



FOR RELEASE August 6, 2026

Most Americans Favor the Death Penalty for Those Convicted of Murder

Wide partisan gaps over whether capital punishment is morally justified, deters people from committing serious crimes

BY *Baxter Oliphant and Andy Cerda*

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, August 2026, "Most Americans Favor the Death Penalty for Those Convicted of Murder"

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About this research

This Pew Research Center analysis examines views of the death penalty.

Why did we do this?

Pew Research Center conducts research to help the public, media and decision-makers understand important topics. We have studied Americans' views of politics and major policy issues for decades.

[Learn more about Pew Research Center.](#)

How did we do this?

We surveyed 3,554 U.S. adults from July 6 to 12, 2026. Everyone who took part in this survey is a member of the Center's American Trends Panel. The survey represents the views of the full U.S. adult population.

Here are the [survey questions used for this analysis](#), the [detailed responses](#) and the [survey methodology](#).

Most Americans Favor the Death Penalty for Those Convicted of Murder

Wide partisan gaps over whether capital punishment is morally justified, deters people from committing serious crimes

By Baxter Oliphant and Andy Cerda

As the [Trump administration](#) and [some states](#) seek to expand the application of the death penalty, about two-thirds of Americans (66%) now favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder, while nearly a third (32%) oppose it.

- 68% also see the death penalty as morally justified for those committing murder, while just 28% see it as morally wrong.
- But a 59% majority say the death penalty is not a crime deterrent; far fewer (39%) say that it is.

Majorities favor the death penalty and say it is morally justified, yet many do not think it deters serious crimes

% who ___ the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



% who say ...



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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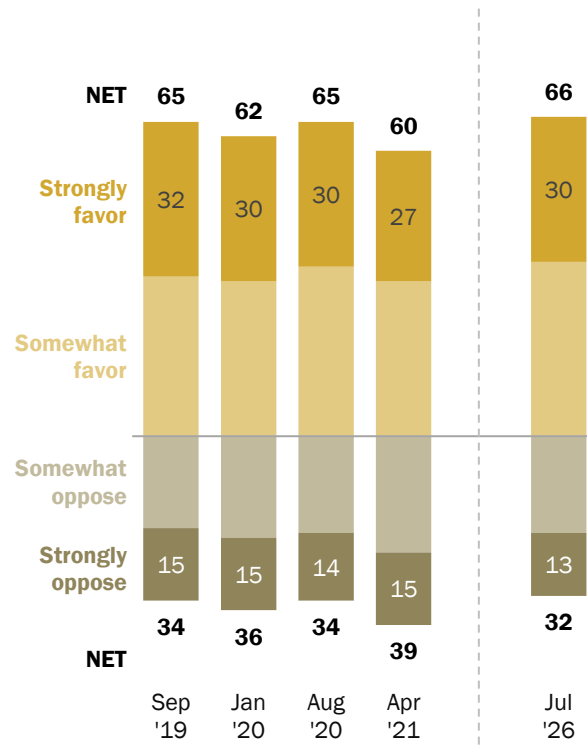
Overall, support for the death penalty is 6 percentage points higher than it was five years ago, in April 2021 – though it is roughly equal to where it was in August of 2020 (65%).

A new Pew Research Center survey of 3,554 U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026, also finds:

- A majority of Americans (73%) say there is some risk an innocent person would be put to death, though a quarter say that there are adequate safeguards in place to prevent this.
- About half of Americans (49%) say Black people are more likely than White people to be sentenced to the death penalty for committing similar crimes – and roughly the same share (48%) say this is not the case.

