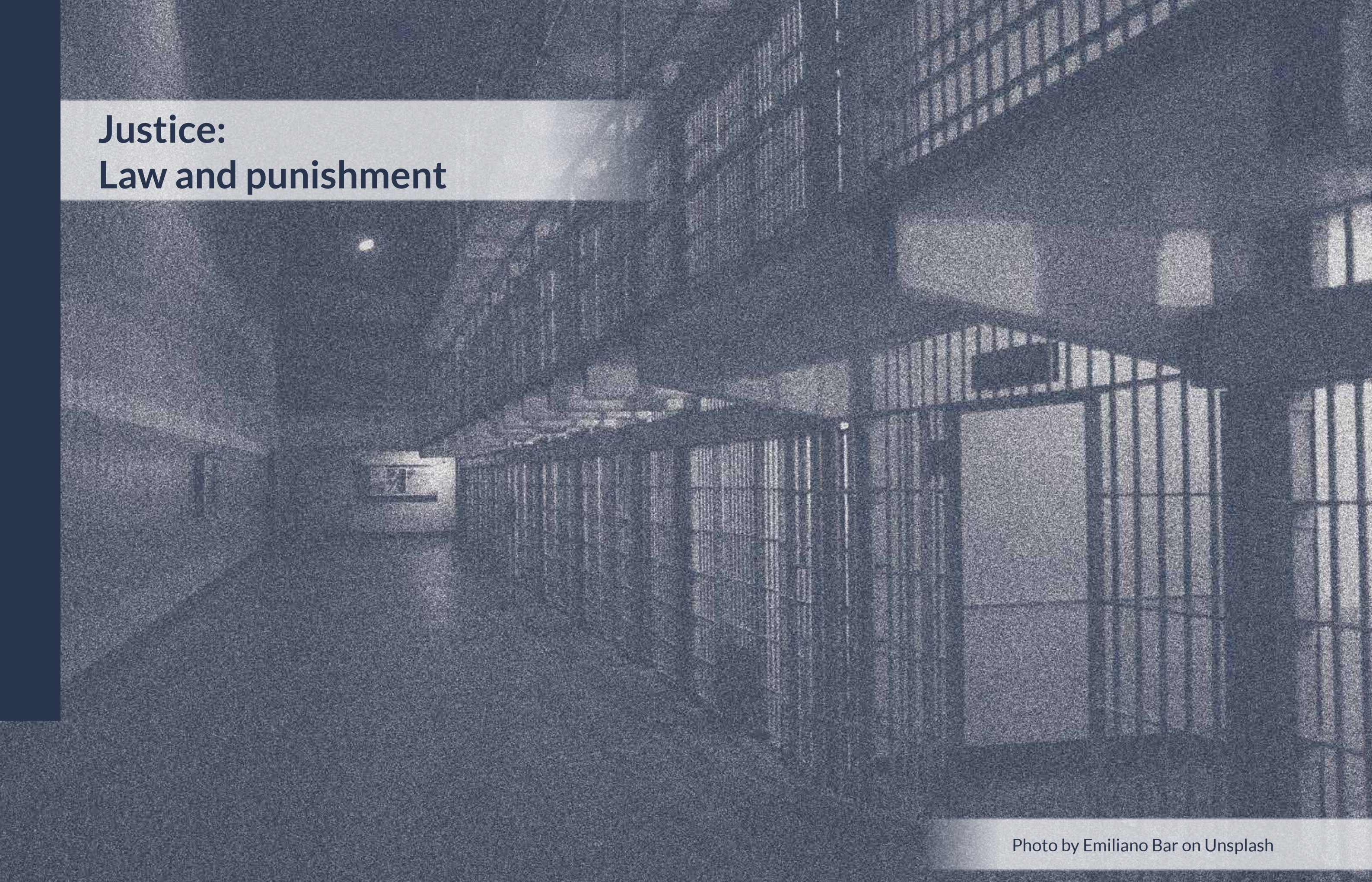
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Photo by Kyle Glenn on Unsplash

A dark, grainy photograph of a prison building at night. In the foreground, a barred window is visible on the right side. A sign with a logo is mounted on the wall to the left. The building has multiple stories and a series of windows, some of which are illuminated from within. The overall atmosphere is somber and institutional.

# Justice: Law and punishment

Photo by Emiliano Bar on Unsplash

## Should the death penalty be legal?

### Proposition

Carmo Matias, Duarte Mendes, Pedro Branco and Vitória Reame 11.º 1A



Photo by Ye Jinghan on Unsplash

Good morning, today, we are here to discuss a topic of great importance, whether the death penalty should be legal or not. We stand firmly in favor of its legalization.

Let's start by taking Hitler as an example. He was the vilest dictator of our time. If you were to choose the sentence for Adolf Hitler, a man who killed families, wiped out lineages, and tried to extinguish a race... what sentence would you give him?

In countries where crime has reached extreme levels, where crimes against humanity or acts of genocide have been committed, or where organizations designated as terrorist groups operate, states may view the death penalty as a means of responding to and deterring such grave offences. Individuals responsible for crimes of this magnitude — particularly those directed not merely against specific persons or groups, but against

entire populations, religious communities, or ethnic groups — may face capital punishment.

The imposition of the death penalty is generally linked to the scale, severity, and consequences of the crimes committed. It may be applied to both the leaders who planned, ordered, or orchestrated these atrocities and to those who directly carried them out. While leaders bear responsibility for issuing inhumane orders, those who execute such acts may also be held accountable as the direct perpetrators of these crimes.

The death penalty ends up being legitimized in cases of extreme gravity. For example, this was the case in the Nuremberg Trials, where war criminals, such as Nazi leaders, were executed. The crimes that had been perpetrated were so heinous and against such a vast number of people that no existing international legal

framework was adequate for the crimes committed. Prison sentences were not sufficiently appropriate for the cases being judged. Therefore, the death penalty should be applied.

Another situation in which the death penalty is used, is when the leaders of certain states (mostly non-democratic ones) use their institutions to eliminate their opponents. This was the case in Spain with Franco, in Italy with Mussolini, or in Germany with Hitler. In Portugal, despite having had a dictatorship during Estado Novo, the death penalty remained unused. In cases where dictators are overthrown and captured, they are often executed by the victors. This is what happened, for example, with Ceausescu in Romania or with Gaddafi in Libya. These are exceptional cases and moments in which the judicial system does not function in its usual manner and the death penalty is used.

As previously stated, the universal punishment for a crime is prison, for however long, depending on the crime. People are confined under authority of the state. In theory, and like our opponents are going to point out, the facility should also correct the criminal behavior. However, this is not the case. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 70% of prisoners released in 2012 were arrested again within five years, about 82% were arrested at least once during a ten-year period (Alper et al., 2018; Alper et al., 2022). This means that, while appearing effective, in the long term, individuals might commit a crime again, an homicide, for example. Therefore, there should be another way to prevent these crimes from happening again. Hence, the death penalty.

We see this cycle in real life all the time: every year, people who are released from prison commit new violent crimes, and others manage to escape and cause harm again, taking advantage of a system that does not create real fear or a true sense of responsibility. This raises a necessary question: how many innocent people will still have to suffer because dangerous criminals are released or manage to escape? Leading many to defend the death penalty to prevent highly dangerous individuals from causing further tragedies?

China is often cited as one of the countries with relatively low crime rates, despite its large population and social organization. A 2005 survey of 2,000 participants showed that 82,1% supported the death penalty, reflecting the perception that it reinforces security and accountability (Johnson & Zimring, 2009). In many societies, this support is not seen as cruelty, but as a way of protecting the innocent. In the end, the death penalty is seen as a way to reinforce public safety by ensuring that the most dangerous offenders, those who have repeatedly shown that they will not change, can no longer commit their crimes. Prison, on its own, has not always been enough. When escapes and reoffending continue to cost lives, it is society that ends up paying the highest price.

One of the reasons some people support the death penalty is the problem of reoffending among ex-prisoners who were convicted of very serious crimes. Statistical evidence shows that recidivism remains high among released prisoners in the United States (Alper et al., 2018; Alper et al., 2022). Hence, prison is not always enough to stop certain people from being dangerous.

**“(...) how many innocent people will still have to suffer because dangerous criminals are released or manage to escape?”**

Even though there are reintegration programmes, the truth is that not everyone manages or even wants to change. Some criminals keep the same violent behavior, and when they return to society, they once again put innocent people at risk. In these situations, the justice system fails to protect the community because it allows someone who has already proved to be dangerous to cause serious harm again. Thus, the death penalty

is seen by some as a means to completely prevent this problem. Unlike prison sentences, which can be reduced or reviewed, the death penalty permanently removes the possibility of a violent criminal repeating their actions. In this sense, it is seen as a last resort to guarantee public safety and to avoid more serious crimes in the future.

Furthermore, every case of reoffending in serious crimes represents not only another victim but also a failure of the system. When someone who has already been convicted of violent crimes attacks again after leaving prison, it shows that the system was not able to protect the population. Supporting the death penalty in this context means defending the idea that society has the right to protect itself in the most effective way possible from individuals who have shown, more than once, that they cannot live safely within the community.

Throughout this debate, we have consistently argued that the death penalty, while extreme, can be justified in contexts of extremely grave crimes where all other forms of punishment fail to protect society. We focused on the death penalty in cases of crimes against humanity, genocide, and large-scale atrocities. By using historical examples such as Adolf Hitler and the Nuremberg Trials, it was argued that there are crimes so vast, so cruel, and so destructive that no prison sentence can truly reflect their gravity. When an individual is responsible for the extermination of entire populations, the destruction of cultures, or the systematic violation of human dignity, imprisonment becomes insufficient. In these exceptional circumstances, the death penalty is presented not as revenge, but as a legitimate response to crimes that transcend ordinary legal frameworks. History itself shows that, when justice systems face unprecedented evil, societies have turned to capital punishment as a final measure.

Then, we addressed the failure of prison systems, particularly regarding escapes and reoffending. Although prison is meant to punish and rehabilitate, reality proves otherwise. High recidivism rates, supported by statistical data, demonstrate that many criminals return to violent behavior after their release.

Each escape and each repeated crime represent a direct threat to innocent lives. From this perspective, the death penalty is defended as a tool to prevent future harm, ensuring that the most dangerous individuals can never again exploit a system that lacks true deterrence. In this sense, capital punishment is seen not as cruelty, but as a necessary means of protecting society and reinforcing accountability.

Lastly, we focused specifically on recidivism among violent offenders. Even after long prison sentences and access to reintegration programmes, some individuals continue to pose a serious danger. When someone who has already committed murder, rape, or severe violence is released and offends again, the justice system has failed in its most basic duty: protecting the population. The death penalty is therefore viewed as a last resort — an irreversible decision, but one that guarantees public safety by permanently eliminating the risk of repetition. Every case of violent reoffending is not only another victim, but undeniable proof that prison alone is sometimes not enough.

In conclusion, this debate has shown that the death penalty is not being defended as a universal solution, but as an exceptional response to exceptional crimes. When faced with genocide, crimes against humanity, or individuals who repeatedly prove incapable of living safely in society, the priority must be the protection of innocent lives. Justice cannot afford to be naïve, and society cannot afford to pay the price of repeated failures.

## Opposition

André Yang, Catarina Fernandes and João Rodrigues 11.º 1A

Teacher, dear colleagues and fellow debaters, today, we are debating whether the death penalty should be allowed. As the opposition team, André, João and I, Catarina, firmly stand against the death sentence, because we believe that it violates the right to life, and wastes the government's resources without being effective to discourage crime, and the logical, moral and ethical contradiction present in the death penalty.

Did you know that more than 70% of countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.)? Portugal, who was one of the pioneers in the abolition of the capital sentence, includes in its Constitution that the penalty will not be allowed in any case (Assembleia da República, n.d.). We define death penalty as the state condemning someone to death. Therefore, the

primary goal of this debate is to demonstrate that the death penalty is wrong and needs to be abolished.

