

## **Support for the Death Penalty Remains High**

Recent publicity about potential flaws in the death penalty system has not dampened the public's support of it.

In the latest ABCNews.com poll, just over six in 10 Americans favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder, unchanged from January. Still, support for the death penalty is at its lowest level in twenty years, down from a high of 77 percent in 1996.

	Death Penalty:	
	Favor	Oppose
6/18/00	63%	27
1/16/00	64	27
8/16/98	69	27
8/5/96	77	19

An ABC News poll in January found that support for the death penalty slips further, to just under half of the public, when life in prison without parole is offered as an alternative.

CHANGE? - Recent research that documents flaws in the death penalty system doesn't change the opinions of most Americans. When told about a recent Columbia University study detailing such flaws, 58 percent said it didn't have an impact on their views. Twenty-five percent said it made them more likely to oppose the death penalty, but half of them were opposed to it in the first place. An additional 13 percent said the results made them more likely to support the death penalty, but again, almost all of these people already supported it.

The Columbia University study, released earlier this month, found that over two-thirds of death penalty sentences appealed from 1973 through 1995 were overturned by higher courts because of flaws in the way the cases were investigated or tried.

POLITICS – Despite the large number of executions in Texas while George W. Bush has been governor, a substantial portion of the public is unaware of his handling of the death penalty. While a plurality approves of Bush' handling of the issue, 38-25 percent, almost four in 10 don't feel they know enough to say one way or the other.

Bush's Handling of the Death Penalty:	
Approve	38%
Disapprove	25
No opinion	37

Not surprisingly, the views of those expressing an opinion are closely tied to their overall views of the death penalty. Those who favor the death penalty tend to approve of Bush's handling of it and those who oppose it disapprove.

While Bush has been governor, 134 inmates have been executed, including three last week. Another death row inmate is scheduled to be put to death on Thursday.

Even with all the publicity on capital punishment, it tends to rank low on the public's list of issue priorities. In an April ABC News/Washington Post poll, 37 percent called handling the death penalty "very important" in deciding how to vote for president, ranking it 14<sup>th</sup> out of 15 issues tested.

GROUPS – Support for the death penalty runs highest among Republicans (77 percent in favor), but it's also supported by majorities of independents (62 percent) and Democrats (55 percent) alike.

Men tend to favor the death penalty more than women do; whites are much more apt to favor it than are blacks; and those with higher incomes are more likely to support it than are those who make less.

	Favor the Death Penalty:
Republican	77%
Independent	62
Democrat	55
Men	69
Women	59
Race:	
White	69
Black	37
Income:	
<\$25K	49
\$75K+	72

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone June 14-18, 2000, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by ICR- International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Daniel Merkle.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

58. Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

	Favor	Oppose	Depends	No Opinion/ Don't Know
6/18/00	63	27	NA	10
1/16/00	64	27	NA	9
8/16/98	69	27	NA	4
8/5/96	77	19	NA	4
1/4/95	74	19	5	2
4/26/92*	75	19	5	1
12/18/82	76	19	NA	6
1/30/82	69	19	8	4
5/20/81	73	20	5	3

\* oppose added

59. As you may have heard, a recent study found that over two-thirds of death penalty sentences that are appealed are later overturned by higher courts because of flaws in the way the cases were investigated or tried. Does this finding make you more likely to (support/oppose) the death penalty, more likely to (oppose/support) the death penalty, or doesn't it have much effect on your opinion one way or the other?

	More likely to support	More likely to oppose	No effect	No opinion
6/18/00	13	25	58	4

60. Regardless of whom you support for president, given what you know would you say you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush has handled the death penalty during his time as governor of Texas?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/18/00	38	25	37

\*\*\*END\*\*\*