



Death Penalty Information Center

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www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/pollresults

Poll Shows Growing Support for Alternatives to the Death Penalty; Capital Punishment Ranked Lowest Among Budget Priorities

Unfairness, high costs, victims' needs, and innocence are important to voters' thinking about the death penalty

(Washington, D.C.) The Death Penalty Information Center today released the results of one of the most comprehensive studies ever conducted of Americans' views on the death penalty. A national poll of 1,500 registered voters conducted by Lake Research Partners shows growing support for alternatives to the death penalty compared with previous polls. A clear majority of voters (61%) would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder, including life with no possibility of parole and with restitution to the victim's family (39%), life with no possibility of parole (13%), or life with the possibility of parole (9%).

In states with the death penalty, a plurality of voters said it would make no difference in their vote if a representative supported repeal of the death penalty; and a majority (62%) said either it would make no difference (38%) or they would be more likely to vote for such a representative (24%).

"For decades, politicians have equated being tough on crime with support for the death penalty, but this research suggests voters want their elected officials to be smart on crime, use tax dollars wisely, and fund the services they care about the most. Capital punishment is not a high priority for voters and is not the 'third rail' of politics," said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of Death Penalty Information Center.

"We see a real openness to considering life with no possibility for parole as a punishment for murder and a real awareness among Americans of the many problems with the death penalty. It is likely we will see Americans moving

away from support for the death penalty as states and local governments grapple with tight budgets and as today's younger voters and Latinos move into the core of the electorate," said pollster Celinda Lake.

Since the start of 2009, many states, such as Maryland, Colorado, Connecticut, Montana, Kansas, and New Mexico considered legislation to repeal the death penalty, and it is expected that trend will continue in 2011.

Additional key findings from the polling research include:

- Costs emerged as an important concern for a strong majority of Americans. Sixty-eight percent said cost was a very or somewhat convincing argument against the death penalty. Voters ranked emergency services, creating jobs, police and crime prevention, schools and libraries, public health care services, and roads and transportation as more important budget priorities than the death penalty.
- A strong majority of respondents (65%) would favor replacing the death penalty with life with no possibility of parole if the money saved were used to fund crime prevention programs.
- Hispanic voters were among those most willing to replace the death penalty with an alternative punishment. They responded most strongly to moral objections to the death penalty rooted in faith, as well as the argument that the death penalty is particularly unfair along racial lines.
- The poll explored the information that the public uses to make up its mind about the death penalty and the problems they see with this punishment.
- Some of the public's top concerns about the death penalty were that it is applied unevenly and unfairly; it subjects victims' families to lengthy trials and years of appeals that interfere with the healing process; and it risks executing the innocent.
- Spending millions of dollars on the death penalty, at a time when states are cutting back on services such as police forces, schools, and public health, and when life in prison would cost less, was also of concern to voters.
- Moral and religious objections to the death penalty were strong among Latino and Catholic voters.

The nationwide poll of 1,500 registered voters was conducted by Lake Research Partners in May, 2010 with a margin of error of +/- 2.5%.