First, one of the fundamental universal rights, the right to life, is the foundation of our viewpoint and one of the strongest reasons to oppose the death penalty. The most fundamental of all rights is the right to life, but it is also the one on which all other rights stand on since without life, no other rights would exist. This is why the right to life is considered universal and unconditional. It belongs to every human being, no matter who they are or what they have done. Neither a government nor an organization should have the authority to decide when someone's life is finished. When a government decides to execute someone, it violates the core of human rights, which were meant to limit the state's power, in cases authority abuse (Amnesty International, n.d.).



Photo by Maria Oswalt on Unsplash

The right to life carries a deeper moral value. Even if someone has committed multiple crimes, their life carries value because it is human. Executing them sends the message that some lives are worth less than others and that the state can remove fundamental rights when it chooses. This is a principle of genocidal people, such as Adolf Hitler or António Salazar who believed that some people did not have the right to live. The idea of the state being able to take a life, weakens the right to life, because it is no longer considered universal. So, to defend this right, we need to defend all of human life, even the ones who have harmed others, and this will strengthen the principle that human dignity and life is absolute and cannot depend on behavior or status.

In addition, there are the financial costs of the death penalty. In fact, in the United States the costs of the death penalty surpass by a lot the cost of life sentences (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). In California, the cost of execution is 114 million dollars more than life sentences (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). A study conducted in Oregon, where aggravated murder can result in either a death sentence or life imprisonment, found that death penalty cases cost between \$800.000 and \$1 million more than non-death penalty cases (Kaplan et al., 2016).

Furthermore, North Carolina spends approximately \$2.16 million more per execution than on comparable cases resulting in life imprisonment (Cook & Slawson, 1993). It has also been estimated that Florida could save millions annually by replacing death sentences with life imprisonment without parole (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.).

The lengthy duration of death penalty trials is another disadvantage. Capital cases require significantly more judicial resources because of the extensive procedures necessary to reduce the risk of wrongful execution. A Kansas study found that capital cases averaged 40 days in court, compared with fewer than 17 days for comparable non-capital cases (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). Other studies show that capital cases require nearly four times longer throughout the legal process and substantially more

courtroom time (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.).

Moreover, the death penalty does not deter crime. Data collected and analyzed by researchers show no convincing evidence that executions reduce homicide rates (Radelet & Lacock, 2009; The Death Penalty Project, 2022). A national survey published in *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* found that 88% of leading criminologists do not believe the death penalty prevents murder (Radelet & Lacock, 2009). As a form of justice, execution is incapable of preventing misbehavior; rather, it may reinforce the notion that violence is an acceptable solution to problems. We have also seen evidence that the abolition of the death penalty does not lead to increased homicide rates. For example, Canada's homicide rate declined significantly following the abolition of capital punishment (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). By replacing the possibility of redemption with irreversible punishment, the death penalty undermines both moral growth and the value of human dignity.

**“The most fundamental of all rights is the right to life, but it is also the one on which all other rights stand on since without life, no other rights would exist.”**

Furthermore, have you seen how contradicting your position is? I can start by citing Victor Hugo: “What says the law? You will not kill. How does it say it? By killing!” (Hugo, 1851 n.d.). Let's put this in a hypothetical situation where someone kills a loved one of yours. What would you do next? Kill them yourselves or wait for the justice system to work? If you thought waiting for justice, then you agree that killing someone that kills another is not justice (or the best form of it) it's revenge. Thus, why should the state be able to kill

when we as a group of thoughtful individuals believe that it is not the best or even the right way to solve a crime. We are solving killing with killing, in other words, crime with crime.

In *Reflections on the Guillotine*, Albert Camus reflects on the capital punishment, which he refers to as the “most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal's deed, however calculated, can be compared” (Camus, 1960), basically the author is saying that the execution is a premeditated and calculated way of killing by the state. When the state decides to murder someone, and calls it punishment, it is, instead of punishment, a cruel act of immorality that it condemns.

There is also the fact that the death penalty faces a devastating paradox: to minimize error and a due justice process it must have a long duration. This duration might affect the defendant in a psychological way. However, if it doesn't have this duration the state might accuse an innocent person, so the system cannot guarantee both justice and humanity at the same time (Sarat, 1999). As a result, your position is contradictory. A better solution to this problem is for the state to show mercy and the possibility of change, rather than state ordered murder.

At this stage, I would like to run through the main points, capital punishment cannot be seen as a fair solution. The death penalty damages human dignity, violates the fundamental and universal right to life, and places the government in a morally dubious position by condemning murder while carrying it out. It is costly, ineffective at deterring crime, and a waste of precious assets like money, time, judges and courts. The biggest concern is that there is an excessive chance of errors. A genuinely compassionate and rational legal system safeguards society while adhering to its own moral standards; it does not seek retribution. It is obvious that no society should have the death penalty if we want a justice system that is fair, safe, and consistent. Destroying it demonstrates a commitment to preserving life, human dignity, and the core principles of justice.

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## Should the death penalty be legal?

### Proposition

Alex Xu, Catarina Mesquita and Inês Ferreira 11.º 1C

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to support the motion that the death penalty is a necessary and just punishment for the most heinous crimes.

Imagine that family member of yours was brutally murdered by a strange man. What should justice do in this situation? Send the man to a prison cell with a bed, meals, and the possibility to escape from it and kill other people, or make him face the consequences of his actions? By this we are not saying or defending that everyone that commits a crime should suffer the death penalty. However, for the most atrocious crimes the death penalty is fundamental to warrant the safety of the population.

Firstly, we consider that putting a dangerous criminal in a prison cell is still an unsafe decision, because it allows the person to kill his cellmate or even assassinate someone after getting released. To sustain our perspective, we created the security argument. In fact, several criminals have shown through their crimes that they are a safety hazard, so, why are we giving them the opportunity to commit crimes again? Many of them, especially serial killers, take a long time to get arrested, they are difficult to find and harder to convict. This example shows their ability to hide from police investigators. A prison escape is not a hypothetical scenario for some of them, and, if this happens, the responsibility of any crime committed by a prisoner that escaped is on the system, who promised society to keep it safe. I'd like to emphasize that, according to the US government, 303 people escaped prison in 2023, 35% of those being criminals with vast criminal history (Administrative Office of the US Courts, n.d.).

It is undeniable that the only way to avoid this kind of problem is the death penalty. For instance, if the criminal is adamant to destroy society and there is evidence that he is guilty, he should suffer that punishment. A horrific real-life situation that proves this is the story of the American serial killer Ted Bundy. He was arrested in 1977. However, he escaped twice from two different prisons, and, in the meantime, he

committed a lot of murders, including that of a 12-year-old girl (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). He was finally captured, and the judicial system decided to execute him in 1989 to prevent more deaths (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). I would like to highlight that the tax of criminal recidivism in some countries is very high. In Portugal's case, the police department estimates that, in 2021, 75% of the criminals that got released committed crimes again (Inácio, 2019). Therefore, the death penalty is the only way to warrant society's safety in some situations, so it should be allowed and retributed to those who committed the most diabolical crimes.

**“We argue that for the most atrocious crimes, the only moral way to balance the criminal's guilt and his actions is the death penalty.”**

The fundamental principle of any judicial system is to warrant that the punishment be proportional to the crime committed. We argue that for the most atrocious crimes, the only moral way to balance the criminal's guilt and his actions is the death penalty. Our position is not related to any desire for revenge, we are simply analyzing the situation from a neutral perspective. In the *Bible*, we can find the principle of *lex Talionis* that says: “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Even from a secular perspective, this principle tells us that the value of a human life can only be compared with that of another human life. This is as universal as giving back something that we stole. Although life imprisonment restricts the freedom of the criminal, it doesn't take away his life, which is unfair for the one who died.



Photo by Wesley Tingey on Unsplash

It is important to differ the terms retribution and revenge, as Robert Blecker, a professor at New York Law School, said:

Retribution is not simply revenge. Revenge may be limitless and misdirected at the undeserving, as with collective punishment. Retribution, on the other hand, can help restore a moral balance. It demands that punishment must be limited and proportional. Retributivists like myself just as strongly oppose excessive punishment as we urge adequate punishment: as much, but no more than what's deserved. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

This is to say, that retribution is not just a fancy way to say revenge, it is about a proportional response to the crime committed. Alternatively, revenge is about personal satisfaction with no sense of limits. Because of this, the first is moral and just and the second is not. The first one brings peace and closure, and the second only brings more harm. An example of a criminal that didn't have a fair sentence, being released too early, is Samuel Little. After assaulting and strangling a woman, he was convicted for only two years and a half. After getting released, he killed ten more women. However, when the homicide department analyzed the DNA remains that they had found in the crime scene, they concluded that he was associated with, at least, 93 murders (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). And I may add that he lived until he was 80 years old, after cutting short 93 lives. This example proves that the sentence wasn't proportional to the crime, so it did not bring justice.

To finish our argumentation, we defend that the death penalty is essential to the victim's peace. I'd like to remind that the victim's family and their friends spend months to years being witnesses, being interviewed and never being able to forget the horror that struck their lives. These are the kinds of people that really need an answer from the State, the ones who need closure. Against what the opposing team believes, the death penalty has the power to bring peace back to them. In fact, Phyllis Loya, the mother of a police officer that was a victim of a murder stated:

People [need] closure, and I think it means different things to different people. What it would mean for me is that my fight for justice for my son would be complete when his sentence [...] would be carried out as it should be. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

And who are we to say that this punishment does not bring peace and closure? Who are we to deny them these things that they desperately need to move on with their lives?

## “The death penalty is not an attempt to avenge the wrong doings that the criminal did.”

The opposition may argue that the death penalty makes families think they will benefit from these measures, but it does not. However, from our point of view, even if it is true that the death penalty may not bring peace for a small portion of the people, we consider that it still helps most of them, who are often traumatized. Maybe it is not what most families need to make them go back to a normal life, but it helps people live their lives more comfortably, with less stress and fear. Don't they deserve to have a chance of that? What we want to emphasize with this is that the death penalty may not bring everyone a total closure, but it brings them some peace of mind that the human who destroyed their normal life is finally gone.

To conclude, the death penalty is an irreplaceable instrument for the justice system because it is the only punishment that actually reflects the gravity of the most atrocious crimes. The death penalty is not an attempt to avenge the wrong doings that the criminal did. It is a path that doesn't just allow justice to recognize the value of the victims' lives, but it also gives the criminals the possibility to pay back for their wrong doings. Kristie Reed, after the execution of her loved one's killer, said: “I need to know that he's gone, that we don't have to deal with this anymore” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

From the moment a person decides to do terrifying things, such as bombing a tower or torturing a person in the most brutal way, they should be prepared for the consequences. When this punishment is applied with strict legal safeguards, it gives a clear message: we defend the innocent, we are not letting them make these mistakes again. The death penalty is the middle term between justice and revenge. It is a necessary policy that allows citizens to trust that their safety is protected by their country. It is a policy that allows them to stand behind it.

## Opposition

Gustavo Ferreira, Inês Santos and Tiago Gonçalves 11.º 1C

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we are here to oppose the motion that the death penalty should be allowed. We speak not out of sympathy to the criminals, but out of commitment to justice, humanity and truth.

Has your best friend ever lied to you? If they did, you ought to know that that isn't a reasonable cause to end a friendship, because of a single wrongdoing. The death penalty works in the same way: it responds to a crime with an irreversible and absolute decision. Even when someone commits a severe offence, repeating the same harm does not lead to justice or understanding. As Gandhi reminded us, “an eye for an eye makes the world blind” (as cited in National Geographic Portugal, n.d.). Thus, the taking of a life cannot be the answer to the taking of another.

Our first argument is based on the premise that the death penalty continues to cause intense physical and psychological suffering to the condemned. Even before the execution itself, the long wait on death row is a form of psychological torture, violating human rights and the principle of human dignity. According to Amnesty International's fifth article: “Everyone has the right to be free from torture” (Amnistia Internacional Portugal, n.d.). So, if capital punishment causes torture to a human being, it violates their human rights. Well, prisoners sentenced to the death penalty are mentally tortured. Thus, the death penalty is profoundly inhumane.

