

# Most S'poreans support death penalty, but less so for certain cases: Survey

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Most Singaporeans are in favour of the death penalty but with exceptions, according to a new survey.

Also, fewer support the death penalty for drug trafficking and firearms in cases where no one dies or is injured.

There is less support for the mandatory death penalty as well.

These findings, released yesterday, follow a United Nations General Assembly debate in September on the death penalty and Singapore giving its judges the discretion, in specified situations, to lift the death penalty for drug couriers.

There is a growing worldwide trend to abolish the death penalty, noted National University of Singapore (NUS) associate law professor Chan Wing Cheong, one of four researchers who headed the study.

"It is important for Singapore to continue to review the death penalty because it is irreversible," he said.

NUS sociologist Tan Ern Ser, Singapore Management University law don Jack Lee and human rights group Maruah president Braema Mathi also led the study, which polled about 1,500 Singapore citizens aged 18 to 74 between April and May this year.

Singapore's approach to capital punishment was restated when the UN General Assembly debated

the issue this year and urged countries to abolish it.

However, four years ago, Singapore had lifted the mandatory death sentence for drug couriers who play a minor role, such as transporting and delivering, and who help the police nab the ringleaders, for instance.

Those who commit murder but did not intend to kill can also escape the gallows.

But the mandatory punishment remains for intentional murder, drug trafficking and firearms-related offences. In such cases, the courts do not have the discretion to decide on a lighter sentence.

The support for the death penalty is as follows: 92 per cent for intentional murder, 88 per cent for discharging a firearm and 86 per cent for drug trafficking.

But when asked whether these same crimes should carry a mandatory death penalty, 47 per cent said "yes" for intentional murder, 36 per cent for firearms offences and 32 per cent for drug trafficking.

People are also more reluctant for the death penalty to be imposed when they know the details of a crime.

The respondents were given 12 scenarios based on real-life cases that ranged from intentional murder to drug trafficking and firearms offences. Each case had either mitigating factors, such as the offender

## Support for the death penalty falls when it is a mandatory punishment

Crime	In favour of death penalty (%)	In favour of mandatory death penalty (%)
Murder	92	47
Firearms-related offences	88	36
Drug trafficking	86	32

Source: National University of Singapore Survey on Public Opinion on the Death Penalty  
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having no prior record, or aggravating factors, like the victim dying.

The respondents chose the death penalty in only one-third of the cases, although all 12 got the mandatory death penalty under the law.

Supporters said they believe it deters would-be offenders from committing serious crimes.

Most who backed the discretionary death penalty gave the reason that circumstances differ, and not every offender deserves to die.

Older Singaporeans and those who are more highly educated are also more likely to support the death penalty in general.

Prof Tan said this may be because the middle-class in Singapore values security highly and believes strongly in meritocracy – that people should be rewarded for hard work, but also punished for wrongdoings.

The support also varies across reli-

gions, with Taoists and Buddhists twice as likely to support the death penalty as Protestant Christians. Protestant Christians themselves are twice as likely as Catholics to support the death penalty.

But Prof Chan said people are unlikely to strongly oppose any gradual move towards judges getting more discretion on when to impose the death penalty.

He pointed out that the study shows most people not having strong views for or against the death penalty.

"A very small percentage insists on the present scheme," he said.

Prof Lee added: "Whether or not we move towards abolishing the death penalty, perhaps we should consider whether judges should be given more discretion."

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