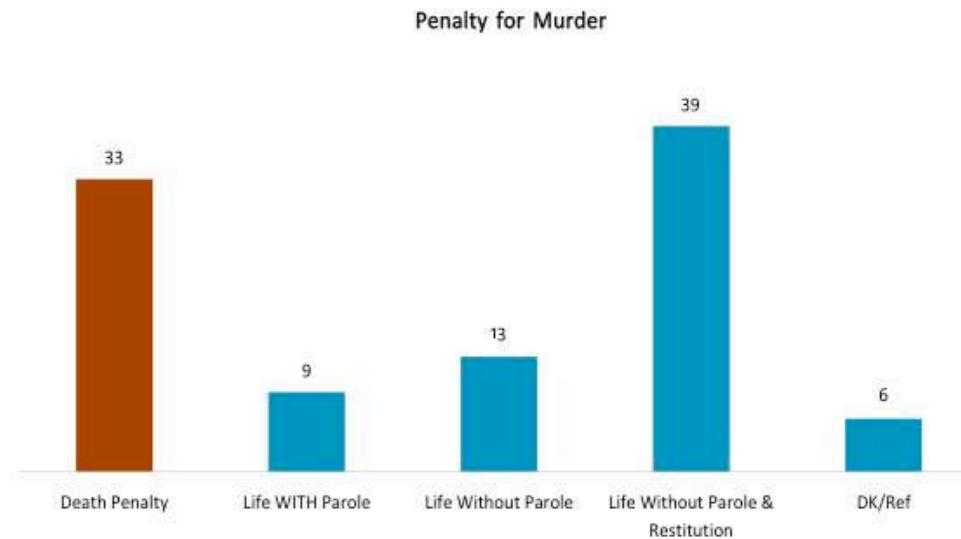
GRAPHS AND CHARTS

A clear majority chooses something other than the death penalty as the punishment for murder. The most popular alternative by far includes restitution.

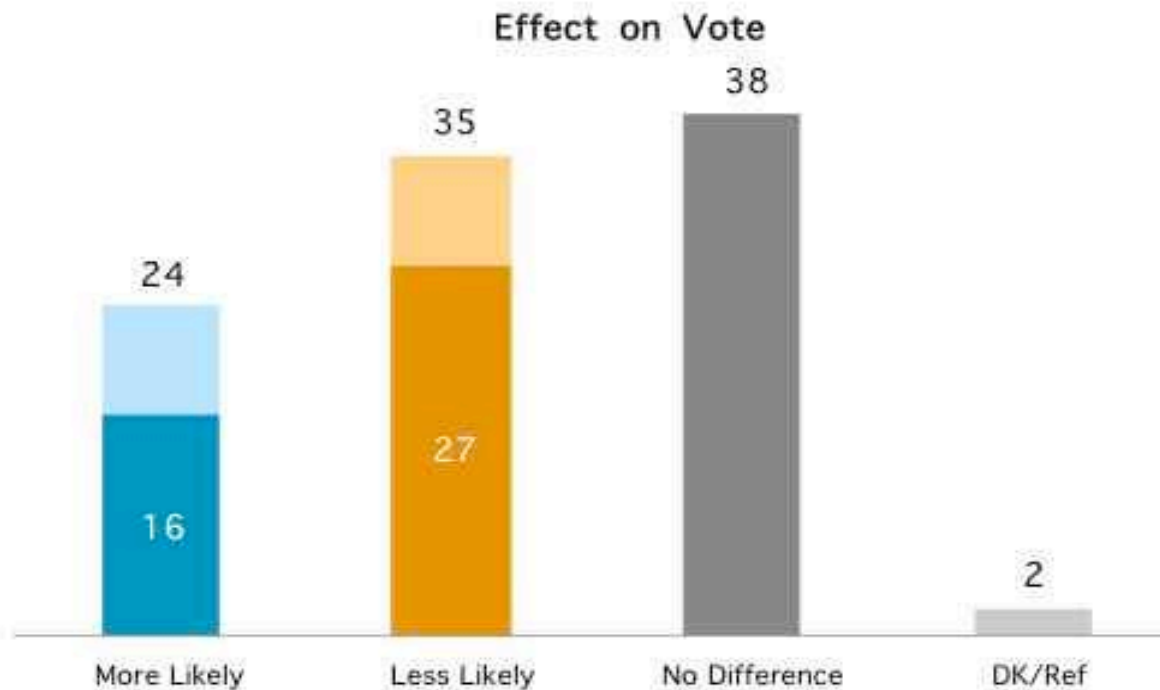
I'm going to read four statements. Listen carefully, then please tell me which of them—number 1, 2, 3, or 4—is closest to your own view:

READ/DO NOT RANDOMIZE:

- 1. The penalty for murder should be the death penalty*
- 2. The penalty for murder should be life in prison with the possibility of parole*
- 3. The penalty for murder should be [life in prison with no possibility of parole]*
- 4. The penalty for murder should be [life in prison with no possibility of parole] and a requirement to work to make restitution for the victim's family*