You might think that that is all that it is, but it could also have physical consequences. Many people think that the methods used are painless, however it isn't always like that. Regardless of how painless methods of execution are claimed to be they aren't always infallible. Let's take the case of Clayton Lockett. He was executed in Oklahoma, in 2014, for murder. What was supposed to be a painless death by lethal injection turned into a despicable murder. The drugs used were experimental, and the intravenous line was inserted incorrectly, causing him to move and cry out in pain for over 40 minutes before dying of a heart attack (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). This case

caused international outrage and raised questions about cruelty and human rights in judicial execution practices. This proves that even the most merciful ways of ending someone's life aren't unimpeachable and can still make someone suffer. So, do you think this is fair? If killing is viewed as such a sin that we choose to take drastic measures against, why should we go guilt free? A death is a death, no matter who kills.



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Our second argument supports our motion by analysing the terminal and irreversible nature of the death penalty. Since 1973, more than 1.500 people have been executed in the United States. However, hundreds of individuals sentenced to death have later been exonerated or had their convictions overturned due to evidence of innocence (Long, 2014). A widely cited study estimated that approximately 4% of those on death row may be innocent (Long, 2014).

The ultimate punishment cannot exist in a world where innocence can still be lost to flawed systems. The judicial system used, nowadays, to determine the punishment of an individual, consists of the jury's

interpretation of the facts exposed by both parties, the prosecution and the defense. Therefore, there's still a human factor involved (the interpretation) in the decision making, and consequently the death penalty could be wrongfully given, as humans are not perfect, and the decision of the judge or jury is also dependent on the capabilities of the lawyer representing the sentenced. As you can't be totally sure that someone is guilty, you also cannot be certain that someone is innocent. And so, a terminal punishment shouldn't be on the table if you can't be absolutely sure of someone's guilt, because you could be punishing an innocent person with an irreversible sentence. And so, nowadays, you can see the debris that judicial execution has left behind. The many parents that were left mourning for their sons, and the many lovers that were left with their hearts tumbling with the loneliness of death. All of this because of a visceral and cruel execution delivered to an innocent human, that did nothing to deserve it.

One example of this type of mistake is the case of Troy Davis. He was convicted of killing police officer Mark McPhail, in 1989, and was executed by lethal injection on 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2011, despite serious doubts about his guilt. The murder weapon was never found, no forensic or DNA evidence linked him to the crime, and seven of the nine key witnesses later recanted their testimonies, claiming police pressure (Guglinski, 2020). Additional witnesses suggested that another man may have confessed to the shooting. Even with global appeals for clemency from prominent figures and human-rights groups, Troy's execution went ahead, becoming a powerful symbol of potential wrongful conviction in the United States death-penalty system.

But Troy Davis was not alone. Cameron Todd Willingham was executed in Texas in 2004 for allegedly murdering his three daughters, despite substantial later evidence questioning the forensic methods used to convict him (Innocence Project, 2024). Mahmood Mattan was executed by hanging in 1952 for a murder he did not commit and was later posthumously exonerated (Wikipedia contributors, 2025a). George Stinney Jr. was executed in 1944 at age 14 and was

posthumously exonerated seventy years later when a court determined that his trial had been fundamentally unfair (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b). These are only a few examples of innocent people whose lives were taken by the state. If it were your own son, how would you respond to learning that your innocent child had died for no reason?

**“Prison isn’t meant solely to punish someone’s actions, its purpose is to give offenders the chance to understand their mistakes, change their behavior and, then, reintegrate them into society.”**

Our third argument supports the prohibition of the death penalty by comprehending its impact on the definition of justice itself. Rehabilitation is one of the fundamental principles of any modern criminal justice system. Prison isn't meant solely to punish someone's actions, its purpose is to give offenders the chance to understand their mistakes, change their behavior and, then, reintegrate them into society. For this to happen, the offender must be alive, so they can evolve as a person and eventually become a free individual. However, the death penalty neglects this opportunity, which constitutes a right to everyone, by terminating the offender's life, and never offering a second chance. We cannot defend a punishment that offers no second chances, no room for correction, and no true deterrence.

You could argue that a criminal who had killed many people with clear evidence doesn't deserve to be alive, and thus should be sentenced to the death penalty. Nevertheless, a person that would do such a thing, is clearly disturbed and needs more help to complete their rehabilitation than prison alone. So, we

defend that they shouldn't be destined to death but put through a psychic program that would help them effectively become a better person and never make such a mistake again.

An example of rehabilitation working as an alternative to the death penalty is Erwin James's case. He served 20 years in prison following a murder conviction. During his time in custody, he earned a degree from the Open University in Keynes, England and began writing, eventually publishing the column "A Life Inside" in *The Guardian*, where he offered a detailed perspective of inside a cell. After his release in 2004, he continued his commitment to prison reform and, in 2016, became editor of *Inside Time*, a United Kingdom's newspaper for prisoners (Billington, 2024). He frequently stated that his past never left him and that his goal was to help others by showing that genuine personal change is possible.

Thus, everyone deserves the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and eventually be reintegrated into society if they do evolve as a person. And this is only possible if the offender is still alive, so the death penalty stands firmly opposed to this matter, and thus shouldn't be allowed, because a nation that chooses execution over rehabilitation, chooses vengeance over justice. As Albert Camus (1957) once stated: "Capital punishment is the most premeditated of murders."

To conclude, we reiterate that the death penalty is wrong and shouldn't be allowed under any circumstances. Mainly because of the three reasons stated. Firstly, capital punishment is inhumane, as the offender still suffers immensely during the time leading to their execution. Moreover, our judicial system can be wrong on who is guilty and who is not and that's inadmissible when death is an option. Furthermore, we state that rehabilitation is a better alternative to the death penalty, because it offers people a second chance to evolve and be reintegrated into society, where they will not commit their crimes again. Finally, we conclude with categorical evidence, that the death penalty is nothing more than just violence disguised as a form of justice promoted by the State. So, as Martin

Luther King Jr. (1963) once noted: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Violence cannot drive out violence; only nonviolence can do that."

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## Should the death penalty be legal?

### Proposition

Constança Carvalhinho 11.º 3, Constança Calado, Duarte Mendes and Mafalda David 11.º 1B

Good morning everyone, we are here to support the motion that the death penalty should not be legal.

Firstly, we would like to clarify that we are not against the prosecution and punishment of criminals. We too think that criminals should take responsibility for their actions and have the appropriate punishment based on the crime they have committed. Those who committed serious crimes such as murder, terrorism, and drug trafficking, that in some way or another compromised the citizens living in a safe society should not live in it. However, as with any other crime we believe that the people who committed serious crimes should be in a prison or a facility that ensures their rehabilitation in hopes that someday, when they are ready, these prisoners can be re-integrated into society, the death penalty does not assure the criminal's rehabilitation or their self-reflection.

The death penalty or capital punishment is the legal punishment of death for a crime (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This threatens one of the fundamental human rights, article III of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (United Nations, 1948).

Isn't it worrying that in 2022, 55 countries still upheld and used the death penalty (BBC News, 2024), when it goes against human rights? What makes the killing of someone by the state any different than when it is by a citizen? By a murderer? We believe that killing is always unjustifiable and that it is worrying that so many countries still use the death penalty. Consequently, this house believes that the death penalty should not be legal. Our main arguments will focus on three points: the economic impacts, the social impacts, and on the morality of this policy.



Photo by Emiliano Bar on Unsplash

**“(...) we believe that the people who committed serious crimes should be in a prison or a facility that ensures their rehabilitation (...)”**

Concerning the latter, there is data that confirms that the justice system is biased. The Bureau of Justice Statistics showed us that, in 2022, out of the 2.265 prisoners sentenced to death 917 were black, they represented almost 41%, when black people only represented 12,5 percent of the American population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2025; Kremling, 2023). In fact, almost 300 black people have been sentenced with the death penalty for murdering white people since 1976 (Yim and Passalacqua, 2023). Additionally, a study from the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute investigated the influence of race in forensic science, concluding that race can affect the subjective forensic fields, even if not purposefully, resulting in black people being more likely to be associated with evidence connected to a crime. In contrast, white people that murdered black people got sentenced with the death penalty almost 17 times less than black individuals (Innocence Project, n.d.).

**“(...) the death penalty eliminates any possibility of rehabilitation or personal change (...)”**

However, race is not the only factor that influences the death penalty's justice system. People with mental illness will be executed without review of their convictions or sentences even though the law forbids executing people who are mentally incompetent.

Studies show that 43% of people executed between 2000 and 2015 were diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or PTSD, and at least 20% of people sentenced to death have a serious mental illness (Equal Justice Initiative, 2024).

Some people in favor of the death penalty argue that it has a positive economic impact. Some people in favor of the death penalty think that it has economic advantages compared to the death sentence, but it is not true. Undoubtedly, the cost of food, dorms, water, and gas for inmates is a big expense. However, a study from the Urban Institute in Maryland shows that the death penalty cases can cost three times more than non-death penalty ones. This happens as a consequence to paying for longer trials, but also extra investigation, motions and longer jury selection, before trial, as well as the longer mandatory appeals, extra lawyers and the long stay at the death row, after trial (Roman et al., 2008).

Another common belief is that the death penalty prevents more crimes. People assume that if the punishment is severe enough, criminals will be too afraid to act. However, studies show that the death penalty does not deter crime, here is what the research actually demonstrates: In 2012, a panel of experts from the national reserve council in the United States reviewed studies that tried to measure whether the death penalty reduces homicide rates and concluded that all existing deterrence studies were methodologically flawed and that there is no reliable evidence the death penalty lowers homicide rates. Also, in 2021, *The Death Penalty Project Report* did a global policy review and found an absence of evidence that executions prevent serious crimes. It also showed that countries that abolished the death penalty did not experience an increase in homicide rates. These studies collectively show that the death penalty is no more effective at preventing crime than long-term imprisonment. In fact, many offenders do not fear execution. Others even take their own lives when facing life behind bars. Moreover, the death penalty eliminates any possibility of rehabilitation or personal change, making it an irreversible response that simply

removes the person rather than addressing the underlying behavior or offering a chance for reform (The Death Penalty Project, 2022)

We have already disproven the most common myths about the death penalty; however, we have not talked about one of the most important topics — justice. Imagine being sentenced to death for something you did not do. If someone is sentenced to life in prison and is later proven innocent, those years spent in prison cannot be given back, but if someone is proven not guilty after the execution they have taken this person's entire life. Studies show that since 1973, 200 prisoners that were killed by death penalty, were, in fact, innocent and got exonerated of all charges related to the wrongful convictions that led them to death (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). Another study shows that around 4% of prisoners sentenced to death are innocent (Innocence Project, n.d.). This means that the states of different countries have all killed innocents without any real reason to. Only because at the time of the execution it was thought they were guilty.

In summary, for all the reasons above mentioned: the social inequality and racial discrimination; the negative economic impact; the fact that it does not have an impact on crime rate; and, above all, the irreversible risk of killing innocent people, we defend that the death penalty should not be legal.

## Opposition

Afonso Ferreira 11.º 1B, Margarida Flora, Matilde Moura 11.º 3 and Maria Inês Pereira 11.º 4

“An eye for an eye”, they say, “makes the whole world blind.” Maybe. But tell me, what happens when one eye belongs to innocence, and the other to evil itself? Justice cannot close both. Sometimes, to protect what is good, we must dare to confront what is unforgivable.

Ladies and gentlemen, we stand here to oppose the motion that the death penalty should be abolished. We disagree with the Proposition's assumption that all lives — even the lives of those who repeatedly take innocent lives — must be preserved at any cost. This debate is not just about punishment; it is about preventing irreversible harm, protecting future victims and ensuring justice is not reduced to symbolism.

If the Proposition defines “death penalty” as merely “state-sanctioned killing,” we challenge that. A more balanced definition comes from Roger Hood, Professor Emeritus of Criminology at the University of Oxford, who defines the death penalty as the “execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law of a criminal offense” (Hood & Hoyle, 2015).

In this debate, our team wants to show that: First, the death penalty uniquely protects society from offenders who continue killing even after sentencing. Second, retribution is a legitimate, morally grounded principle, not emotional revenge. Third, in extreme cases — serial murder, genocide, terrorism — no other punishment offers proportional justice or permanent public safety. And to finish, common arguments raised by the proposition are flawed, often based on generalizations, moral absolutism, or incomplete statistics.