Support for the death penalty is up from 2021, though similar to 2019 and 2020

% who ___ the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



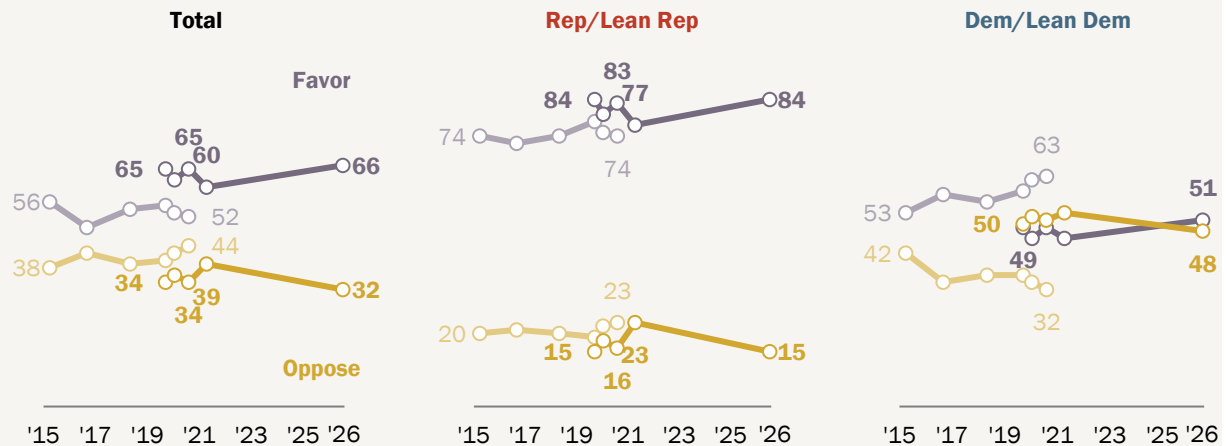
Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Greater support for death penalty in online panel surveys than telephone surveys

% who ___ the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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The data in the most recent survey, collected from Pew Research Center’s predominantly online [American Trends Panel \(ATP\)](#), finds that 66% of Americans favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Over five ATP surveys conducted since September 2019, there have been relatively modest shifts in these views – from a low of 60% seen in April 2021 to a high of about two-thirds in September 2019, August 2020 and now.

Before Pew Research Center shifted most of our domestic surveys to the ATP, we conducted most of our polling by phone, and we had long tracked public views on this issue. During the transition from telephone surveys to the ATP, Pew Research Center conducted phone surveys between September 2019 and August 2020 with field periods nearly identical to ATP surveys. The phone surveys found support for the death penalty that was significantly lower than in the online surveys: 55% favored the death penalty in September 2019, 53% in January 2020 and 52% in August 2020 – 9 to 13 percentage points lower than the ATP surveys conducted around the same time. The consistency of this difference points to substantial [mode effects](#) on this question.

As a result, survey results from online surveys *are not* directly comparable with the Center’s past telephone survey trends or with [other organizations’ trends](#) that are collected by telephone. An [analysis from 2021](#) provides further details on the mode differences seen on this question. And for more on mode effects and the transition from telephone surveys to online panel surveys, read [“What our transition to online polling means for decades of phone survey trends”](#) and [“Trends are a cornerstone of public opinion research. How do we continue to track changes in public opinion when there’s a shift in survey mode?”](#)

As in the past, there are wide partisan gaps in views of the death penalty

Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party overwhelmingly support the death penalty (84% say they're in favor), including about half (47%) who *strongly* favor it. Democrats and Democratic leaners are about equally split between support (51%) and opposition (48%).

Partisan differences extend to views of the death penalty's fairness, moral justification and effectiveness as a crime deterrent.

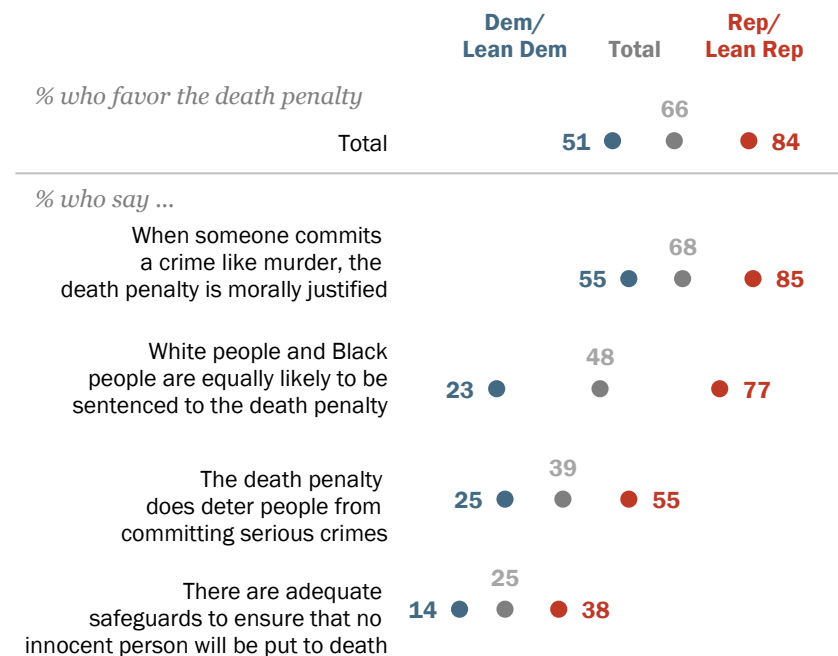
Republicans and Democrats are most divided over whether the death penalty is fairly applied across racial lines: 77% of Republicans say White and Black people are equally likely to be sentenced to the death penalty for similar crimes, but just 23% of Democrats say the same.