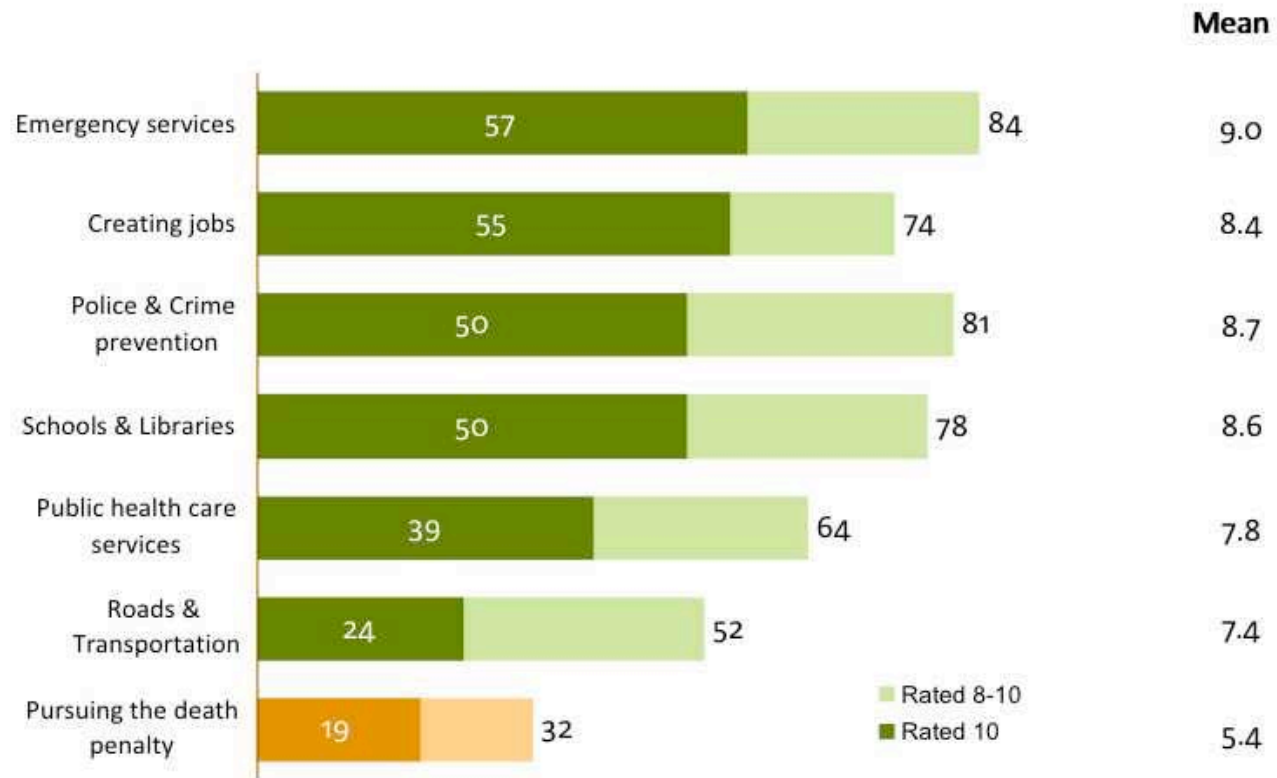


In death penalty states, about one third of voters would be less likely to vote for a representative who voted to repeal the death penalty. However, the vote would make no difference to a plurality.



If your state representative voted to repeal the death penalty in your state, would that make you more or less likely to vote for him or her, or would it not make a difference? [IF MORE/LESS LIKELY ASK:] Is that much more/less likely or somewhat more/less likely?