To prove that the death penalty uniquely protects society from offenders who continue killing even after sentencing we want to show you an example in 1966, where McDuff, and an accomplice, kidnapped and murdered three teenagers who were visiting from California. He was given three death sentences but avoided execution after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Furman v. Georgia* (1972). He was resentenced to life

and was paroled in 1989. Between October 1989 and March 1992, McDuff raped and murdered at least six women, receiving another death sentence and was later executed in 1998 (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, n.d.). If McDuff had been executed when first sentenced, at least six innocent women might have been spared.

Normally capital punishment is associated with revenge and "immoral justice". However, it is not about blind emotion, it is about retribution. As legal scholar Robert Blecker argues: “Retribution is not simply revenge. Revenge may be limitless and misdirected at the undeserving... Retribution, on the other hand, can help restore a moral balance” (Blecker, 2013).

**“Sometimes, to protect what is good, we must dare to confront what is unforgivable.”**

But the proposition wants you to believe that life imprisonment is enough and “solves the problem”. But reality shows that is not enough and it doesn't solve the problem. Some criminals do not stop killing — not even behind bars. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, inmates serving life sentences commit homicides inside prison at a significantly higher rate than the general population. Prisons do not magically transform violent predators into harmless individuals. A life sentence protects society only if the criminal stays inside forever — but history shows that political changes, legal loopholes, and parole boards can and do fail. If the system fails to contain the most violent criminals, how can we morally justify keeping them alive when consequences fall on innocent people? This proves that the real question is not “Do we value human life?”, it is “Which human lives are we willing to protect? The innocent or the irredeemably violent?”

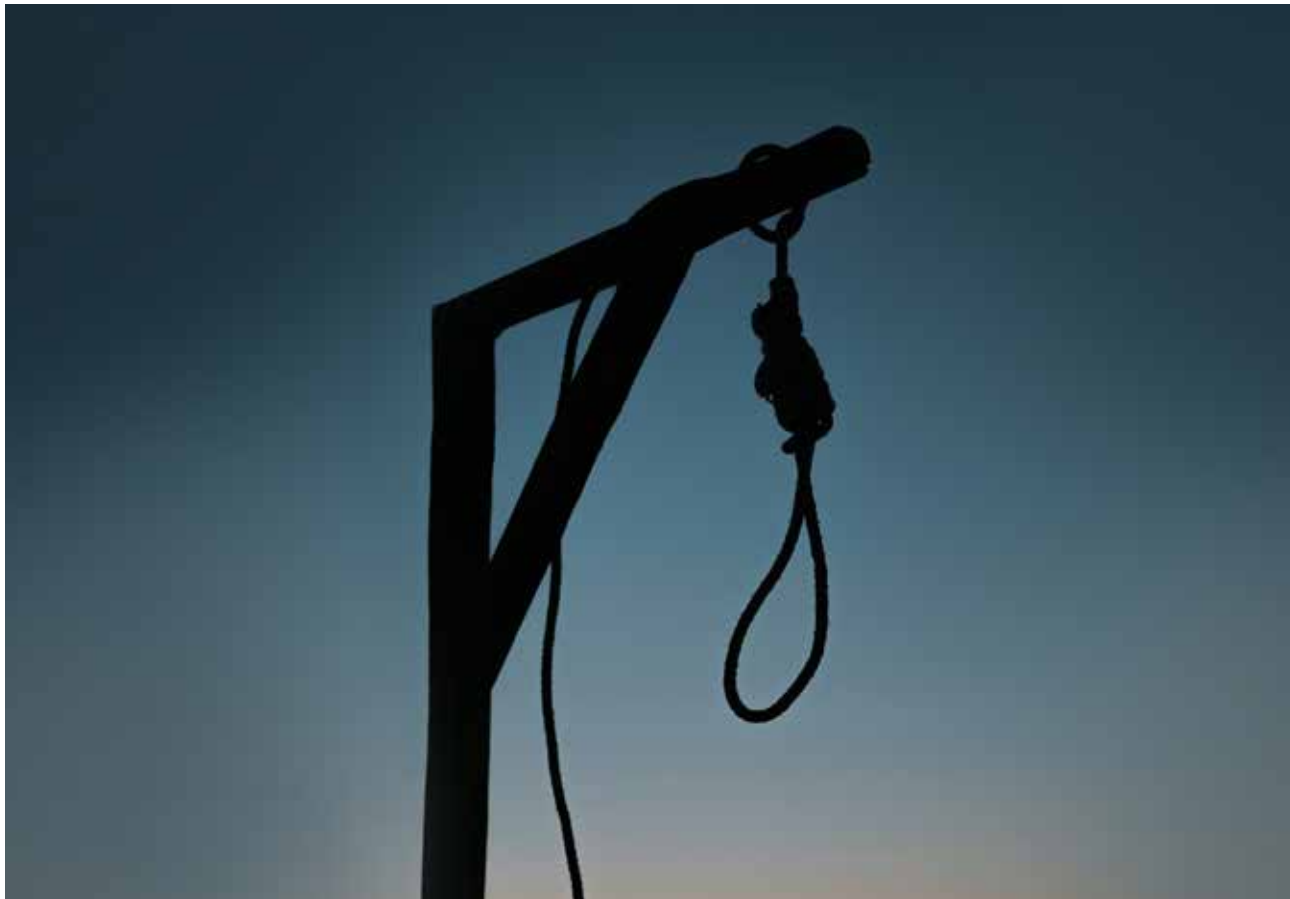


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And this is not theoretical. We have seen mass murderers, genocidal commanders, cartel leaders and war criminals who continue to order killings from prison cells. For these individuals, imprisonment does not neutralize their threat — it simply relocates it. The death penalty, in extreme cases, is the only measure that guarantees incapacitation: the absolute certainty that they will never harm again.

The proposition will argue about wrongful convictions — and we agree this is a tragedy that must be prevented. But modern legal systems include DNA testing, multiple appeal levels, and procedural safeguards that dramatically reduce this risk. Today, more than 300 convicts have been exonerated through

DNA evidence before execution (Innocence Project, n.d.). This shows that the justice system is becoming more precise, not less.

More importantly, rare judicial errors cannot become a blanket excuse to abolish the only punishment capable of stopping the world’s most violent and persistent offenders. No one argues that medicine should be abolished because mistakes exist. We fix the system — we don’t eliminate the treatment.

Finally, there is the emotional dimension: the families of victims. Some oppose capital punishment, and that is their right. Others believe that justice is achieved only when the perpetrator faces the ultimate consequence.

Public opinion research has consistently shown substantial support for the death penalty among many victims' families and members of the public, although views vary considerably (Gallup, 2024). Their voices deserve consideration as well. Justice must listen to all victims, not only those whose perspectives align with one side of the debate.

**“(...) rare judicial errors cannot become a blanket excuse to abolish the only punishment capable of stopping the world’s most violent and persistent offenders.”**

We are not defending cruelty. We are defending protection. We are defending justice. We are defending the lives of future innocent people that we can still save. If society has the means to permanently neutralize those who have shown absolute contempt for human life — then failing to do so is not compassion. It is negligence.

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## Should all countries have life sentences?

### Proposition

Constança Carvalho, Gabriel Pombal and Miguel Zlotnikov 11.º 1C

Good evening esteemed guests, today, we are proposing the motion of implementing life sentences in all countries. To begin, let us clarify our terms. A life sentence is a prison sentence which lasts for the remainder of someone's life. In our first argument, we will argue that "life sentence is not cruelty — it is accountability", which means that people should be rightfully punished for the crimes they commit, and depending on the case, life sentence may be necessary. Secondly, we will be showing that life sentences bring proportionality of punishment. That means that the severity of a crime should be matched by the sentence given to the criminal. And finally, we will argue about giving peace of mind to the victims of these criminals, as psychological wounds also need to be tended to. These are all the things that point to the necessity of life sentences.

I would like to start off by reinstating that life sentence is not cruelty, it is accountability! There is a misconception that this type of punishment is inherently cruel, but that isn't the case. We must remember that actions have consequences. When an individual commits serious crimes, such as murder, terrorism, rape, etc., they should suffer the consequences, by living out the rest of their days in prison, since taking away someone's life or disrespecting their basic rights means sacrificing your freedom as well. Some people may argue that sentencing people for life takes away their opportunity for a second chance to be included in society. However, we have to understand that every act has a consequence, and that some people don't deserve a second chance, and the implementation of life sentences can prevent people from harming others more than once. In 2005, the Bureau of Justice Statistics tracked prisoners released from prison across 30 US states. The results were evident: 75% of those prisoners were rearrested within 5 years, with 36% of these being in the first 6 months after release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). Furthermore, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports that countries with no life sentences often have higher rates of repeated violent crime among released serious offenders (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], n.d.). As such, we can conclude that sometimes, maximum-term

sentences fail to incapacitate or reintegrate dangerous individuals into society.

In accordance with what was previously stated, we find it unfair to the victims that the maximum jail time is, for example, in Portugal, 25 years. We believe these sentences, without the option of life, show that the justice system may somewhat lessen the cruelty and the violence with which the individual committed the crimes, as well as the gravity of these. As such, we think that for those scenarios, the most adequate and fair punishment is a life sentence. With this option available, proportionality of punishment to the crimes committed is assured. You might argue that this is risky because the judicial system is flawed, and that if someone is wrongfully convicted, their life is ruined until they die. This is just a case of human error, and if innocent people can be wrongfully convicted to 25 years or less, then serious criminals should be incarcerated for life.

**“(...) adopting the use of life sentences worldwide would strengthen public safety, while honoring the suffering of victims, because some actions are so harmful, that they strip a person of their right to return to society.”**

Take this real case for example. Pedro López, also known as the “Monster of the Andes” is a Colombian serial killer with an estimated kill count of roughly 110 to 300 people, with most of these being teenage girls that he mistreated and then buried himself (Aventuras na História, n.d.; Wikipedia Contributors, n.d.). Even though this is an example of an absolutely despicable human being, for this horrendous list of felonies, in



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1981, López received a sentence of only 16 years, which was the maximum prison sentence in Colombia at the time (Aventuras na História, n.d.; Wikipedia Contributors, n.d.). Evidently, this punishment is totally insufficient and not proportionate to the crimes committed, and it shows disrespect to the countless people that fell victim to this monster.

The final reason why life sentences should be applied in all countries is arguably more important than facing the consequences of your actions, or even making sure that the punishment you get is fair, or any other possible argument. The absolute best benefit from the implementation of life sentences is giving peace

of mind to the victims. Be it the victims themselves, or their loved ones, depending on the case, they will most likely want to make sure that the criminal who hurt them is incarcerated for as long as they live. Consider the following scenario: In our current judicial system, when a criminal who committed many felonies is going to be judged, no matter how many crimes the person has committed or the seriousness of these crimes, they are only, at most, condemned to 25 years. Does that seem fair to you? I'll go even further, imagine that the person who committed all those crimes killed, for example, one of your loved ones. How would you feel, knowing that in 25 years they would be free to go and could be walking the streets right next to you? You couldn't possibly feel totally safe. Life sentences would put an end to this problem. With its implementation, victims or those related to them could live peacefully, knowing that they are permanently safe from those who have wronged them. In fact, a study done by a university in Sweden in 2011, entitled “Distress after Criminal Victimization” concluded that victims often suffer from psychological distress like anxiety, fear, among others, even months or years after the crime occurred (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2011). This clearly shows that, to benefit and help victims recover, criminals with serious offences should be incarcerated for the rest of their lives.

I would like to finish by reminding everyone that the implementation of life sentences is not an act of cruelty, but rather one of justice, accountability, and protection of the people. As we have argued, the most serious crimes demand consequences that truly reflect their severity, and life sentences ensure that this proportionality is upheld. They hold criminals fully responsible for their actions, prevent the justice system from minimizing the gravity of their crimes, and, most importantly, provide victims and their families with the peace of mind they deserve. All in all, adopting the use of life sentences worldwide would strengthen public safety, while honoring the suffering of victims, because some actions are so harmful, that they strip a person of their right to return to society. So remember, if you can't do the time, don't do the crime. Thank you.

