

Support for the death penalty for convicted murderers at a 20-year low

By Fred Backus, [CBS News](#), September 26, 2011

A majority of Americans continue to support the death penalty for persons of convicted of murder, but that support is at the lowest it has been for the past twenty years, according to the latest CBS News/New York Times Poll.

Currently, 60 percent of Americans favor the death penalty for convicted murderers, while 27 percent are opposed. This percentage is down slightly from when it was last asked in May of last year, and down 18 percentage points from when the question was first asked by CBS in October 1988, at the height of a presidential campaign in which Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis was being buffeted by charges of being soft on crime during his tenure as governor of Massachusetts.

Do You Favor or Oppose the Death Penalty for Persons Convicted of Murderer?					
(CBS News/New York Times Polls)					
	Now	5/2010	9/1995	8/1990	10/1988
Favor	60%	63%	65%	76%	78%
Oppose	27%	26%	21%	15%	14%

This poll was conducted from September 10th through September 15th - a few days before the execution of Troy Davis on September 21st in Georgia for the 1989 murder of police officer Mark MacPhail.

When comparing views on the death penalty between now and approximately twenty years ago, while Republicans continue to show strong support for the death penalty, a marked decline can be seen among both Democrats and independents.

Do You Favor or Oppose the Death Penalty for Persons Convicted of Murderer?						
(CBS News/New York Times Polls)						
	Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	Now	8/1990	Now	8/1990	Now	8/1990
Favor	79%	83%	52%	72%	55%	73%
Oppose	14%	11%	39%	17%	25%	17%

And while conservatives remain strong in their support, a similar decline can be seen among both liberals and moderates.

Do You Favor or Oppose the Death Penalty for Persons Convicted of Murderer?						
(CBS News/New York Times Polls)						
	Liberals		Moderates		Conservatives	
	Now	8/1990	Now	8/1990	Now	8/1990
Favor	50%	74%	56%	75%	77%	81%
Oppose	39%	19%	29%	15%	16%	13%

Gallup polls indicate similar results over the past twenty years, and a fluctuation in approval over the past seven decades. According to Gallup, a slight majority of Americans supported the death penalty in 1936 and up through the 1950s, with public opinion dividing on the issue in the mid 1960s. In 1972 - when the U.S. Supreme Court briefly ended capital punishment in the United States for four years - a majority was once again in favor of the death penalty. By the time capital punishment was resumed in 1976, two-thirds of Americans were in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder, with support reaching its high point in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Are You in Favor of the Death Penalty for a Person Convicted of Murderer?									
(Gallup Polls)									
	10/2010	5/2001	9/1994	9/1988	4/1976	11/1972	1/1965	3/1956	12/1936
Yes	64%	65%	80%	79%	66%	57%	45%	53%	61%
No	29%	27%	16%	16%	26%	32%	43%	34%	39%

The death penalty for those convicted of murder enjoys support from both men and women and Americans of all age groups, and while Americans who make over \$100,000 a year are less likely to support the death penalty than those making less, most still favor it.

In addition, while highly educated Americans with post graduate degrees oppose the death penalty, Americans who are at lower education levels support it.

Do You Favor or Oppose the Death Penalty for Persons Convicted of Murderer?

(CBS News/New York Times Polls)

	Favor	Oppose
TOTAL	60%	27%
Men	62%	26%
Women	59%	28%

AGE:

18-29	58%	29%
30-44	60%	25%
45-64	63%	27%
65+	60%	27%

EDUCATION:

High school or less	61%	26%
Some college	64%	23%
College graduate	64%	24%
Post graduate	43%	49%

INCOME:

Under \$50K	60%	27%
\$50K-\$100K	66%	27%
\$100K+	52%	33%

Republicans	79%	14%
Democrats	52%	39%
Independents	55%	25%

Liberals	50%	39%
Moderates	56%	29%