Most Republicans (85%) also say the death penalty is morally justified for a crime like murder. Democrats are more closely split on this question – 55% say it's morally justified, and 42%

say it's not. (Democrats who support the death penalty overwhelmingly say it is morally justified, while those who oppose it say it is not. Visit [the appendix](#) for more details on how supporters and opponents of the death penalty view its administration.)

In contrast, Republicans are somewhat split over the death penalty's role as a deterrent for serious crime (55% say it deters crime, 43% say it does not). Democrats overwhelmingly reject the death penalty as an effective crime deterrent (25% say it deters crime, 73% say it doesn't).

Wide gaps between Republicans and Democrats on racial disparities, morality of death penalty



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Majorities of both Republicans (60%) and Democrats (84%) say there is some risk that an innocent person will be put to death. But Republicans (38%) are more likely than Democrats (14%) to say there are adequate safeguards in place to prevent that.

Views of the death penalty by ideology, race and ethnicity, education, and age

Ideology

Ideological divisions over the death penalty are wider within the Democratic Party than the Republican Party.

Most liberal Democrats (62%) oppose the death penalty for people convicted of murder. A majority of conservative and moderate Democrats take the *opposite* position (62% favor the death penalty).

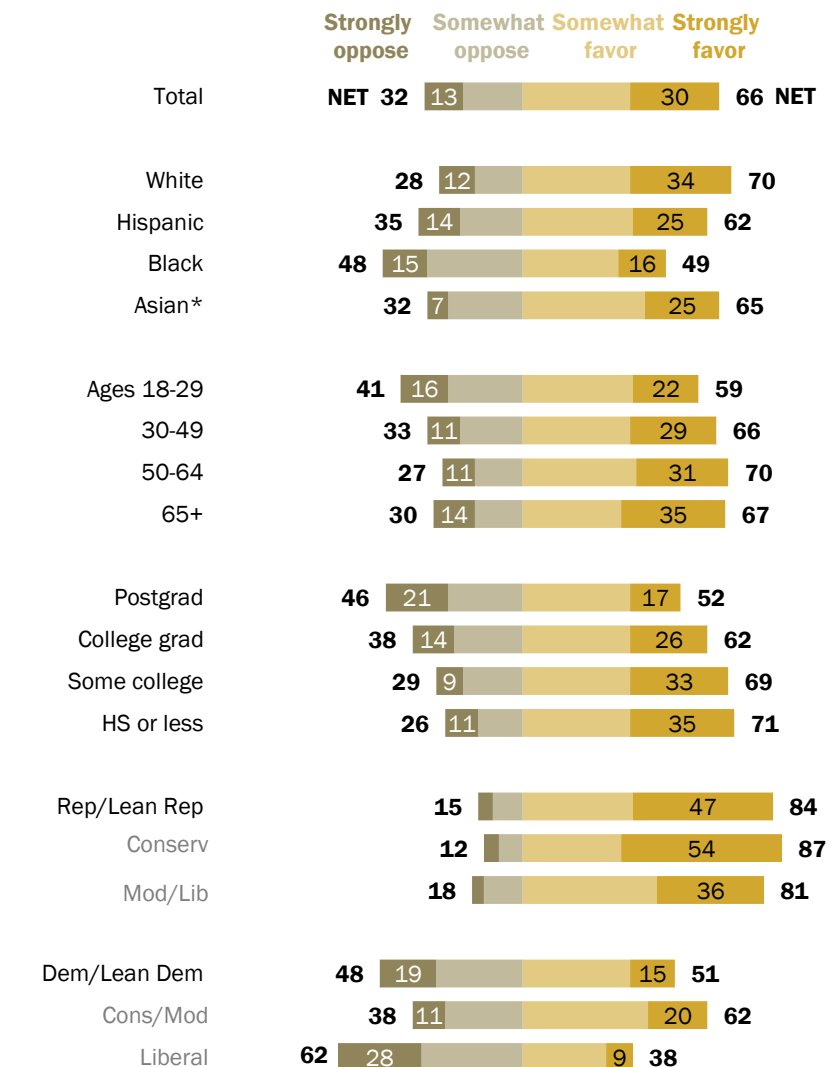
Conservative Republicans are modestly more supportive of the death penalty (87%) than moderate and liberal Republicans (81%), but both groups support it by wide margins.

