

Kansans Choose Life over Death

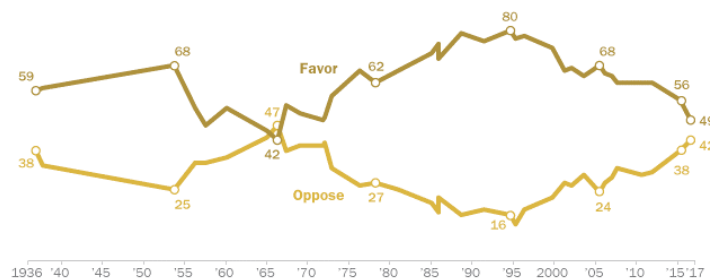
In a 2016 Fort Hays State University poll on criminal justice issues, Kansans supported life without parole over the death penalty by a ten-point margin with 49% of Kansans choosing life without parole as the maximum sentence to murder, and just 39% choosing the death penalty.¹

If you could choose between the following two approaches, which do you think is the better maximum penalty for murder – the death penalty or life imprisonment, with absolutely no possibility of parole?



Support for death penalty continues to fall

% who ___ the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



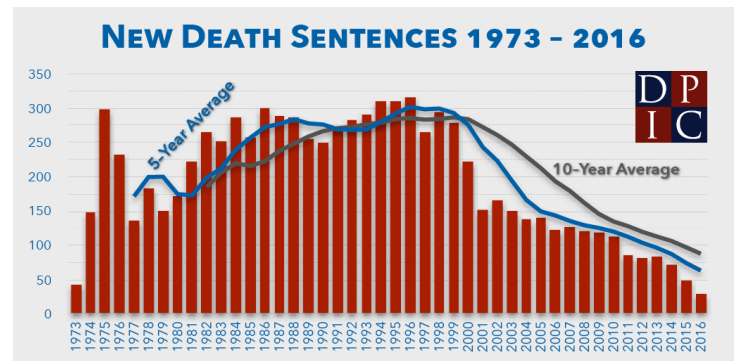
Notes: Don't know responses not shown. 1935-1995 data from Gallup.
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2, 2016.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Death Penalty Support at Record Lows

Kansans' low support for the death penalty aligns with national trends. Pew and Gallup² find around a 20-percentage point drop in death penalty support nationally in the past two decades. The 2016 Pew poll (see graph) recorded the lowest public support for the death penalty in over 40 years.³ When Americans are informed of alternative sentences like life without parole, death penalty support drops further. A national ABC News/Washington Post poll in 2014 found that respondents chose life without parole over the death penalty (52-42%) for those convicted of murder.⁴

Death Sentences Reflect Declining Support for the Practice

The death penalty is also falling out of favor with juries, as there has been a sharp decline in the number of death sentences handed down. Death sentences nationally have dropped from 315 in 1996 to only 30 in 2016.⁵ Out of over 3,000 counties nationally, in only 16 were there five or more death sentences between 2010 and 2015.⁶



Kansans are Ready for Change

The 2016 Fort Hays State University poll finds strong public support for criminal justice reform, across all demographic and political groups. A full 93% of Kansans say it is somewhat or very important to make changes to the criminal justice system in Kansas.⁷ Ending the death penalty is part of this desire for reform.

¹ FHSU Docking Institute of Public Affairs poll in August 2016 with 415 Kansans and a margin of error of +/- 4.8%.

² Gallup, "Death Penalty."

³ Pew Research Center poll conducted Aug. 23-Sept. 2 of 1,201 adults nationally with a margin of error of +/- 3.2%.

⁴ ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted May 29-June 1, 2014, of 1,002 adults nationally with a margin of error of +/- 3.5%.

⁵ Death Penalty Information Center, "Death Penalty in 2016: Year End Report."

⁶ Fair Punishment Project, "Too Broken to Fix: An In-depth Look at America's Outlier Death Penalty Counties."

⁷ FHSU Docking Institute of Public Affairs poll.