

Can public opinion on death penalty be changed?

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Abstract

Is Taiwan a punitive society? Or Taiwan has become more and more towards punitive? A survey conducted by Academia Sinica and the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty in 2014 showed that 82% of the public supported the death penalty in Taiwan. It seems to support that Taiwan is indeed a punitive society. However, the research question raised by this study is whether or not the strong public support on death penalty can be changed. This present study analyzed the same 2014 survey data and found that it is possible to change the public opinion on death penalty. There are at least three methods to do so. First, 5% of the public would change their attitudes to support abolishment if more information/knowledge is provided. Second, 47% of the public would change their attitudes to support abolishment if alternative punishments are offered. The most effective alternative punishment preferred is the life sentence without parole plus prison work to compensate the victims (63%). Last, most of the public have an ambiguous attitude to death penalty, for example, they support both individualism and collectivism, concern with both innocent cases and criminals found not-guilty in courts, have higher fear of crime but feel safe in the community, and perceived both rehabilitation and deterrence/retribution as the purposes of punishment. Nevertheless, these people who face the most value conflicts are most likely to change their originally positive attitudes of death penalty to abolishment. This study has demonstrated that the public opinion on death penalty are not as firm or unchangeable as the government or society claims.

Keywords: Death Penalty, public opinion, alternative to death penalty, value conflict