Race and ethnicity

Support for the death penalty also varies across racial and ethnic groups, with majorities of White, Hispanic and Asian adults favoring it. Black adults are split (49% favor, 48% oppose).

Black Americans, those with graduate degrees and liberal Democrats are more likely than others to oppose the death penalty

% who ___ the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



* Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Education

Adults with a college degree, especially those with a postgraduate degree, are less likely than others to favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder.

Age

Younger adults are modestly less supportive of the death penalty than older adults. About six-in-ten adults ages 18 to 29 favor the death penalty, compared with roughly seven-in-ten who favor it among older groups.

Demographic differences in support for the death penalty within the parties

Among those who associate with the Democratic Party, support for the death penalty varies by education and by race and ethnicity. Republicans' views do not vary much across these lines.

There are wide education gaps among Democrats, but not Republicans.

Six-in-ten Democrats with a high school education or less favor the death penalty, as do 56% of those with some college experience but without a bachelor's degree. By comparison, 40% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher say this, including just 36% of Democrats with a postgraduate degree.

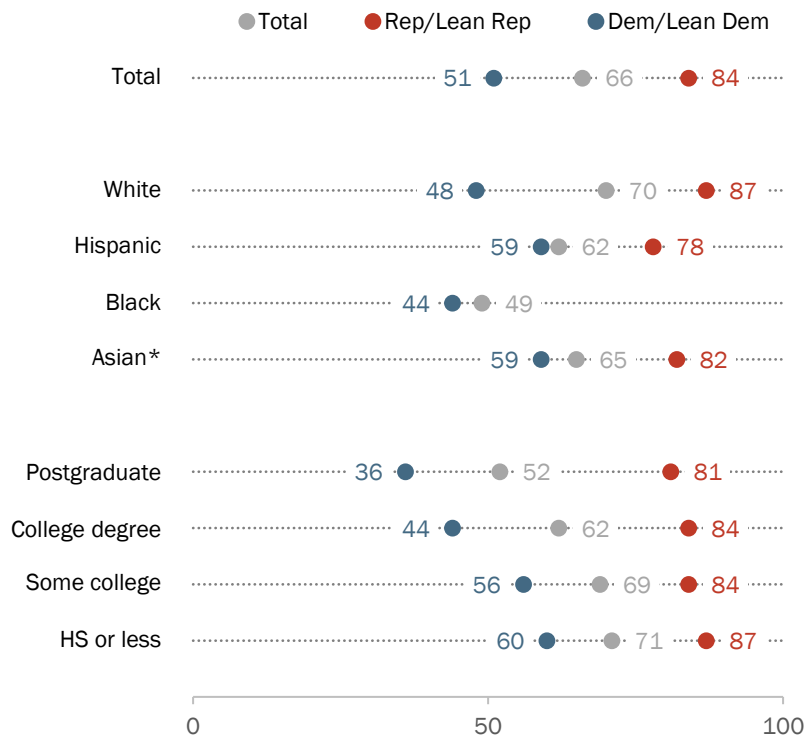
White (48%) and Black Democrats (44%) are less likely than Hispanic and Asian Democrats (59% among both) to say they favor the death

penalty. Support for the death penalty is high among Republicans regardless of race or ethnicity, yet there is a modest gap between White and Hispanic Republicans in their support.

Visit [the appendix](#) for additional graphics on how views about the death penalty's moral justification, crime deterrence, racial fairness and administration vary by age, education, and racial and ethnic groups.

Deep divisions on the death penalty among Democrats across education levels

% who say they **favor** the death penalty for persons convicted of murder



* Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Black Republicans are a very small share of the population, so their responses cannot be shown separately.

