

Poll Shows Oregonians Still Support Capital Punishment

Kristian Foden-Vencil | Feb. 1, 2012 6 a.m. | Portland, OR

[Oregon Public Broadcasting](#)

Governor John Kitzhaber raised the issue of Oregon's death penalty this winter, when he placed a moratorium on executions for the rest of his tenure.

He urged Oregonians to "find a better solution."

But now, a new poll by OPB and DHM Research shows that most Oregonians favor the death penalty. Kristian Foden-Vencil has more.

Dave Husted a 41-year-old metal fabricator from Myrtle Point. He makes precision metal parts for things like guns.

DEATH PENALTY

Do you **favor** or **oppose** the death penalty?



500 Oregon registered voters polled.

He supports the death penalty for certain crimes.

"If you harm a child and kill that child to, forgive my lack of eloquence here, to get your jollies, I believe you should be executed," Husted says.

Husted's views are similar to those of many Oregonians.

The poll found that 57 percent favor the death penalty for some crimes; 39 percent oppose it. Four percent say the don't know.

Su Midghall, lead pollster for DHM Research, says those numbers haven't moved in a while. "Historically, Oregonians haven't changed a lot in their support for the death penalty. It was high 10 years ago, meaning over a majority then, it's still over a majority today."

The telephone survey polled 500 people throughout Oregon. It was conducted last week, and has a margin of error of plus-or-minus 4.4 percent.

The poll found you could make some predictions about who supports and who opposes executions.

"More men and more Republicans favor the death penalty and they do tend to be outside of the urban core. Let's look at it from the other angle though, the ones who are most opposed. They're college educated female Democrats," according to Midghall.

Those two groups make up the people who say they "strongly" favor or oppose the death penalty. But Midghall says there's an important group of people in the middle.

"We have 60 percent almost of Oregonians who support the death penalty for certain crimes. Half of that, so about 30 percent are soft in their support, meaning with additional information they could be persuaded to look at things differently."

In light of that, I asked metal fabricator Dave Husted whether his support of the death penalty is strong.

"I would be willing to stand and discuss the matter... lacking the screaming and hollering that usually occurs during these discussions," Husted says.

Reactions like that give Ron Steiner of Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, hope.

"When they start asking some questions. People who say they're somewhat in favor, they're fairly weakly held. And when the discussion is held to find out all the things that surround the death penalty, there's quite a bit of movement," Steiner says.

On the other side of the capital punishment spectrum stands Clatsop County DA, Joshua Marquis.

"If you look at the last 20 years in America, approximately two thirds, generally support capital punishment. And this is slightly below that. I don't know if that's because of a genuine change of attitude in Oregon," Marquis says.

A discussion is just what Governor Kitzhaber asked for when he issued a temporary reprieve in November, stopping the execution of murderer, Gary Haugen.

In an interview that will run on OPB's [Think Out Loud](#) Wednesday Kitzhaber reacted to the OPB DHM poll that shows a majority of Oregonians support capital punishment.

The governor explained his actions, "I didn't abolish the death penalty. I didn't commute the sentences of everyone on death row to life in prison, which I could have done. I simply stayed the execution of Mr. Haugen and made it clear that I'm not going to carry out that sentence during my term in office. With the hope of fostering a discussion about the death penalty. A, whether we still want it. And B, if we do want it, whether the way the death penalty is set up in Oregon is really what people thought they were voting for back in 1984."

That's when Oregonians reinstated capital punishment.