

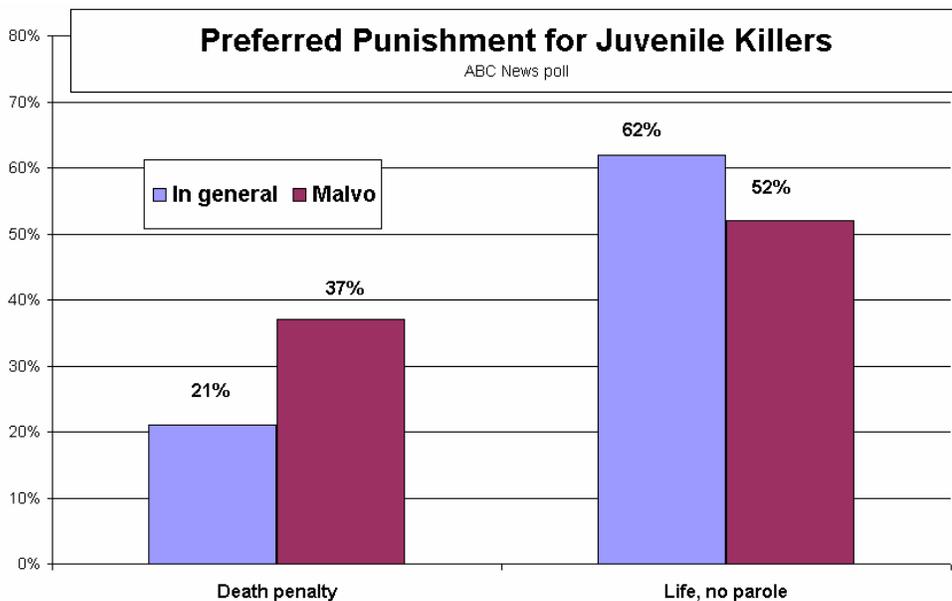
More Back Life Sentence For Convicted Sniper Malvo

Most Americans prefer to spare the life of convicted Washington, D.C. sniper Lee Malvo, a view reflecting the public's broader disinclination to execute juvenile murderers.

Given a choice, 52 percent say they'd prefer a sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole for Malvo, while 37 percent prefer the death penalty. (Support for execution is higher, 56 percent, when no other option is offered).

The results reflect broader concerns about executing juveniles. With no alternative offered, a quarter of Americans support the death penalty for juvenile killers in general, a quarter say it depends on the circumstances and half oppose it. But given an alternative, 62 percent prefer mandatory life; just 21 percent favor capital punishment.

Support for executing rather than imprisoning Malvo – 37 percent, vs. 21 percent support for the general policy – likely reflects the nature and notoriety of his crime.



Malvo was convicted Thursday of killing an FBI analyst in a Virginia parking lot, one of 10 deaths in a shooting spree that terrorized the capital area last fall (this poll was conducted before the verdict.) He was 17 years old at the time of the crime.

Malvo's surrogate father, John Muhammad, was convicted of another of the slayings, and sentenced to death, last month.

	Death penalty for juveniles	Death penalty for Malvo
Support	26%	56%
Oppose	49	30
Depends	23	7
	Preference for juveniles	Preference for Malvo
Death penalty	21%	37%
Mandatory life	62	52

ADULTS – Americans are more likely to back the death penalty for adults convicted of murder, especially when no alternative is mentioned. But they divide when given a choice of punishments. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll early this year, 64 percent favored the death penalty in principle, but when given a choice it was a much narrower split: Forty-nine percent preferred executing murderers, while 45 percent favored life without parole.

With adult killers, too, support for capital punishment can be higher in specific cases. In 2001, 75 percent favored executing Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh.

GROUPS – There’s a gender gap, with women less likely than men to support the death penalty. With no other option offered, 55 percent of women oppose the death penalty in juvenile cases, compared with 42 percent of men. Given an alternative, women are 10 points more likely than men to prefer mandatory life, 67 percent to 57 percent.

Specifically in Malvo’s case, with no alternative, 46 percent of women support the death penalty, compared with 67 percent of men. Given an option, 57 percent of women prefer mandatory life, compared with 47 percent of men.

Political partisanship is also a factor. When the death penalty is mentioned alone, 68 percent of Republicans say they would support it for Malvo, compared with 55 percent of independents and 48 percent of Democrats. When given a choice of sentences, 61 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of independents say they’d prefer mandatory life; just 39 percent of Republicans agree.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 10-14, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,031 adults. Each question was asked of a random half of the total sample. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html

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Results follow:

1. (SPLIT SAMPLE A) Do you support or oppose the death penalty for people who are convicted of murder that they committed when they were juveniles - that is, when they were younger than age 18?

	Support	Oppose	Depends (vol.)	No opin.
12/14/03	26	49	23	3

2. (SPLIT SAMPLE A) Which punishment do you prefer for people who are convicted of murder that they committed when they were juveniles - (the death penalty), or (life in prison with no chance of parole)?

	Death penalty	Life in prison	No opin.
12/14/03	21	62	17

3. (SPLIT SAMPLE B) As you may know, Lee Malvo is on trial in Virginia on a murder charge in one of the random shootings of 13 people in the Washington D.C. area last year. Malvo was a juvenile, 17 years old, at the time of the shootings, but is being tried as an adult. Would you support or oppose the death penalty for Malvo if he is convicted of murder?

	Support	Oppose	Depends (vol.)	No opin.
12/14/03	56	30	7	7

4. (SPLIT SAMPLE B) Which punishment would you prefer for Malvo if he is convicted of murder - (the death penalty), or (life in prison with no chance of parole)?

	Death penalty	Life in prison	No opin.
12/14/03	37	52	11

END