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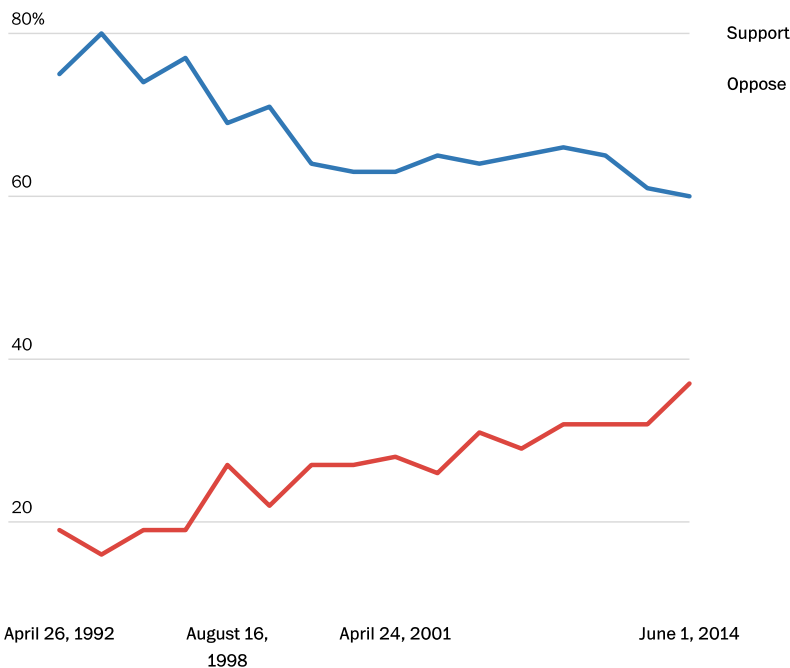
Support for death penalty still high, but down

By Reid Wilson June 5, 2014

A clear majority of Americans still support the death penalty for convicted murderers in the wake of Oklahoma's botched execution attempt in April, but the percentage who say they back capital punishment has fallen in recent years.

Sixty percent of Americans say they favor the death penalty, [a new Washington Post-ABC News poll shows](#), while 37 percent are opposed. That number is down from roughly two-thirds who supported it in polls from 2002-2006, and well below the 80 percent high-water mark for capital punishment in a 1994 survey.

Favor or Oppose death penalty?



Source: [The Washington Post](#), [Get the data](#)

But for the first time in Post-ABC polling, more than half of Americans say they prefer life sentences for convicted murderers, rather than the death penalty. Fifty-two percent of those polled said they would choose life in prison, while 42 percent said they favored execution.

Those attitudes have changed thanks to shifting opinions among non-whites, who favor life sentences over the death penalty by more than a 2-to-1 margin, 65 percent to 28 percent. Eight years ago, non-whites favored life terms by 55 percent to 41 percent. White voters split 50 percent to 45 percent toward preferring the death penalty, though the margin is not statistically significant.

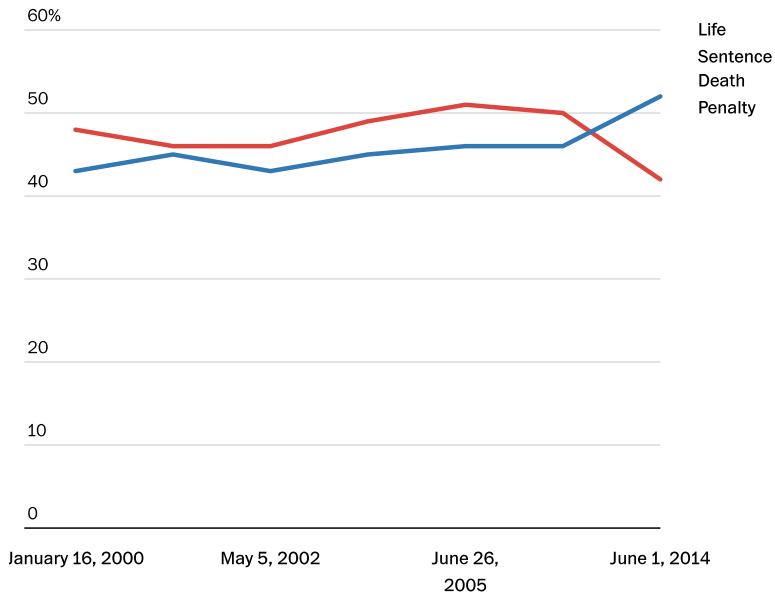
Democrats and independents have shifted toward life sentences in significant numbers since the 2006 survey, by nine

percentage points and eight percentage points respectively. Just 36 percent of Republicans prefer life sentences, little changed from the last survey.

Nearly half of Americans living in the 32 states that allow the death penalty, or 49 percent, say they would prefer life imprisonment for convicted murderers. Support for life in prison rises to 58 percent respondents in states that have abolished the death penalty.

Punishment preferred for convicted murderers

"Which punishment do you prefer for people convicted of murder: the death penalty or life in prison with no chance of parole?"



Source: [The Washington Post](#), [Get the data](#)

Despite the gruesome story out of Oklahoma, where a convicted murderer had a heart attack 45 minutes after executioners incorrectly inserted the needle that was to deliver the fatal drugs, there is little evidence that support for the death penalty is collapsing.

Americans still favor lethal injection over other methods of execution, according to a [Gallup poll](#) last month; states began using lethal injection in the early 1980s to put a more humane face on capital punishment. If lethal injection were not available, only 48 percent of Americans say they would still support the death penalty, compared with 45 percent who would support ending capital punishment if lethal injection weren't available.

The Post-ABC poll surveyed 1,002 adults between May 29 and June 1, both over landlines and on cellular phones. The overall survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Reid Wilson covers state politics and policy for the Washington Post's GovBeat blog. He's a former editor in chief of The Hotline, the premier tip sheet on campaigns and elections, and he's a complete political junkie.

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