



# Investigating Attitudes To The Death Penalty In Indonesia

In 2019-20, The Death Penalty Project, in partnership with LBH Masyarakat and the University of Indonesia, commissioned Prof. Carolyn Hoyle of the Death Penalty Research Unit at the University of Oxford to conduct a thorough survey of attitudes towards the death penalty in Indonesia.

## Why was the research commissioned?

Like many of its South East Asian neighbours, Indonesia retains the death penalty with the assumption that it serves as an effective deterrent against crime, particularly drug trafficking, and that it is supported by the majority of the public.

Belief in the 'deterrent effect' for drug offences has not been substantiated with rigorous research and has focused solely on murder. Research on attitudes to the death penalty has been superficial and unhelpful in building understanding. The research aimed to better understand attitudes and facilitate a nuanced discourse.

## How was the research carried out?

An Appetite for Change: interviews were conducted with 40 opinion leaders; considered influential in shaping, or in responding to, public opinion from across Indonesia.

No Barrier to Abolition: public opinion research was undertaken by surveying a representative sample of 1,515 respondents, allowing us to understand the views of the overall population.

## The death penalty in Indonesia

Indonesia has some of the strictest drug laws in the world. Firing squad is the default method of execution.

60%



of those on death row were sentenced for drug offences

22 44

half of all executions over the past 20 years have been for drug trafficking

Number of people currently on death row

355



the last known executions were in 2016. Four men, including three foreign nationals, were killed by firing squad

## Attitudes to capital punishment

The initial question to those surveyed asked whether the death penalty in Indonesia should be abolished or retained. The results showed a considerable difference between the attitudes of the public and opinion formers.

67%

of opinion formers favour abolition of the death penalty

69%

of the public favour retention of the death penalty

With further questioning, the majority of opinion formers 'strongly' favoured abolition, whereas only 35% of the general public 'strongly' favoured retaining the punishment.

While 33% of opinion leaders were in favour of retention, only half 'strongly' favoured it.



## Scrutinising opinions

With previous research suggesting majority support for retention, this study introduced more detailed questioning to examine the strength of opinion. It looked at how entrenched the public's views were, as well as people's knowledge of the death penalty and the Indonesian criminal justice system, to contextualise responses.

## Reasons for opinions

Across both sets of respondents, the rationale for supporting abolition was the same:

the abuse of  
human  
rights

possibility of  
wrongful  
conviction

no faith in  
deterrent  
effect

For those in support of the death penalty, the main rationale was the belief in its deterrent effect against serious crime.

## Knowledge of the death penalty

The findings of both studies showed a clear inverse relationship between respondent's knowledge of the death penalty and their support for the punishment.



The public understanding of the death penalty was found to be limited: only 2% of public respondents considered themselves 'very well' informed, and only 4% said that they were 'very concerned' by the issue.

2%

of the public considered themselves 'very well' informed about the death penalty

Opinion formers were reasonably well informed regarding the death penalty, but they perceived that decision makers were not.

## Trust in the criminal justice system

There was evidence of mistrust in the criminal justice system. 44% of the public felt the judiciary was only 'sometimes' completely fair and 33% felt it was 'not often' completely fair.

Of opinion formers, 63% stated that the criminal justice system 'never', 'rarely' or only 'sometimes' provides adequate safeguards to prevent miscarriages of justice.

63%

of opinion formers felt there was a risk of miscarriages of justice

## Salience

When the public was given the choice of an alternative punishment, such as life without parole, the number of people strongly in favour of the death penalty dropped from 35% to 25%.

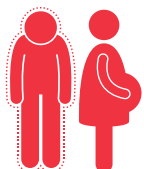


Support for the death penalty diminished when mitigating circumstances were considered

Support for the death penalty in realistic scenarios was lower than in the abstract and diminished when mitigating circumstances were considered.

Providing the public with in-depth information regarding the administration of the death penalty proved highly persuasive in reducing the initial support indicated for retention.





Vulnerable people must be protected

All respondents agreed that 'vulnerable' people: juveniles, pregnant women, the elderly, those with physical and/or mental disabilities, must be excluded from capital punishment.



When shown the possibility that **innocent people could be executed**, public support for abolition rose

When asked their position if the criminal justice system was proven to be unfair, the figure in support of abolition rose to 50%.

### Deterrence: A misguided policy

Though deterrence of serious crime was the predominant rationale for members of the public in support of the death penalty, when asked about measures to reduce crime, most did not choose the death penalty.

54% said more effective policing

48% said better moral education

41% said reduce poverty and improve housing

Only 6% suggested increasing death sentences

Opinion formers similarly preferred the choice of social or therapeutic policies and poverty reduction.

### Findings Reveal: No Barrier to Abolition and An Appetite for Change

The research has shown that the public in Indonesia are not against change and that opinion formers would welcome reform, and felt the best way to achieve it would be through an amendment to the country's criminal code.

Alternative sentences were preferred, as were alternative measures to reduce crime.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the people of Indonesia would accept a government policy that ended the use of capital punishment.

### Download the reports

Both reports are available to read in full on our website.

#### Investigating Attitudes to the Death Penalty in Indonesia

Part I  
Opinion Formers: An Appetite for Change

Carolyn Hoyle



#### Investigating Attitudes to the Death Penalty in Indonesia

Part II  
Public Opinion: No Barrier to Abolition

Carolyn Hoyle  
with the assistance of Diana Batchelor

