

Rasmussen Reports  
60% Still Favor Death Penalty  
Tuesday, September 27, 2011

The execution of Troy Davis last week for murdering a Georgia policeman prompted controversy here and abroad, but it did little to shift opinions on the death penalty. Still, a sizable majority of Americans worries that people may be executed for crimes they didn't commit.

The latest Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey of American Adults shows that 60% favor the death penalty, while 28% oppose it. Another 12% are undecided. (To see survey question wording, [click here](#).)

This is little changed from surveys dating back to November 2009, with support for capital punishment running from 61% to 63%.

However, nearly three-out-of-four Americans (74%) are at least somewhat concerned that people might be executed for crimes they did not commit, including 40% who are Very Concerned. This finding also is little changed from late 2009.

Twenty-three percent (23%) don't share that concern, but that includes just three percent (3%) who are Not At All Concerned.

Even a majority of those who favor the death penalty (63%) are at least somewhat concerned a person could be wrongfully executed, with 27% who are Very Concerned. Ninety-five percent (95%) who oppose the death penalty share that concern, and that includes 71% who are Very Concerned.

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The survey of 1,000 Adults was conducted on September 23-24, 2011 by Rasmussen Reports. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3 percentage points with a 95% level of confidence. Field work for all Rasmussen Reports surveys is conducted by Pulse Opinion Research, LLC. See methodology.

Americans are evenly divided over whether the death penalty helps deter crime: 43% say it does, but the identical number (43%) say it doesn't. Fourteen percent (14%) aren't sure. The number of adults who believe capital punishment helps reduce crime is down slightly from 47% in November 2009.

Seventy percent (70%) of men favor the death penalty, compared to 52% of women. A plurality (48%) of men believes capital punishment deters crime, but the plurality (46%) of women disagrees. Married Americans and those with children in the home are more supportive of the death penalty than those who are not married and don't have children living with them.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of whites and 59% of those of other races support the death penalty. Most blacks (51%) oppose it. Blacks and those of other races are much more concerned, too, that the wrong person might be executed.

While most Republicans (77%) and adults not affiliated with either party (61%) favor capital punishment, Democrats are almost evenly divided.

But the majority of adults across all demographic categories share the concern that people might be executed for crimes they didn't commit.

Earlier this year, 56% favored the death penalty for Jared Loughner, the Arizona man accused of shooting Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and killing six others.

More than a year after the November 2009 massacre of 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas, 62% of Likely U.S. Voters said Major Nadal Malik Hasan should receive the death penalty if he is found guilty.

In June, more adults than ever reported that crime in their community had increased over the previous year, and most said the continuing bad economy will cause the crime rate to rise even higher.