## Opposition

Manuel Silva, Matilde Nobre, Rodrigo Macedo and Vasco Jesus 11.º 1C

Good evening, lady chairman, my worthy opponents, fellow debaters and audience, with your permission, allow me to begin with a real story.

Let's talk about George Jackson, an American man born in Chicago. When he was 18 years old, Jackson was involved in a \$71 armed robbery, for this crime he was sentenced to life in San Quentin State Prison. During his stay behind bars, he changed; he became an avid reader and political thinker who took up Marxist-Leninist ideas. He became a leading voice in the prison radical movement, and published a bestselling collection of prison letters, *Soledad Brother*, which made him famous and influential outside prison (BlackPast.org, n.d.). Should society and the system still condemn him to die in prison, denying him any hope of redemption? If justice denies hope, can we still call it justice? Well, we believe it was the wrong call and it proves that life sentence shouldn't be applied in all countries.

While we appreciate the principle of ensuring justice through uniform punishment, we contend that the universal application of a life sentence would be ethically indefensible and practically unworkable. Justice must be guided by context, fundamentals, and ethical reasons. Such punishment disregards and overlooks the diverse moral, cultural, and legal contexts that define justice within each society, and in doing so, it risks replacing fairness with rigidity. Locking a person away until they die, regardless of who they become, is a punishment that locks away not only the person, but their hope as well. It does not simply restrict freedom, it extinguishes the possibility of transformation. As Desmond Tutu once said, "to take a life when a life has been lost is revenge, not justice."

A life sentence without the possibility of release can turn prisons into institutions of despair. As inmates age, develop chronic illnesses, or lose mobility, they require intensive medical care. Care that prisons were never designed to provide. In the United States, for instance, the number of incarcerated people over 55 has skyrocketed in recent decades, creating what some attorneys call "America's nursing homes behind bars."

Elderly inmates, many of whom pose little to no risk to society, often remain locked in tiny cells as dementia sets in or as they approach the end of their lives. This is not justice. It is warehousing human suffering.

The proposition may argue that life sentence protects society, ensures safety, and delivers justice to victims. But safety is absolutely attainable through long, finite sentences combined with robust rehabilitation programs, risk assessments, and parole processes that carefully evaluate who is truly dangerous. Justice must be firm, justice must be fair, humane, and rooted in the belief that redemption is possible. Therefore, we stand against imposing life sentences universally because doing so replaces justice with rigidity, fairness with

cruelty, and hope with despair. A system that refuses to recognize human complexity ultimately fails to protect society. True justice must defend not only our safety, but also our humanity.

The universal application of life sentence disregards the fundamental principle of cultural and legal diversity that reinforces international justice. Each nation's criminal justice system exemplifies its unique historical experiences, moral values, and social objectives. According to a report by the House of Commons Library, when trying to make comparisons between countries, it is important to note that legal systems do not necessarily follow recognized state borders and can create significant variations in criminal

justice within a country. For example, as documented by the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, there is a significant disproportion in the severity of sentencing for drug related offences across different countries.

The most striking degree of disparity was found in the drug importation scenario. K. would be likely to receive a life sentence in Thailand, a 20 year term in India, 15 years in South Africa, and between five and 18 years in most of the other countries. Again, the Netherlands was the exception, with lawyers estimating her likely sentence at around four months. In six jurisdictions, K. was also liable to receive a fine on top of custody: in New South Wales, the fine could equate to almost US\$700.000 (but would be in the court's discretion). In Brazil, a minimum fine equivalent to around US\$3.500 would apply. In Kenya, South Africa, Thailand, and India, non-payment of the fine would probably mean extra time in custody. In Brazil it would mean removal from the electoral roll and losing the right to work.

Thus, enforcing a uniform life sentence policy would represent a violation of their independence and a deterioration of legal autonomy, imposing a universal moral standard that does not exist. Therefore, preserving the diversity of legal systems is essential to maintaining fairness, cultural integrity, moral beliefs and rehabilitation goals that define each nation's identity. Justice must reflect cultural context, not erase it.

Life sentence denies the possibility of rehabilitation and second chances. They assume that a person can never change and that their worst act defines them forever. This belief contradicts both moral principles and psychological evidence showing that human beings are capable of growth, remorse, and transformation. So, when punishment is irreversible, it becomes vengeance, not justice. True justice allows for equity and hope of redemption. Denying release even after rehabilitation disregards the offender's humanity and moral growth.



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From a human rights perspective, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that life imprisonment without parole is “inhuman and degrading treatment” violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, 2013). Justice should not be vengeance; it should be a balance between accountability and the possibility of redemption. For example, Norway, where the focus is on rehabilitation rather than lifelong punishment, the reoffending rate is below 20%, one of the lowest globally (Legal Services India, n.d.). This proves that when prisoners are given a path to reform, society becomes safer, not more dangerous.

**“(…) if justice exists to protect society while still being humane, it must punish wrongdoing while maintaining alive the possibility of becoming better”**

Therefore, implementing life sentences in all countries would erase hope, hinder rehabilitation, and betray the belief that people can change, a belief that keeps the joy in living. This way, enforcing life sentences in all countries would be to institutionalize hopelessness. It assumes that some people are beyond saving, effectively denying them the essence of being human, the ability to grow, learn, and atone. Such punishment does not make societies safer; it only creates deeper wounds. Justice that rejects redemption is not justice, it is just retaliation disguised as protection. By denying redemption, life sentences without parole deny not only the prisoner’s future but also society’s capacity for compassion and moral progress.

The proposition may claim that life sentences are necessary to protect society from individuals who remain permanently dangerous, such as serious killers, terrorists, or extremely violent offenders who, in their view, can never be safely released. They will claim that, although rehabilitation is ideal, it cannot be guaranteed, and therefore the penal system must prioritize the safety of the community above the possibility of personal transformation. They will also enforce that serious crimes require harsher punishment, arguing that allowing release undermines the severity of them. They will also refute, that releasing high-risk offenders is risky and unsafe, so countries must retain the right to impose life sentences based on their own legal standards. In short, they will ensure and defend that life sentences are indispensable for upholding justice, deterring crime and ensuring the safety of society.

Ladies and gentlemen, after everything we have shown you today, the answer cannot be clearer: No, life sentences should not be applied in all countries. Like we said before we reject the universal use of life imprisonment for three main reasons.

Firstly, life sentences are cruel and inhuman. Keeping a person in the environment of a prison until they die takes away their freedom, their hope of becoming better and their dignity. A justice system whose only purpose is to punish and deny transformation of an individual will never correct their behavior. If we reject the death penalty for being inhumane, how can we call a slow death inside a prison cell acceptable? George Jackson’s story makes this point unmistakable.

Secondly, a universal life sentence ignores cultural and legal differences between nations. Laws differ across the world because different countries, have distinct histories, beliefs and approaches to justice. Forcing every nation to adopt a single punishment would erase these differences among them and undermine their beliefs. One size does not fit all societies. Justice must be meaningful within each culture, not dictated by a uniform rule imposed on everyone.

Thirdly, the possibility of life sentence blocks rehabilitation and second chances. They assume that a person’s worst behavior defines them forever and that they are incapable of becoming better. This view contradicts both ethical standards and psychological data demonstrating that people are capable of development, regret, and change. A punishment ceases to be justice and turns into vengeance when it is irreversible. Equity and the possibility of redemption are essential components of true justice, where the focus is on rehabilitation rather than lifelong punishment. Even after true rehabilitation, refusing release, disregards a person’s moral development and humanity.

So, how can we answer the moral question we asked earlier? Should a system force a changed person to die in prison, with no hope of redemption? If you view justice merely as punishment, the answer is yes. But if justice exists to protect society while still being humane, it must punish wrongdoing while maintaining alive the possibility of becoming better. We could choose long sentences, strict reviews, parole based on real change, education in prison and laws that prevent abuse. We can protect society without killing hope.

This is not to soften the prisons, this is responsibility. We stand with the victims. We stand for the safety of everyone. But we also stand for a justice system that does not give up on human potential, that does not believe a bad moment defines a bad life, and a bad person. If we truly care about justice, we must reject a universal life sentence and build systems that punish firmly and rehabilitate seriously. If justice becomes a slow death of the soul and it kills hope, change and redemption then we are not protecting society. We are becoming no better than the harm we condemn. Let justice defend our safety without killing the hope of people.

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# LGBTQ+: Rights and equality



## Should same-sex marriage be allowed?

### Proposition

Henrique Nunes, Maria Leonor Matias and Tiago Almeida 11.º 2

Good morning, everyone, today, we stand in favor of the motion that homosexuals should be allowed to get married. Imagine being told that the person you love, the person you want to build a life with, is someone you are not allowed to marry. It feels unfair, doesn't it? For millions of people around the world, that's still a reality, and that's not freedom, that's discrimination. Our position is clear, same-sex marriage should be fully recognized and protected by law.

Let's start with the idea that same-sex marriage harms no one. When two people of the same sex get married, nothing changes for heterosexual couples, their rights, their families, and their values remain exactly the same. No one loses anything. Legalizing same-sex marriage doesn't weaken the institution of marriage, it strengthens it, by showing that marriage is about love and responsibility, not about gender.

A study by Dinno and Whitney (2013), published in *PLOS One*, analyzed data from across the US (1988–2009), it concluded that legalizing same-sex marriage did not negatively affect heterosexual marriage rates (Dinno & Whitney, 2013). Some people might say that allowing it changes the “definition” of marriage, but the way society views marriage has already changed many times before. In the past, women had no rights in marriage, people from different races couldn't marry, and divorce wasn't allowed. Same-sex marriage takes nothing away from anyone, it only adds, more love, more equality and more justice. A society that values love equally is a society that values humanity.

Our second argument is that legalizing same-sex marriage helps to fight prejudice and social exclusion. For many years, homosexual people have been treated as if their love was something less, something that isn't accepted by society. Some people might say that society can respect gay people without giving them marriage rights. But respect without equality is not real respect, it's just tolerance with limits. If we say “you can love who you want, but you can't have the same rights” we are still treating people as second-class citizens.

The question of same-sex marriage goes far beyond laws or religion, it is about human freedom and dignity (Ferreira, 2009). In Portugal, religious institutions are free to follow their own traditions, but civil marriage belongs to everyone. No one should be denied the right to love openly, to build a family, or to have their relationship recognized simply because of who they love. When we deny same-sex couples the right to marry, we are not protecting tradition. Society grows stronger, not weaker, when it embraces diversity and allows every individual to live authentically.

True justice means giving every person the freedom to choose love, commitment, and family without fear or discrimination. Marriage is more than symbolic, it also gives important legal rights between two adults, these rights include medical decision-making, tax benefits, shared property, parental responsibilities, and more (Gates & Brown, 2015). Denying the same-sex marriage, doesn't give them these rights, it creates real legal inequality. It's treating them as second-class citizens.

**“(...) legalizing same-sex marriage is not just a legal issue; it is about fairness, equality, and respecting people for who they are.”**

A study published in *Social Science & Medicine* by Aksoy, Carpenter, and Frank found that after same-sex marriage was legalized in the United Kingdom, same-sex couples experienced an 8% increase in life satisfaction. This rise was observed not only among couples who married but also among those who were already cohabiting, demonstrating that legal recognition itself reduces stigma and strengthens social inclusion (Aksoy et al., 2020).

Some might claim that allowing same-sex marriage offends or violates religious beliefs. But civil marriage is not a religious ceremony, it is a legal institution that guarantees equal rights under the law. No church will ever be forced to perform a marriage that goes against its faith.

Our third argument is that legalizing same-sex marriage has benefits for people's mental health and for society. When you tell people that their love is not valid and that they don't deserve the same rights as other people, it causes deep emotional harm. When you tell someone that they can't build a life with the person they love, they won't be mentally well, it's not something easy to deal with. Marriage isn't just a symbolic act it is a legal and emotional recognition of one's relationship and identity (Olson, 2020).

Some people may argue saying that, if depression is a reason to allow marriage, then we should allow every type of marriage, even allow children to marry adults, they might get depressed if we won't. But the difference is that same-sex marriage involves two consenting adults, fully aware of their choices and the responsibilities that come with marriage, children cannot legally or psychologically understand the implications of marriage. The two situations are not comparable.