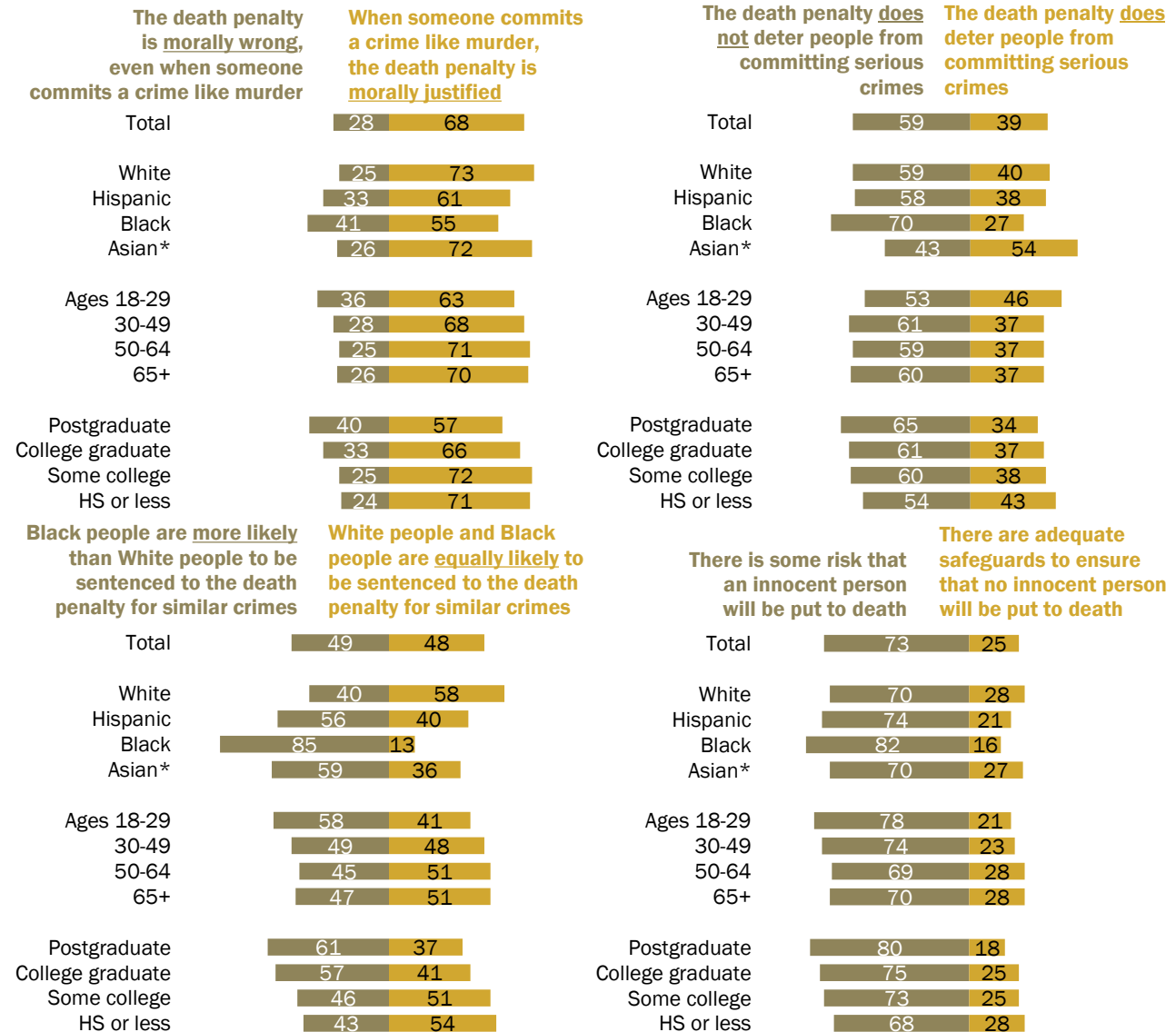
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Appendix: Additional charts

Views of administration of capital punishment by age, education, and race and ethnicity

% who say ...



* Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

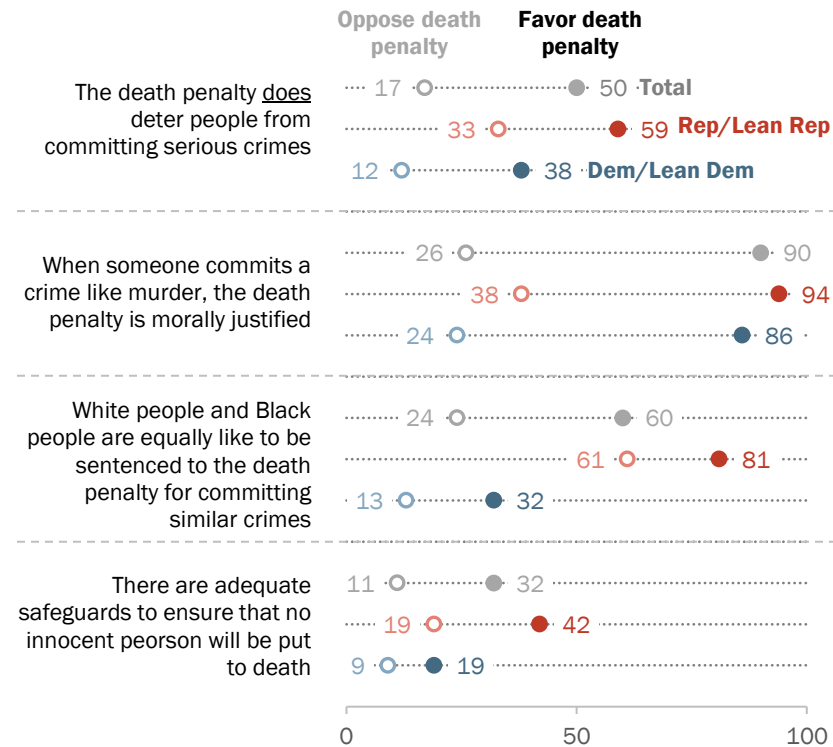
Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Supporters of the death penalty think it is morally justified for crimes like murder