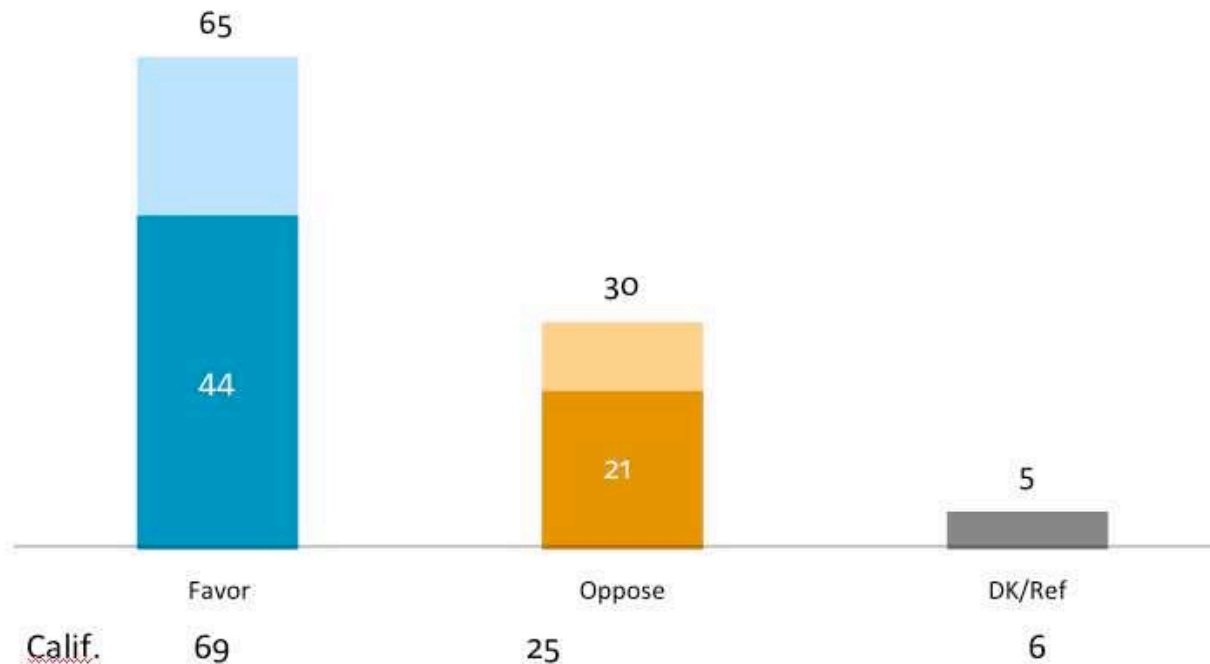
The death penalty was the lowest tested budget priority.



These days, state and local governments often have to make tough budgetary choices. For each one of the following, please rate how high a priority it is for your state or local government on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means it is a very high priority, and 0 means it is not a high priority at all. If you are not sure, please say so.

After the facts battery, when voters have heard about some of the cost and effectiveness issues with the death penalty, they favor replacing it with LWOP and using the money for other things.

Replace the Death Penalty and Use Money for Crime Prevention



Would you favor or oppose replacing the death penalty with a penalty of life in prison with no possibility of parole if the money saved were used to fund crime prevention measures? [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE ASK:] Is that strongly favor/oppose or somewhat favor/oppose?

The top three statements were “Unfairness,” which speaks to disparities in the system; the “Victims’ Families” statement that includes restitution; and “Innocence.”

Statements	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
Unfairness - Our criminal justice system should treat all people equally, regardless of how much money they make, where they live, or the color of their skin. In reality, the death penalty is applied unevenly and unfairly, even for similar crimes. Some people are sentenced to die because they couldn’t afford a better lawyer, or because they live in a county that seeks the death penalty a lot. A system that is so arbitrary should not be allowed to choose who lives and who dies.	37	69
Victims’ Families w/Restitution - Many victims’ family members say every time there is a court hearing, a conviction, or an appeal, the focus is on the defendant, but the family still has to go through their pain again and again. It’s very, very hard for the families. It reopens the wounds each time. When we condemn people to life without parole instead, family members will not be subjected to years of court hearings, and they can turn to the process of healing. If we replaced the death penalty with a sentence of life without parole with labor and restitution, we could use the money to help provide counseling services to victims’ families.	33	69
Innocence - The death penalty risks executing the innocent. Many innocent people have been sent to our nation’s death rows before new evidence freed them and some innocent people may have been executed. It is unacceptable to execute innocent people, and in a system run by human beings that’s inevitable. Executing innocent people is a risk we can completely avoid by using sentences of life with no possibility of parole.	33	71

Now, I’m going to read you some statements people have made in support of replacing the death penalty with a sentence of life in prison with no possibility of parole. Please tell me whether each statement I read is a VERY convincing, SOMEWHAT convincing, NOT TOO convincing, or not AT ALL convincing reason to replace the death penalty with a sentence of life in prison with no possibility of parole. If you are not sure how you feel about a particular item, please say so.