In 2017, a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* revealed that, following the legalization of same-sex marriage in some of the states in the United States, suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ teenagers decreased by 14%. This represents the preservation of thousands of young lives, a significant impact (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017). When people feel accepted, they are happier, healthier, and more productive. Some people might argue that mental health problems have many causes, and that marriage laws don't really make a difference. But this study, and, many others, prove the opposite, that laws do affect how people see themselves (Olson, 2020).

In summary, legalizing same-sex marriage is not just a legal issue; it is about fairness, equality, and

respecting people for who they are. Throughout our speech, we explained three main points. First, same-sex marriage does not harm heterosexual society in any way. It simply shows that marriage is about love and commitment, not about gender. Second, denying this right keeps prejudice alive and stops people from having the same rights as everyone else. Giving same-sex couples the right to marry helps promote equality, inclusion, and respect. And third, allowing same-sex marriage has real benefits for mental health and for society because it reduces stigma, improves well-being, and can even save lives (Aksoy et al., 2019; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017).

A society that treats all kinds of love equally becomes stronger, fairer, and more human. Stopping someone from marrying the person they love doesn't help anyone, it only creates more discrimination. But allowing same-sex marriage shows that we value dignity, respect, and equality for all people.



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## Opposition

Francisco Marcos, Leonor Carvalho and Tomás Folque 11º 2

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our guests to this debate. We disagree with the presented motion, which consists in the legalization of same-sex marriage. It's mostly a matter of principles and logistic, as well as tradition and society-functioning.

Firstly, we argue that same-sex marriage may contribute to demographic challenges if it becomes increasingly common. In fact, a 2019 analysis by the US Census Bureau found that only 14.7% of same-sex couples had at least one child under the age of 18 living in the household, compared with 37.8% of opposite-sex couples (US Census Bureau, 2019). We should therefore ask ourselves: is this the path we want to follow? What might the long-term consequences be? This is one of the reasons why we do not believe same-sex marriage should be legalized.

**"(...) same-sex marriage makes starting a family a harder task for these couples."**

As we have already seen in this data, same-sex marriage makes starting a family a harder task for these couples. This comes from the incapacity of natural reproduction, and it will likely lead to a population decrease, which, on its behalf, leads to a decline in the market, as general demand, as well as production, will tend to reduce along with the population. While that could be unharmed in the short term, with the larger acceptance of homosexuality and the media influencing this "new" form of love, it could expand to greater scales and cause a mass influence in global demand. Some can argue that it's possible to reproduce by medical procedures, a lesbian couple, for example, could use a sperm donation to get pregnant and reproduce, but, as homosexuality gets more popular, these types of procedures become short for the high demand, resulting, inevitably, in a population decrease.

Another reason to consider this matter as an obstacle is the influence of parental tutoring in children's education. A household where children are received and welcomed by their parents (whether biological or not, same-sex or not) is important, not only to the received children, who receive valuable lessons from people who they give their trust to, but to the tutors as well, as they gain valuable experiences as parents and as individual beings as well, learning better how to communicate, love and protect their children.

Adding to our previous argument, there is also a longstanding religious perspective on homosexuality. In the *Bible*, Leviticus 20:13 states: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their

blood is upon them." (English Standard Version Bible, 2001/2016, Leviticus 20:13). This verse clearly states that homosexuality is morally wrong and goes against basic social values, and it is very important that we, as a collective society, don't forget our core values.

Furthermore, this passage explicitly states that engaging in a romantic relationship with someone of the same sex is considered sinful and contrary to the will of God. For those who believe that the *Bible* is the inspired word of God, this teaching carries the highest moral authority. Consequently, if God does not approve of marriage or romantic relationships between two people of the same sex, it follows that such unions should not be recognized. From this perspective, supporting same-sex marriage would mean acting contrary to God's will, despite His being regarded as all-knowing and morally perfect. In addition, some surveys indicate that many people who oppose the legalization of same-sex marriage base their views on religious beliefs. Therefore, for those whose moral principles are grounded in the teachings of the Bible, opposition to same-sex marriage is seen as a matter of remaining faithful to their religious convictions.

Based on this evidence, why is there such great necessity to seek legalization of homosexual marriage, when there's other ways people can use to love and not go against social and religious values?

Many people believe that the family is strongest when it includes both a paternal and a maternal figure, each offering something distinct to a child's development. A maternal figure is traditionally seen as a source of emotional warmth, sensitivity, and nurturing, while a paternal figure is often viewed as providing structure, discipline, and a model of masculinity. We believe that children benefit when they can learn from both of these complementary influences. We agree that seeing adults of different genders interact, cooperate, and manage conflict gives children a broader understanding of relationships. We also suggest that gender-specific guidance can feel especially relevant during puberty and adolescence, when young people naturally look for role models

who reflect their own identity. From our perspective, a concern is raised that same-sex households, no matter how loving or dedicated, may offer only one side of this traditional balance.

In conclusion, we believe that same-sex marriage should not be legalized because it raises important concerns about the long-term functioning of society. As we have argued, it may contribute to demographic challenges, conflicts with the moral and religious beliefs that guide many people, and departs from what we consider the traditional family structure that best supports children's development. For these reasons, we believe that preserving the current definition of marriage is the most responsible course of action.

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# Police Action:

## Between safety and individual rights

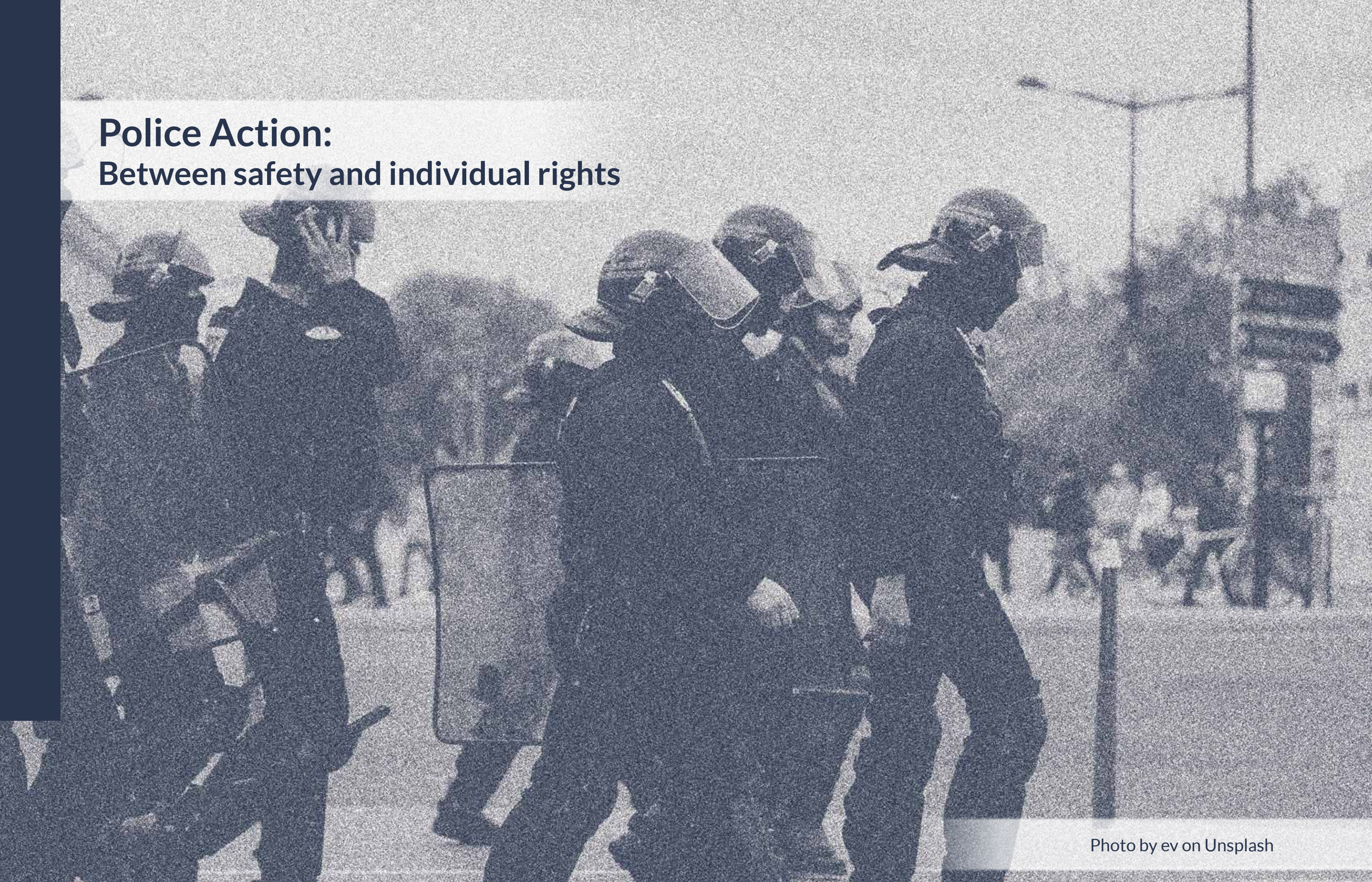


Photo by ev on Unsplash

## Was police action in *Complexo do Alemão* and *Complexo da Penha* justifiable?

### Proposition

Francisca Henriques 11.º 4, Diogo Devesa and Isabel Lima 11.º 3

Ladies and gentlemen, honorable judges, and esteemed opponents. Today, in this debate, we stand firmly in support of the actions of the Brazilian police on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025 in Rio de Janeiro, specifically in the *Complexo do Alemão* and *Complexo da Penha* favelas, where 20.000 people live and are controlled by a criminal organization.

Firstly, to know more about this organization, we searched numerous sources from those who have done research with public security entities in Rio de Janeiro, to better determine the most common methods of torture and abuse against innocent residents, to members of this criminal organization in these *favelas*. The first relevant source we found was an article written by Gabriel Sestrem on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, in the Brazilian newspaper *Gazeta do Povo*, which described numerous crimes committed by this criminal organization. For example, judge Leonardo Rodrigues da Silva Picanço directly cited the case of a woman who was forced to remain in a bathtub filled with ice as punishment for, according to the criminals, causing trouble at a funk party (Sestrem, 2025).

In another case, some of these public punishments involve shootings in the hands and/or feet, mutilations, and even dragging victims tied to vehicles. According to a complaint filed by the Public Prosecutor's Office, a man was dragged by a car while the scene was broadcasted live to a drug trafficker nicknamed BMW, who mocked the victim's suffering (Sestrem, 2025).

Additionally, the murder of residents and even members of *Comando Vermelho* occurs thanks to "crime tribunals", made by this criminal organization, in which drug trafficking leaders in each community judge the conduct of the victims and determine the punishment. According to a source, the death penalty usually occurs with informants, residents who collaborated with the police or rival groups, drug debtors, and dissidents of the faction. Executions typically take place by firing squad, hanging, or "microwaving" victims, one of the most brutal forms of torture and execution, of which journalist Tim Lopes was a victim

of in 2002 at the *Complexo do Alemão* (Castro, 2025). Frequently, torture punishments are recorded and shared in messaging groups to serve as a warning to the surrounding community. One of the many other crimes also involves pulling out or shaving victims' hair if they refuse to become emotionally or sexually involved with crime leaders (Castro, 2025).

**“What if you were one of the innocent victims praying for your life, would you still call this operation justified?”**

These torture methods employed by *Comando Vermelho* are varied and use extreme violence to instill fear in all people who decide to cross their path, inflicting punishments intended to eliminate rivals and repress residents who oppose or denounce their illegal actions. As Delegate Fabrício Oliveira stated:

The goal is to make the victim suffer as much as possible and for others to witness this suffering to subjugate this population through terror. So, people are terrified, dying of fear of being the next victims, or even doing or saying anything that could be interpreted negatively by these traffickers. (in Sestrem, 2025)

To conclude this matter, a colonel of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police explained that: “Compared to other factions, the members of *Comando Vermelho* are more hostile, aggressive, and cowardly, showing no respect for the elderly, women, and children, who are frequently used as human shields” (Sestrem, 2025). He also stated that: “The presence of clandestine cemeteries, for the disposal of victims' corpses, in almost all favelas, increases the psychological terror these criminals inflict on the population” (Sestrem, 2025).