Among those who oppose/favor the death penalty, % who say ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 6-12, 2026.

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Acknowledgments

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

Data in this report comes from Wave 196 of the American Trends Panel (ATP), Pew Research Center’s nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. The survey was conducted from July 6 to July 12, 2026. A total of 3,554 panelists responded out of 4,173 who were sampled, for a survey-level response rate of 85%.

The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 3,554 respondents is plus or minus 1.9 percentage points.

The survey includes [oversamples](#) of non-Hispanic Asian adults, 18- to 29-year-old validated voters and Hispanic validated voters in order to provide more precise estimates of the opinions and experiences of these smaller demographic subgroups. These oversampled groups are weighted back to reflect their correct proportions in the population.

SSRS conducted the survey for Pew Research Center via online (n=3,428) and live telephone (n=126) interviewing. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

To learn more about the ATP, read “[About the American Trends Panel](#).”

Panel recruitment

Since 2018, the ATP has used address-based sampling (ABS) for recruitment. A study cover letter and a pre-incentive are mailed to a stratified, random sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service’s Computerized Delivery Sequence File. This Postal Service file has been estimated to cover 90% to 98% of the population.¹ Within each sampled household, the adult with the next birthday is selected to participate. Other details of the ABS recruitment protocol have changed over time but are available upon request.² Prior to 2018, the ATP was recruited using landline and cellphone random-digit-dial surveys administered in English and Spanish.

¹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. “[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#).”

² Email pewsurveys@pewresearch.org.

A national sample of U.S. adults has been recruited to the ATP approximately once per year since 2014. In some years, the recruitment has included additional efforts (known as an “oversample”) to improve the accuracy of data for underrepresented groups. For example, Hispanic adults, Black adults and Asian adults were oversampled in 2019, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was noninstitutionalized persons ages 18 and older living in the United States. It featured a stratified random sample from the ATP in which non-Hispanic Asian adults, 18- to 29-year-old validated voters and Hispanic validated voters were selected with certainty. The remaining panelists were sampled at rates designed to ensure that the share of respondents in each stratum is proportional to its share of the U.S. adult population to the greatest extent possible. Respondent weights are adjusted to account for differential probabilities of selection as described in the Weighting section below.

Questionnaire development and testing

The questionnaire was developed by Pew Research Center in consultation with SSRS. The web program used for online respondents was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the SSRS project team and Pew Research Center researchers. The SSRS project team also populated test data that was analyzed in SPSS to ensure the logic and randomizations were working as intended before launching the survey.

Incentives

All respondents were offered a post-paid incentive for their participation. Respondents could choose to receive the post-paid incentive in the form of a check or gift code to Amazon.com, Target.com or Walmart.com. Incentive amounts ranged from \$5 to \$15 depending on whether the respondent belongs to a part of the population that is harder or easier to reach. Differential incentive amounts were designed to increase panel survey participation among groups that traditionally have low survey response propensities.

Data collection protocol

The data collection field period for this survey was July 6 to 12, 2026. Surveys were conducted via self-administered web survey or by live telephone interviewing.

For panelists who take surveys online:³ Postcard notifications were mailed to a subset on July 6.⁴ Survey invitations were sent out in two separate launches: soft launch and full launch. Sixty panelists were included in the soft launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on July 6. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled online panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on July 7.

