

# **SURVEY ON SINGAPORE RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE DEATH PENALTY 2021**

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## **Abstract**

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, conducted a survey in 2021 to better understand public perceptions towards the Singapore Government's policy positions on the death penalty. The survey found that the majority of the respondents agreed that Singapore's policy positions on the death penalty were appropriate and believed in the deterrent effect of the death penalty. A large proportion of respondents also believed that mandatory death penalty was a more effective deterrent compared to discretionary death penalty, and that the death penalty was more effective than life imprisonment in deterring people from committing serious crimes.

## **Background**

Singapore imposes the death penalty as a punishment for the most serious crimes (e.g., intentional murder, trafficking a significant amount of drugs, and discharging, or attempting to discharge a firearm with the intent to cause physical injury). The death penalty serves as a strong deterrent to discourage the occurrences of such crimes in Singapore and minimise the harms caused by these crimes to the society.

As the death penalty is an integral part of Singapore's policy landscape for ensuring safety and security, it is important to understand the public's attitudes towards the Singapore government's policy positions on this issue.

In 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs commissioned a public perception survey to understand Singapore residents' attitudes towards the government's policy positions on the death penalty.

## **Survey Methodology**

### Participants

A survey company was appointed to conduct face-to-face interviews with 2,000 Singapore residents, comprising both citizens and permanent residents, aged 15 and above. The survey utilised stratified random sampling based on age, race, gender and citizenship status (refer to [Appendix 1](#) for the demographic characteristics of the sample). The fieldwork for the survey took place between March and May 2021. Respondents were assured by the survey company that their responses would be kept anonymous.

## Questionnaire Design

The respondents were asked a set of questions under the following categories:

- a) Attitudes towards the use of the death penalty for serious crimes
- b) Attitudes towards the use of the mandatory death penalty for specific crimes
- c) Perceptions of the deterrent effect of the death penalty
- d) Confidence in the Singapore criminal justice system

For most of the questions, respondents were provided with an attitudinal statement on a particular aspect of the death penalty and asked to indicate their position on the statement using a 5-point rating scale. The options used for the 5-point rating scale were “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”.

## Data Collection and Quality Assurance

Quality assurance measures were applied to the fieldwork and vendor management processes to ensure the quality of the collected data. In particular, a cognitive testing session was conducted with members of the public prior to the start of fieldwork to test whether the questions were clear and easy to understand.

The overall survey findings were also weighted to follow the national demographic profiles to ensure representativeness at the national level.

## **Key Survey Findings**

### Attitudes Towards the Use of the Death Penalty for Serious Crimes

Under Singapore’s laws, the death penalty is used as a punishment for the most serious crimes. When asked for their views on this policy stance, almost three-quarters of the respondents (73.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that the death penalty should be used for “the most serious crimes” (Table 1 refers).

*Table 1: Attitudes Towards the Use of the Death Penalty for Serious Crimes*

| Question  | Strongly Agree/<br>Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree/<br>Disagree |
|---|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| The Death Penalty should be used for the most serious crimes. | 73.7%                    | 15.1%   | 11.2%                          |

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

### *Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the Death Penalty Should be Used for the Most Serious Crimes*

Respondents were asked via an open-ended question for the reason(s) behind their stance. The reasons cited were then broadly coded into the various themes identified.

Most respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that the death penalty should be used for the most serious crimes said that the death penalty provides deterrence, is a just punishment, and that the crimes in question cause serious harm to the society (Table 2 refers).

*Table 2: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the Death Penalty should be used for the Most Serious Crimes*

| Theme                     | Reason  | % Among those who strongly agreed/ agreed* |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Provides Deterrence       | To deter crimes                                       | 39.4                                       |
| Just Punishment           | It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime | 27.5                                       |
| Crime Causes Serious Harm | These are serious crimes / Danger to society          | 19.7                                       |
| Just Punishment           | To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye      | 3.7  |
| Provides Deterrence       | Has worked well for Singapore / Kept Singapore safe   | 2.9  |
| Maintains Order           | To uphold the rule of law                             | 2.6  |
| Just Punishment           | Crime is committed intentionally                      | 1.1  |

\*73.7% of all respondents strongly agreed/agreed that the death penalty should be used for the most serious crimes.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

*Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to the use of the Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes*

As shown in [Table 1](#), a small proportion (15.1%) of the respondents indicated that they were neutral with regards to the use of the death penalty for “the most serious crimes”. Majority (74.6%) of these respondents cited reasons related to discretionary sentencing and disproportionate punishment to support their stance ([Table 3](#) refers). The respondents who had felt that the death penalty should be discretionary (59.7%) felt that circumstantial factors such as possible provocations and financial difficulties (particularly for the trafficking of drugs) should be taken into consideration before sentencing. Respondents who cited reasons related to disproportionate punishment (14.9%) had felt that drug trafficking and firearm offences were less severe compared to murder and thus imposing the death penalty was disproportionate to the severity of the crime.

*Table 3: Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to the use of the Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes*

| Theme                | Reason  | % Among those who were neutral* |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Discretionary        | Sentence should be decided case by case                         | 36.0                            |
| Discretionary        | Circumstantial factors must be considered                       | 23.7                            |
| Disproportionate     | Drug trafficking is less severe                                 | 7.1                             |
| Ambivalence          | Prefer to leave it to the government to decide on policy stance | 4.6                             |
| Ambivalence          | Not sure  | 4.5                             |
| Disproportionate     | Firearm offences are less severe                                | 3.9                             |
| Disproportionate     | Drug trafficking and firearm offences are less severe           | 3.9                             |
| Allow Rehabilitation | Give offender a second chance                                   | 3.6                             |
| Pro-Life             | Believe in sanctity of life                                     | 3.2                             |

|                      |                       |     |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| Allow Rehabilitation | Prefer rehabilitation | 2.9 |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|

\*15.1% of all respondents were neutral to the use of the death penalty for the most serious crimes.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

### *Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Disagreed/Disagreed that the Death Penalty Should be Used for the Most Serious Crimes*

Among the small minority (11.2%) of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of the death penalty, a sizeable proportion (43.9%) indicated that they preferred for offenders to be rehabilitated or given a second chance. Almost a quarter of these respondents (23.6%) cited reasons that were pro-life, and a smaller group (16.5%) believed that discretion was required in sentencing ([Table 4](#) refers).