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So what happened on the October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025? We will now refresh your memory, supported by the information provided by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

On this dreadful day, 2.500 civil and military police officers raided the residential neighborhoods of *Complexo do Alemão* and *da Penha*, which were controlled by *Comando Vermelho*. This led to a 15-hour shootout and the closure of Rio's schools, universities, and health clinics. Approximately 132 people were killed, including four law enforcement officers, and 113 people were imprisoned by the police. Most of the killings occurred in secluded areas away from street cameras that could have provided insight into what took place. Approximately 74 bodies were recovered

in forest areas, several of which bore stab wounds, while others were decapitated by close-range rifle fire. Many of these victims were low-level *Comando Vermelho* members, although some civilians were also sadly caught in the crossfire (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

Nevertheless, a survey conducted two days after the deadly violence found that approximately 64% of Rio de Janeiro residents viewed the police operation positively (Tribuna et al., 2025). This generally positive public reaction to the raid has been shown in Brazilian media coverage, with commentators largely interpreting the action as a necessary measure to contain organized crime (Nascimento, 2025).

As the police approached these neighborhoods, *Comando Vermelho* had already initiated its defense strategy by dropping bombs from drones and igniting large roadside fires to halt the police invasion before authorities even had the opportunity to shut down the city. Therefore, lives were already being lost as the criminals began defending their territorial control even before the police attacked. The beginning of this conflict already demonstrates how risky this operation was and how much quick thinking was required, as residents were already surrounded by road fires and drones carrying explosives (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

We must also recognize that police officers operate in complex, high-pressure situations where decisions must be made within seconds. Their actions are guided by training and, above all, the commitment to preserve life and uphold justice. In some cases, these are extremely difficult decisions to make, but they are always intend to preserve safety and protect society day after day, no matter how difficult circumstances become.

Without their intervention, crime would rise unchecked, and the very fabric of our society would be threatened. In that case, supporting the police means supporting stability and security. It means acknowledging that while no institution is perfect, the overwhelming majority of officers act with integrity, courage, and dedication. Therefore, the men and women who wear the uniform are not merely enforcers of the law, they are also guardians of our communities and protectors of our families and finally the first line of defense against chaos and disorder. Their duty is not easy, and yet, day after day, they put themselves at risk to ensure our safety.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that on October 28<sup>th</sup>, *Comando Vermelho* operatives had already seized buses and trucks and blocked major thoroughfares, grinding Brazil's second-largest city to a halt (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025). Overall, however, the strategic gains of the operation were minimal. The criminal organization

will absorb the loss of resources and the deaths of lower-level operatives without too much difficulty, while still retaining territorial control over vast areas of Rio de Janeiro. Indeed, over two million people — approximately one-third of the city's population — currently live under the group's governance, a figure that has continued to rise since 2017 (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

Therefore, we defend that the actions of the police were, and still are, essential to maintaining peace and protecting citizens. Let us stand with them, for in standing with the police, we stand with the values that keep our society strong.

## Opposition

Alice Carrilho 11.º 3, Duarte Ramos 11.º 1B and Matilde Ramos 11.º 4

“People in the favelas live under a constant state of alert and threat. Police operations in Brazil have become synonymous with terror, racism and a total lack of protection” (Amnesty International, 2025). Good morning audience, judges and fellow debaters, the fear and terror described in this quote was only intensified with the unhuman operation described by our opponents. We are here today to support the motion that the police action in *Complexo do Alemão* and *Complexo da Penha* on October 28<sup>th</sup> in Rio de Janeiro was not justified.

Imagine waking up to the sound of helicopters and gunshot outside your house. Imagine your children hiding under the bed. Imagine not knowing if you will make it safely to work or school, this is not a movie scene, this happened in Rio de Janeiro. The police action that claimed wanting security, turned neighborhoods into battlefields. They want safety by bringing fear. They wanted to protect lives but ended up killing 132 people.

“They didn’t stop shooting, throwing gas bombs, and many times we had to take cover. They were firing, and we were hiding among the bodies just to keep moving” (Amnesty International, 2025), reported a witness who was trying to release from the hospital the body of a cousin who was killed in the operation. In his attempt to help, the man said that the scene was heartbreaking. So, the question we came here to ask is: was this right? Some of you may say yes, but before accepting that argument, let me ask you something deeply personal: What if this happened to you? What if you were one of the innocent victims praying for your life, would you still call this operation justified? This house believes that this police action was unjustified and deeply harmful to the society they claimed to be protecting.

When we refer to “police action”, we are not speaking of a controlled, precise intervention. We are talking about an operation involving more than 2.500 police officers and military personnel, carried out with armored vehicles, explosive devices, and with little to no concern for the safety of the civilians living in those

communities (Ionova, 2025). What was supposedly an operation aimed at capturing criminal leaders from the organization known as *Comando Vermelho* ended up becoming one of the deadliest actions in Rio’s recent history.

**“(…) supporting the police means supporting stability and security.”**

To illustrate just how serious the situation was, let us recall the words of Ana Piquer, Regional Director of Amnesty International for the Americas: “What happened in Rio de Janeiro is not a security operation, it’s a massacre. More than a hundred people, almost all of them black and living in poverty, were murdered in an action planned and executed by the State itself” (Amnesty International, 2025). When an internationally respected human rights organization, operating in more than 150 countries, calls something a massacre, it is not an exaggerated or emotional statement. It is a clear and alarming warning.

In this debate our team will present three main arguments: these operations cause extreme violence, fear, and trauma among innocent civilians; they fail to address the structural causes of crime, making them ineffective in the long term; and, finally, they destroy trust between the police and the community, making public safety harder to achieve. Together, these points show that the operations do not bring safety, they bring suffering.

Our first argument is the most urgent: these police operations put innocent lives at risk. Every time these police actions happen, residents, not just criminals, are caught in the middle. People are killed inside their own homes. Children miss school because of gunfire. Mothers cannot go to work. Streets are blocked,

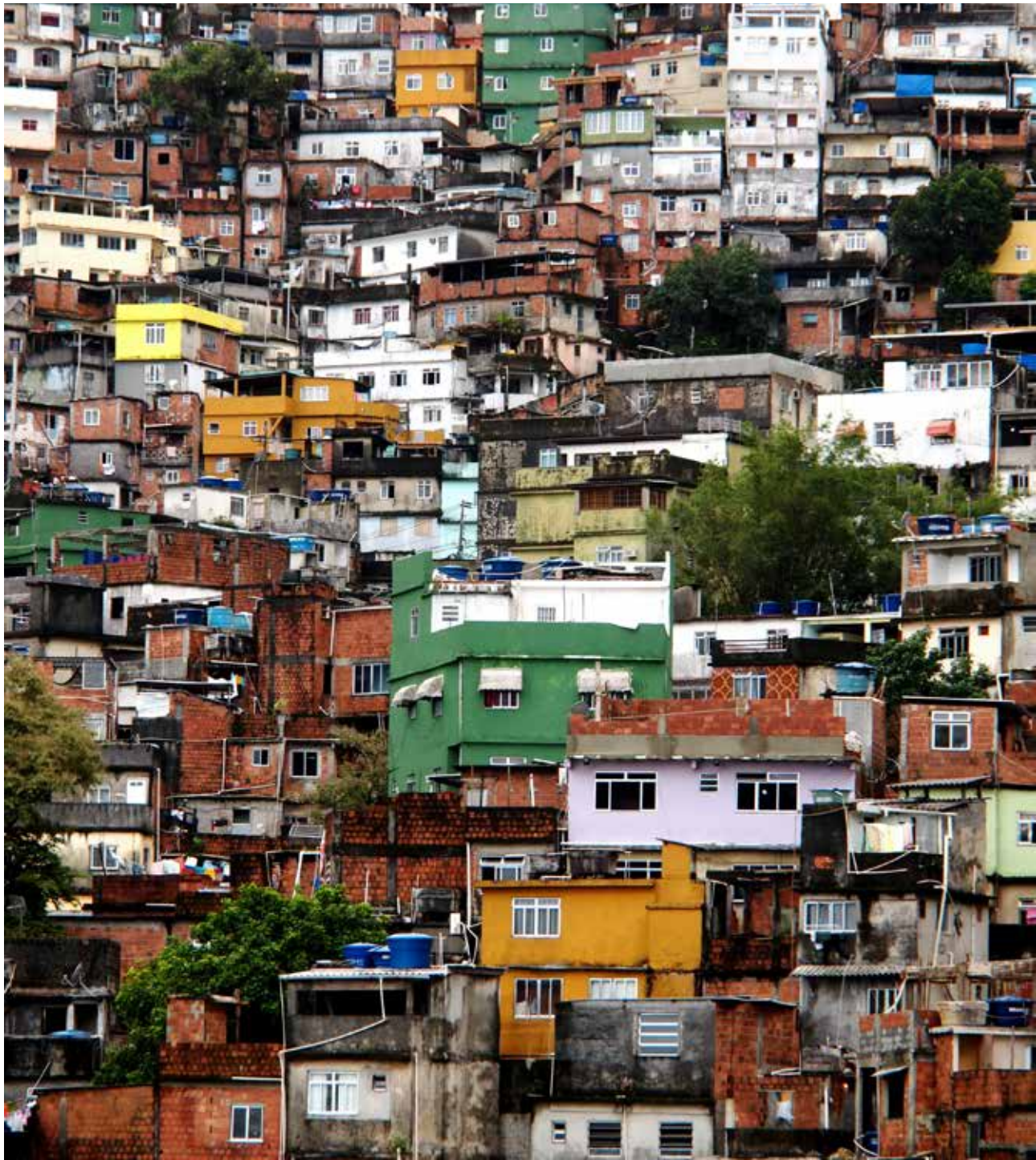


Photo by David Sidhom on Unsplash

hospitals cannot operate, and basic daily activities become dangerous. In a democracy, the police should protect all citizens equally. But in these operations, favela residents, who are mostly black, poor, and socially marginalized, are treated as if their lives matter less. If the same level of violence happened in wealthy neighborhoods, it would be a national scandal. Yet in the favelas, it is presented as “normal.” A justified operation should save lives, not destroy them. It should make people feel safe, not terrified. The fact that civilians fear the police more than criminals shows how deeply unjust these operations are.

A potential argument that the opposition may present today is that the police action was well succeeded and was necessary, because the criminal organization *Comando Vermelho* did more harm than good to society and for that it needed to be stopped at any cost. However, defending that is going against human rights. We know those people weren't saints, we know they committed crimes, but those police forces were no better than them, because killing should never be the solution! Violence always brings about more violence! If we accept this, how will we end up?

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, the police operations at *Complexo do Alemão* and *Complexo da Penha* were not justified. They harmed innocent people, failed to solve the real problems, and intensified the distance between communities and the state. True safety cannot be created through fear. It must be built through opportunity, respect, and equality. If the goal is to create peace, then bullets and helicopters are not the solution, investment, dignity, and justice are.

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# Religious Expression: Identity and restrictions

Photo by Elin Tabitha on Unsplash

## Should the use of the burqa be prohibited in Portugal?

### Proposition

Beatriz Trigo, Mariana Diniz 11.º 3, João Sousa and Vasco Almeida 11.º 1B

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are here today to discuss whether the burqa should be prohibited in Portugal or not.

Firstly, we would like to ask you something: if a person commits a crime in a public space while their entire face is covered, how can the police identify them? Well, the answer is simple: they can't. In moments where security depends on recognition, complete facial concealment makes it harder to identify who should be held accountable. But beyond safety, there is also the principle of equality. In Portugal, the law must apply equally to everyone. We already expect motorcyclists to remove their helmets in banks, and we prohibit face coverings in courts and other spaces. Ensuring that all citizens follow the same rules in public spaces is not about targeting a specific group but about guaranteeing that everyone is treated equally under the same standards of visibility, accountability, and social integration and it's exactly for that reason that this House believes that burqas should be prohibited.