**Invitation and reminder dates for web respondents,
ATP Wave 196**

	Soft launch	Full launch
Initial invitation	July 6, 2026	July 7, 2026
First reminder	July 9, 2026	July 9, 2026
Final reminder	July 11, 2026	July 11, 2026

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Panelists participating online were sent an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. ATP panelists who consented to SMS messages were sent an SMS invitation with a link to the survey and up to two SMS reminders.

For panelists who take surveys over the phone with a live interviewer:

Prenotification postcards were mailed on July 2. Soft launch took place on July 6 and involved dialing until a total of three interviews had been completed. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled phone panelists' numbers were dialed throughout the remaining field period. Panelists who take surveys via phone can receive up to six calls from trained SSRS interviewers.

Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, Center researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for whether respondents left questions blank at very high rates or always selected the first or last answer presented. As a result of this checking, two ATP respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to weighting and analysis.

³ The ATP does not use routers or chains in any part of its online data collection protocol, nor are they used to direct respondents to additional surveys.

⁴ Postcard notifications for web panelists are sent to 1) panelists who were recruited within the last two years and 2) panelists recruited prior to the last two years who opt to continue receiving postcard notifications.

Weighting

The ATP data is weighted in a process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the panel survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of recruitment into the panel. These weights are then calibrated to align with the population benchmarks in the accompanying table to correct for nonresponse to recruitment surveys and panel attrition. If only a subsample of panelists was invited to participate in the wave, this weight is adjusted to account for any differential probabilities of selection.

Among the panelists who completed the survey, this weight is then calibrated again to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table and trimmed at the 1st and 99th percentiles to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

American Trends Panel weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age (detailed)	2024 American Community Survey (ACS)
Age x Gender	
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Race/Ethnicity x Gender	
Race/Ethnicity x Age	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metropolitan status	
Volunteerism	2023 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Frequency of internet use	2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Religious affiliation	
Party affiliation x Race/Ethnicity	2026 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Party affiliation x Age	
Validated 2024 presidential election turnout and vote choice	Candidate vote share is based on official results from the Federal Election Commission. Turnout is based on estimates from the Election Lab at the University of Florida. The size of the voting-eligible population is based on the 2023 ACS.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on noninstitutionalized adults. For weighting to the 2024 presidential election results, panelists are considered validated voters if their self-report of having voted was confirmed after matching to a national voter registry.

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The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey.

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Sample sizes and margins of error, ATP Wave 196

Group	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	3,554		1.9 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	1,485	43	2.9 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	1,911	48	2.7 percentage points

Note: This survey includes oversamples of non-Hispanic Asian adults, 18- to 29-year-old validated voters and Hispanic validated voters. Unweighted sample sizes do not account for the sample design or weighting and do not describe a group's contribution to weighted estimates. See the Sample design and Weighting sections above for details.

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Dispositions and response rates

Final dispositions, ATP Wave 196

	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	3,554
Logged in (web) / Contacted (CATI), but did not complete any items	2.11	117
Started survey; broke off before completion	2.12	36
Never logged on (web) / Never reached on phone (CATI)	2.20	464
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	0
Other non-interview	2.30	0
Completed interview but was removed for data quality	2.90	2
Total panelists sampled for the survey		4,173
Completed interviews	I	3,554
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	153
Non-contact	NC	464
Other	O	2
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		4,173
AAPOR RR1 = $I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)$		85%

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Cumulative response rate, ATP Wave 196

	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	12%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	74%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 196	40%
Response rate to Wave 196 survey	85%
Cumulative response rate	3%

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**2026 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 196 POLITICS JULY SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
July 6-12, 2026
N=3,554**

Note: This survey was conducted primarily online, with some interviews conducted by live telephone. This topline shows the programming language for online administration. For details on how questions were slightly modified for phone administration, visit the questionnaire.

American Trends Panel surveys conducted between October 2016 and June 2024 were conducted fully online (with tablets and data plans provided to adults without home internet). American Trends Panel surveys conducted prior to October 2016 were conducted primarily online, with some respondents completing by mail. For additional details, visit the Methodology.

