

NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT

State v. Rejai

320 Neb. 599 (2026) · No. S-24-808 · Decided January 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The Nebraska Supreme Court affirmed Armon K. Rejai’s life-to-life sentence following his no-contest plea to second degree murder. The court held that the district court did not abuse its discretion in weighing mitigating factors or considering information in the presentence investigation report. The court also rejected a comparative sentencing analysis and disapproved language from State v. Iromuanya suggesting that such comparisons are required or persuasive.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Nebraska Supreme Court
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cassel, J.; Funke, C.J.; Stacy, J.; Papik, J.; Freudenberg, J.; Bergevin, J.; Martinez, District Judge
JURISDICTION	Nebraska Supreme Court
DECIDED	January 2, 2026
DOCKET	S-24-808
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Direct appeal from a plea-based conviction for second degree murder and the resulting life-to-life sentence. Rejai challenged the sentence as excessive and argued that the court should compare his sentence with sentences imposed in other cases.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A sentence within statutory limits will not be disturbed absent an abuse of discretion. The appellate court reviews whether the sentencing court abused its discretion in considering relevant factors and applicable legal principles; it does not conduct de novo review to determine what sentence it would impose or whether the sentence is proportionate through comparative analysis.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published precedential opinion
PARTIES	Armon K. Rejai v. State of Nebraska

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court abused its discretion by imposing a life-to-life sentence for second degree murder.
2. Whether the district court improperly failed to consider mitigating evidence concerning Rejai's autism spectrum disorder, other diagnoses, personal history, and lack of prior convictions.
3. Whether the district court abused its discretion by considering depositions and an anonymous tip included in the presentence investigation report.
4. Whether the appellate court was required or permitted to conduct a comparative analysis of sentences imposed in other cases.
5. Whether the Nebraska Supreme Court should disapprove the statement in *State v. Iromuanya* suggesting that a particular minimum term could not be imposed on a hardened criminal with a lengthy history of violent felony convictions.

HOLDINGS

1. An appellate court will not disturb a sentence imposed within statutory limits absent an abuse of discretion by the sentencing court.
2. In reviewing an excessive-sentence claim, an appellate court determines whether the sentencing court abused its discretion in considering and applying relevant factors and applicable legal principles; it may not conduct de novo review to determine what sentence it would impose.
3. A sentencing court has broad discretion regarding the source and type of evidence and information it may consider, and may receive evidence concerning any matter it deems relevant to sentencing.
4. Once the statutory sentence is constitutional and the imposed sentence is within statutory limits, appellate review asks whether the sentence was appropriate for the defendant in the subject case, not whether another defendant received a lesser sentence. Appellate courts have no duty to conduct a comparative or de novo proportionality review.
5. The court disapproved the statement in *State v. Iromuanya* that a court could not impose a more severe minimum term for second degree murder on a hardened criminal with a lengthy history of violent felony convictions, to the extent the statement suggests that comparative analysis is required or persuasive in reviewing excessive sentences.
6. The district court did not abuse its discretion by imposing a life-to-life sentence, and the sentence was not excessive.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Once it is determined that the sentence prescribed by statute is constitutional and that the sentence imposed is within statutory limits, the issue in reviewing a sentence is not whether someone else in a different case received a lesser sentence, but whether the defendant in the subject case received an appropriate one.” (608)

“We take this opportunity to dispel the misconceptions that, in reviewing excessive sentence claims, the Iromuanya majority opinion imposes a duty to conduct comparative analyses or that such analyses are persuasive.” (608)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rejai shot and killed his 18-year-old neighbor, Julian Martinez, outside Rejai’s apartment after a dispute involving the neighbors’ dogs and a confrontation at Rejai’s door. Rejai told police that Martinez lunged at him, prompting Rejai to fire one handgun shot into Martinez’s chest. Rejai had no prior convictions, but the presentence investigation report included psychological evaluations, differing risk assessments, depositions from former neighbors, and an anonymous report concerning an alleged threat while Rejai was jailed.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The State initially charged Rejai with first degree murder and use of a firearm to commit a felony, later adding two counts of second degree assault. Under a plea agreement, Rejai pleaded no contest to second degree murder, and the remaining charges were dismissed. The Lancaster County District Court imposed a sentence of not less than nor more than life imprisonment. Rejai timely appealed, and the Nebraska Supreme Court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Iromuanya, 272 Neb. 178, 719 N.W.2d 263 (2006)
- State v. Hagens, ante p. 65, 26 N.W.3d 174 (2025)
- State v. Dawn, ante p. 342, 27 N.W.3d 9 (2025)
- State v. Sutton, 319 Neb. 581, 24 N.W.3d 43 (2025)
- State v. Ezell, 314 Neb. 825, 840, 993 N.W.2d 449, 460-61 (2023)
- State v. Montoya, 305 Neb. 581, 941 N.W.2d 474 (2020)
- State v. Lara, 315 Neb. 856, 2 N.W.3d 1 (2024)
- State v. Galindo, 278 Neb. 599, 665, 774 N.W.2d 190, 242 (2009)
- State v. Morton, 310 Neb. 355, 966 N.W.2d 57 (2021)
- State v. Gray, 307 Neb. 418, 949 N.W.2d 320 (2020)
- State v. Davis, 276 Neb. 755, 757 N.W.2d 367 (2008)
- State v. Reid, 274 Neb. 780, 743 N.W.2d 370 (2008)
- State v. Marrs, 272 Neb. 573, 723 N.W.2d 499 (2006)
- State v. Smith, 240 Neb. 97, 480 N.W.2d 705 (1992)