Before we continue, to help you better understand our position, we would like to define one important term clearly. What is a burqa? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), a burqa is "a loose enveloping garment that covers the face and body and is worn in public by certain Muslim women". When we defend that burqas should be prohibited, we mean that their use in public places must be restricted under a universal rule that applies to all types of face-covering garments. This includes masks, balaclavas, covered helmets, and any other item that conceals identity. These definitions are important because we want you to understand that this law does not target a religion. It is meant for everyone, and therefore treats everyone equally.

We believe that everyone agrees that safety is not a privilege but a right. The central role of public law enforcement is the ability to ensure public safety. But when someone hides their entire face, they gain the power to commit acts in complete anonymity. This can enable theft, harassment, vandalism, and other

crimes, with the criminal being unidentifiable. This is not just a hypothetical.

In Portugal, we already have laws that ban face coverings in certain places, like courts, banks, and some public buildings, because the principle of visibility is essential. The proposed national ban simply extends this logic consistently across society. Let us consider a real-world example: France.

In 2010, France banned all full-face coverings in public, to ensure security and social transparency, not to target Muslims. France argued that in any open space, people must be recognizable to each other. After the law was introduced, police and local authorities reported clearer identification, fewer instances of face-covering during suspicious activity, and easier public safety management. Therefore, prohibiting full-face coverings in public is essential to ensure accountability, maintain public safety, and uphold the basic right of every citizen to feel secure.

Beyond the issue of security, we must remember that the use of the burqa is related to a society that undermines women. The burqa is a symbol of women's oppression, since it is used as a tool of control. In Islamic countries, such as Pakistan, Israel, and Iraq, the use of the burqa or niqab (a garment like the burqa, except everything is covered but the eyes) is not a matter of personal choice but a legal, cultural or religious obligation. In these societies, it is considered cheating if a woman looks at another man or if she is looked at by another man who is not part of her household. Such a comparison, between actual cheating and merely being looked at, is the one that is used to attempt to justify the use of the burqa; although it is not fair to put being looked at and having an affair with someone else on the same level. It is neither fair nor logical, and it strips women of basic individual freedom. In places like Afghanistan, restrictions go even further; in this case, women cannot laugh in public, talk, go to school, or walk in the streets freely, among other things. The only figures they are allowed to talk to are their family, leading to situations where the woman must ask her

husband to do or ask something. In severe cases, such as medical emergencies, the woman can, at best, be mildly inconvenienced, at worst, die.

Around the world, burqas and niqabs are often imposed, not chosen. In many families and communities, a woman may "choose" to wear them only because she fears social punishment, family shame, or even violence. We are not claiming that every woman is forced. But many are, and many cannot openly say so. But by having this law, we are giving women who do not want to wear it a legitimate, socially accepted reason to refuse. They can say "I am not allowed to," without putting themselves in danger.

Now, imagine a woman born in Afghanistan, someone who always wanted to express herself but

never had the right. When she moves to Portugal seeking safety and opportunity, and she learns that the burqa is prohibited here, she gains something she never had before: guaranteed freedom. She can finally walk, speak, smile, and live without fear of punishment. You may argue that the ban applies only to public spaces. But in Portugal, freedom of expression is protected everywhere, because Portugal is a secular country with no official religion and where no religious rule can override individual rights. That means people arriving from restrictive cultures finally gain the freedom to choose how they present themselves, instead of being controlled by the expectations of others. Portugal must ensure that women are visible, recognizable, and equally present in society. A full-face covering erases a woman from public life. A ban ensures she cannot be erased.



Photo by Wanman Uthmaniyyah on Unsplash

Finally, the Portuguese Constitution relies on an important principle: all citizens possess equal social dignity and stand equal before the law. Therefore, no one may be privileged or exempted from a duty that applies to all, just as no one may be deprived of a right without the same rule applying universally. This principle leaves no room for doubt: the law must apply equally to everyone. If we were to create a religious exception allowing certain individuals to conceal their faces in public, we would be violating that very foundation. The law cannot proclaim: every person must reveal their face, except for one specific group. That is not equality. That is a privilege. And privilege is unconstitutional. Some may insist that such a ban is “discriminatory,” but that claim collapses under scrutiny. Discrimination occurs when the law treats people differently. A universal rule does the opposite. It treats every citizen the same. If your face is covered in a public space, you must reveal it not because of your religion, not because of your culture, not because of your personal motivations, but because the same rule applies, without exception, to all. That is not discrimination, that is equality, the very equality the Constitution stands for. It safeguards public safety, transparency, and fairness, all without singling anyone out. For these reasons, a universal ban on full-face coverings is not only reasonable; it is the only option that aligns with Portugal’s constitutional order, its democratic principles, and its unwavering commitment to equal treatment under the law.

**“(…) when someone hides their entire face, they gain the power to commit acts in complete anonymity”**

In conclusion, prohibiting the burqa in public spaces is not about restricting religion but about protecting the principles that make our society safe and fair.

Portugal values security, equality, and freedom, which rely on transparency in public areas. When people cannot be identified, no one can be held responsible for their actions, which endangers public safety and undermines the citizens' sense of security. Therefore, banning this piece of Islamic clothing ensures that no group is targeted, promoting equality in treatment.

By removing the pressure to wear burqas and other face-covering clothing, Portugal creates an environment that protects individuals, especially women, who may face cultural or familial restrictions that limit their autonomy. In a country that guarantees freedom of expression, it must ensure this freedom is genuine and accessible to all, unlike in some Islamic countries like Afghanistan.

For these reasons, we believe that Portugal should prohibit burqas in public places: to enhance public safety, to uphold fair treatment, and to foster a society where people, particularly Muslim women, can finally enjoy their freedoms.

## Opposition

Maria Francisca Silva, Vasco Silvestre 11.º 1B, Pedro Rocha 11.º 3, and Rafaela Costa 11.º 4

True democracy is not afraid of difference, true democracy protects it. Banning the burqa does not liberate anyone. It only alienates, discriminates against, and limits individual freedom.

“A burqa is a type of enveloping outer garment worn by some Muslim women which fully covers the body and the face” (Wikipedia Contributors, n.d). But while it is a garment, it is still a symbol. This symbol comes all the way from the Pachtuns tribes who used it to show their status. Then, in the seventh century, the *Qur’an* (2004) shows us verses such as Surah 33:59 and Surah 24:31 that say women should wear cloaks such as the burqa. Thus, we are here to oppose the motion that burqas should be prohibited.

Before explaining why, this house believes that, unlike what the proposition said, the prohibition of burqas was presented with the intention of reducing the number of Muslims and worsening the lives of the Muslims living here. Chega, the party who presented this law, follows a populist, radical right-wing, nationalist, patriotic, conservative ideology. Its assistant directors, Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, was the leader of MDLP, the right-wing movement that bombed and killed people, because they wanted to return to “Estado Novo”, which was a dictatorial regime known for not allowing Islamism. Chega with other groups such as 1143, a neo-Nazi group with Ku Klux Klan members, protested under the slogan: Europe is being Islamized. Isn’t it possible that this law is being presented not because the police cannot see Muslim women’s faces but because Chega is against Islam? Therefore, we do not believe that burqas should be prohibited. Why, you may ask, there are three main reasons why.

Firstly, prohibiting burqas comes with an inevitable risk of social exclusion, since it is forcing a group of people to choose between obeying the law or following their religion, which is not fair, as other religions are practiced freely without any fear of disobeying the law, such as Christianity. This fear or that of getting looked down upon can cause people to hide and avoid public spaces and that is unacceptable, considering

that, as we have already mentioned, according to article 41 of the Portuguese Constitution, Portugal is a secular state and that means there is not an official religion as state and church are separate. By approving the prohibition of burqas, we are creating an enormous contradiction as it is not right to say Portugal is a secular state while there are religions that do not have full freedom of practice. Instead of freeing the women, you are pushing them further away from society.

Secondly, for many of those who follow and have faith in Islam, wearing a burqa is not just a cultural and traditional clothing that has to be worn or a tradition that must be strictly followed and respected, especially by women, as they are the ones who wear it. It is, in fact, a way to protect women from harassment, stares and unwanted attention from men in public spaces. To the ones who do not believe in what we are saying, there are women such as Semaa Abdulwali (2014), who states: “When we meet, I choose what you see. You deal with my mind and personality. I wasn’t forced to wear the niqab, and forcing me to take it off would be oppression.”

In many countries, where the official religion is Islam, women not wearing a burqa in public spaces can be highly criticized and even punished, which in our opinion should not happen, as being forced to wear something is unacceptable, the same way a country prohibiting people from wearing something is also not acceptable, and that means in the Islamic religion, women not wearing a burqa can be seen as something disrespectful and insulting. Also, many women want to wear a burqa and feel like it is important for them to be able to follow their religion properly, unlike some parties, such as Chega who say that women are being forced to wear it. From a young age Muslim women are taught to wear pieces of clothing such as burqas and niqab as a way of protection, they believe that by covering themselves they become recognized as a part of the Muslim culture. Therefore, they will not suffer any form of abuse. Forcing these women not to wear the clothing they want to wear is beyond cruel, as it is depriving them of their safety. Amnesty International



Photo by Eliin Tabitha on Unsplash

Portugal (2025), a global organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, has recently published a new article criticizing this new law. The article implies that the law is discriminatory, it violates the human rights of women who choose to wear these cloaks, and it further impacts their right of privacy.

Lastly, the bar association has a negative opinion on the prohibition of burqas, because it will violate the 26<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> article and of the Portuguese Constitution, that protects freedom of expression and the right to freedom of religion and worship. (Ordem dos Advogados, 2025). The bar association is a public association that represents lawyers, and their main duty is to defend and protect the rights of citizens and their collaboration with justice. Which means it would

not defend something that would take away the their freedom,so,if the burqas were always imposed by men, the bar association would defend their prohibition. How can someone deny and argue with what experts in law think?

Individuals who support the burqa's prohibition will probably argue that it is not right to teach someone that the only way to be protected from assault is by covering their body and face. They may also claim that burqas make women believe that the blame for being assaulted depends on how they dress. And it is precisely for this reason, they argue, that the use of burqas should be banned, so that this belief that women are responsible for their own assault no longer exists.

It is indeed not right for women to be blamed for an act that was not consensual. And yes, it is necessary to teach that the fault does not lie with the woman because of how she dresses, but with the person who commits the act without consent. However, the burqa has a history that goes far beyond this single definition. Burqas were not implemented as a formal religious decision overnight; they emerged from cultural garments that evolved and varied from around 1200 BC to the present day (Wikipedia Contributors, n.d.). Furthermore, it is not correct to generalize that every woman wears the burqa solely for protection from social harassment; many women also wear the burqa to express their faith. The imposition that women must wear the burqa to protect themselves from harassment is wrong, but the use of the burqa is not exclusively tied to that. It is a historical, religious, and cultural garment, and banning its use overnight will not solve the problem of harassment. In fact, it will create many other problems.

### **“We will not solve the problem of discrimination against women by banning a garment that encompasses cultural and religious aspects (...)”**

If we want to deconstruct the idea that it is necessary to wear the burqa to be protected from harassment, we must debunk it by discussing the issue and teaching that women should not feel guilty for being assaulted. We will not solve the problem of discrimination against women by banning a garment that encompasses cultural and religious aspects, while generalizing it and disregarding the fact that many women wear it solely for reasons of faith.

In conclusion, we believe that all women should have the right to wear the burqa, because it is not a religious cloak that all women who follow Islam are forced

to wear, it is a religious cloak that means way more than what is being said by our opposition and political parties such as Chega. The burqa is a way of protection for many women, as it can help them not catch unwanted attention from other men in public spaces, protecting them from harassment. It is also a cloak that many women want to wear as it makes them feel better about how they are following their religion. On top of that, the burqas prohibition will violate articles 26 and 41 of the Portuguese Constitution, by taking away the freedom of expression of many women who just want to follow their religion and culture. Not only that, but it can also exclude and push them away from society. Many women may feel scared to wear burqas, because they need to choose between following their religion or obeying the law.

Prohibiting the burqa does not free women, it only replaces one way of imposition for another. True freedom only exists when each person chooses for themselves.

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