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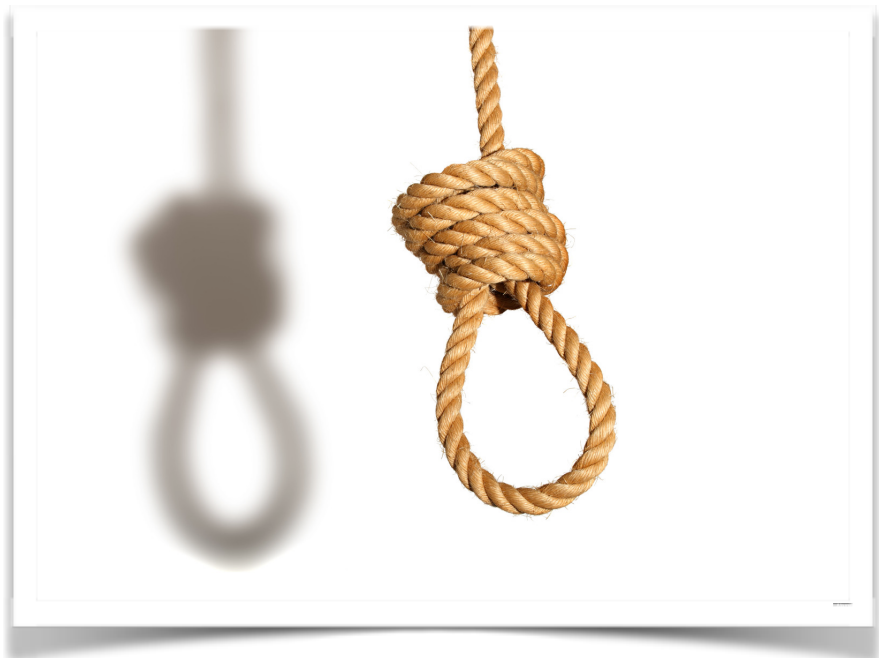


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“Support for the death penalty not deeply entrenched”

VOCABULARY

Entrenched =

Firmly established and
unlikely to change

Adhere =

To believe in , or follow
something

Abolish =

To formally put an end
to a system or practice
(noun form - abolition)

Abolitionist =

Person who wants to
abolish something

Discussion questions

1. Do you think Japan should abolish the death penalty? Why? Why not?
2. Which of the 5 categories (“should definitely be kept, should probably be kept, can’t say, should probably be abolished, should definitely be abolished”) do you fall into? Why?
3. Do you agree that there would be a “smooth road to abolition” if the government moved towards abolishment?
4. The overall premise of the article is that general support for the death penalty is high in Japan, but that staunch support is quite low. Does this match your impression of Japanese feeling on this topic?
5. Why do you think the overall global trend is away from capital punishment?

VOCABULARY

Heinous =

Particularly terrible or
wicked

Retentionist =

Person who wants to
keep a particular system
or practice

Staunch =

Very loyal or committed
in attitude

Clamour =

To shout loudly and
insistently (by a group)

Japanese people may not be as enthusiastic the death penalty as we thought. A recent study shows public support for the death penalty is not deeply **entrenched** despite a government survey indicating more than 80% **adhere** to it. While Japan has cited the outcome of the survey to support its maintenance of capital punishment despite a global trend to **abolish** it, lecturer Mai Sato said, “The majority of the public is in favor of the death penalty if asked in general, but how strongly or how unconditionally they want to retain it is a different matter. Our research indicates that only a minority of respondents are really committed to keeping the death penalty,” she said. Sato, together with Paul Bacon of Waseda University, conducted an opinion survey on the death penalty in March, shortly after the Cabinet Office had carried out its own poll about the issue last November. Between the two surveys, no inmates were hanged while no **heinous** crimes were reported, which means there were no significant factors to influence the public view of capital punishment during the three-month period, making it possible to meaningfully compare their results.

The two surveys asked respondents if they think the death penalty is unavoidable or if it should be **abolished**. Both found around 80% in favour of capital punishment.

The researchers also gave the respondents options to examine the levels of commitment to retention—whether capital punishment should definitely be kept, should probably be kept, cannot say, should probably be **abolished**, or should definitely be **abolished**. Only 27% chose the first option. The 2014 Cabinet Office survey found that only 34% are **staunch retentionists**, who even in the future would never approve **abolition** of the death penalty. “Headlines of the government survey’s reports say ‘80% support death penalty,’ but our study shows **staunch**

supporters are the minority, at around 30%,” It is therefore doubtful that the government has a sufficient rationale for executions.”

The researchers’ survey also shows 71% of **retentionists** said they would accept the **abolition** of capital punishment, if the government took initiatives to do so. “The outcome suggests a rather smooth road to **abolition** if the government exercises policy initiatives. We could say Japanese people possess the capacity and flexibility to embrace **abolition**”, said Sato.

The researchers also asked several questions to test the respondents’ level of knowledge concerning the death penalty, at a time when the government discloses little information about executions. One of the questions was the method of execution used, with the respondents given some options. Only 51% of them selected the correct answer—hanging. “The fact that only half of the respondents knew about the execution method in Japan highlights the secrecy surrounding the death penalty. Japan has the death penalty not because the general public is **clamoring** for its retention, but rather because the government has not taken steps to understand public opinion on the subject. If the government changed its stance on the death penalty, there is evidence that its citizens would follow” she added.

Last year, the U.N. Human Rights Committee urged Japan to consider abolishing the death penalty. However, Tokyo hanged a death-row inmate in June, bringing the total number of executions since December 2012 to 12.

According to human rights group Amnesty International, 140 countries, or about 70% of all nations in the world, have abolished capital punishment. In 2014, only 22 countries executed inmates.