* "No answer" includes web respondents who do not answer the question as well as telephone respondents who refuse to answer or who say that they don't know how to answer. In cases where "not sure" was offered as an explicit option to web and telephone respondents, the "no answer" category includes only web skips and telephone refusals.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

DTHPNLTY

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

	NET	<i>Strongly</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	NET	<i>Strongly</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	No
	<u>favor</u>	<u>favor</u>	<u>favor</u>	<u>oppose</u>	<u>oppose</u>	<u>oppose</u>	<u>answer</u>
Jul 6-12, 2026	66	30	36	32	13	20	2
Apr 5-11, 2021	60	27	32	39	15	24	1
July 27-Aug 2, 2020	65	30	35	34	14	20	1
Jan 6-19, 2020	62	30	32	36	15	21	2
Sep 3-15, 2019	65	32	33	34	19	15	1

PHONE TREND FOR COMPARISON:

	-----FAVOR-----			-----OPPOSE-----			(VOL.)
	<i>Strongly</i>			<i>Strongly</i>			DK/Ref
	<u>Total</u>	<u>favor</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>oppose</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	
July 23-Aug 4, 2020	52	20	31	44	19	25	5
Jan 8-13, 2020	53	28	25	42	19	24	5
Sep 5-16, 2019	55	27	28	40	16	24	5
Apr 25-May 1, 2018	54	23	30	39	13	26	7
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	49	21	27	42	14	28	9
Mar 25-29, 2015	56	23	34	38	13	24	6
Nov 9-14, 2011	62	28	34	31	11	20	7
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011 ⁵	58	--	--	36	--	--	6
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	62	30	32	30	10	20	8
August, 2007	62	29	33	32	11	21	6
Early January, 2007	64	30	34	29	11	18	7
March, 2006	65	27	38	27	8	19	8
December, 2005	62	--	--	30	--	--	8
Mid-July, 2003	64	28	36	30	10	20	6
March, 2002	67	33	34	26	9	17	7
March, 2001	66	30	36	27	10	17	7
September, 1999	74	41	33	22	7	15	4
June, 1996	78	43	35	18	7	11	4

⁵ In all surveys October 2011 and before, the question was asked as part of a list, except in November-December 2005.

ASK ALL; SHOW INTRO TEXT AND DTHPNLTYA-DTHPNLTYD ON SAME SCREEN USING VISUAL DIVIDER BETWEEN EACH VARIABLE:

Next are a few pairs of statements about the death penalty in the U.S. Please choose the statement that comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right. **[RANDOMIZE THE ORDER OF PAIRS AND RANDOMIZE STATEMENTS WITHIN PAIRS].**

[Please select one item from each pair]

ASK ALL:

DTHPNLTYA	The death penalty deters people from committing <u>serious crimes</u>	The death penalty does NOT deter people from committing <u>serious crimes</u>	<u>No answer</u>	
Jul 6-12, 2026	39	59	2	
Apr 5-11, 2021	35	63	2	
Jan 6-19, 2020	36	62	2	
<i>Phone trend for comparison:</i>			(VOL.) <u>Depends</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
Jan 8-13, 2020	38	59	1	2
Mar 25-29, 2015	35	61	1	3

ASK ALL:

DTHPNLTYB	When someone commits a crime like murder, the death penalty is <u>morally justified</u>	The death penalty is morally wrong, even when someone commits <u>a crime like murder</u>	<u>No answer</u>	
Jul 6-12, 2026	68	28	3	
Apr 5-11, 2021	64	33	3	
Jan 6-19, 2020	66	31	3	
<i>Phone trend for comparison:</i>			(VOL.) <u>Depends</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
Jan 8-13, 2020	61	32	3	3
Mar 25-29, 2015	63	31	3	3

ASK ALL:

DTHPNLTYCMOD	Black people are more likely than White people to be sentenced to the death penalty for committing <u>similar crimes</u>	White people and Black people are equally likely to be sentenced to the death penalty for committing <u>similar crimes</u>	<u>No answer</u>	
Jul 6-12, 2026	49	48	3	
Apr 5-11, 2021	56	41	3	

ASK ALL:

DTHPNLTYD

	There is some risk that an innocent person will <u>be put to death</u>	There are adequate safeguards to ensure that no innocent person will <u>be put to death</u>	No answer
Jul 6-12, 2026	73	25	2
Apr 5-11, 2021	78	21	2
Jan 6-19, 2020	79	19	1
			(VOL.)
<i>Phone trend for comparison:</i>			<u>Depends</u>
Jan 8-13, 2020	70	27	1
Mar 25-29, 2015	71	26	*
			(VOL.)
			<u>DK/Ref</u>
			2

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics today, do you consider yourself a...

ASK IF INDEP/SOMETHING ELSE (PARTY=3,4 OR REFUSED):

PARTYLN	As of today do you lean more to... ⁶					Lean	Lean
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<u>Something</u> <u>else</u>	<u>No</u> <u>answer*</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>
	26	28	29	14	2	17	20

⁶ PARTY and PARTYLN asked in a prior survey.