*Table 4: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Disagreed/Disagreed that the Death Penalty Should be Used for the Most Serious Crimes*

| Theme                | Reason                                    | % Among those who strongly disagreed/ disagreed* |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Allow Rehabilitation | Give offender a second chance             | 27.8   |
| Pro-Life             | Believe in sanctity of life               | 23.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation | Prefer rehabilitation                     | 16.1   |
| Discretionary        | Sentence should be decided case by case   | 6.3  |
| Discretionary        | Circumstantial factors must be considered | 5.3  |
| Discretionary        | Possibility of wrongful convictions       | 4.9  |
| Disproportionate     | Death Penalty is too harsh                | 4.8  |

\*11.2% of all respondents strongly disagreed/disagreed that the death penalty should be used for the most serious crimes.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

### Attitudes Towards the Use of the Mandatory Death Penalty for Specific Crimes

Under Singapore’s laws, the death penalty is mandatory for a subset of the most serious crimes. For the following offences where the current punishment is mandatory death penalty, respondents were asked whether they agreed that this was an appropriate punishment:

- i. Intentional Murder;
- ii. Discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with the intent to cause physical injury (hereafter referred to as “Firearm Offences”); and
- iii. Trafficking a significant amount of drugs (hereafter referred to as “Drug Trafficking”).

A large majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment, with intentional murder receiving the highest level of agreement ([Table 5](#) refers).

Table 5: Attitudes Towards the Use of the Mandatory Death Penalty for Specific Crimes

| Question  | Strongly Agree/<br>Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree/<br>Disagree |
|---|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| The mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment for ...                  |                          |         |                                |
| intentional murder  | 80.5%                    | 11.6%   | 7.9%                           |
| discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with intent to cause physical injury | 71.1%                    | 16.1%   | 12.8%                          |
| trafficking a significant amount of drugs   | 65.6%                    | 14.4%   | 20.0%                          |

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

*Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the Mandatory Death Penalty was an Appropriate Punishment for the Specific Crime Types Covered*

For all three offences, most respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment cited causing serious harm to the society or the need for deterrence or just punishment as reasons for their stance (Table 6 refers).

Table 6: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the Mandatory Death Penalty was an Appropriate Punishment for the Specific Crimes Covered

| Theme                     | Reason   | % Among those who strongly agreed/<br>agreed* |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Drug Trafficking</b>   |  |   |
| Crime Causes Serious Harm | Drug trafficking is a serious crime / Danger to society                            | 55.0  |
| Provides Deterrence       | To deter drug trafficking / drug abuse   | 26.0  |
| Just Punishment           | It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime                              | 11.4  |
| Just Punishment           | Crime is committed intentionally   | 3.2   |
| Discretionary             | Circumstantial factors must be considered  | 1.5   |
| Provides Deterrence       | Has worked well for Singapore / Kept Singapore safe                                | 1.3   |
| <b>Firearm Offences</b>   |  |   |
| Crime Causes Serious Harm | Firearm offences are serious crimes / Danger to society                            | 48.8  |
| Provides Deterrence       | To deter firearm offences  | 18.1  |
| Just Punishment           | There is intention to cause harm   | 18.1  |
| Just Punishment           | It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime                              | 4.6   |
| Provides Deterrence       | The danger / destruction of firearms is evident in countries with lax firearm laws | 3.1   |
| Just Punishment           | To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye                                   | 2.2   |
| Maintains Order           | To uphold the rule of law  | 1.9   |
| Provides Deterrence       | Has worked well for Singapore / Kept Singapore safe                                | 1.1   |
| Discretionary             | Circumstantial factors must be considered  | 1.1   |
| Safety                    | To prevent reoffending by the same individual                                      | 0.5   |
| <b>Intentional Murder</b> |  |   |
| Crime Causes Serious Harm | There is intention to kill   | 26.3  |
| Just Punishment           | It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime                              | 17.8  |

|                           |   |      |
|---------------------------|---|------|
| Provides Deterrence       | To deter intentional murder                               | 14.6 |
| Crime Causes Serious Harm | Intentional murder is a serious crime / Danger to society | 14.3 |
| Just Punishment           | To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye          | 12.8 |
| Just Punishment           | No right to take the victim's life / Life is precious     | 8.7  |
| Safety                    | To prevent reoffending by the same individual             | 2.8  |
| Maintains Order           | To uphold the rule of law                                 | 1.1  |

\*% of respondents who strongly agreed/agreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking – 65.6%; firearms offences – 71.1%; intentional murder – 80.5%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

### *Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to the Mandatory Death Penalty Being an Appropriate Punishment for the Specific Crimes Covered*

A significantly smaller proportion of respondents (Intentional Murder – 11.6%; Firearm Offences – 16.1%; Drug Trafficking – 14.4%) were neutral with regards to the mandatory death penalty being an appropriate punishment for the three specific crime types covered (Table 5 refers). Across all three types of crimes, the most common reason cited by respondents who were neutral was that circumstantial factors had to be considered for sentencing (drug trafficking – 39.1%; firearm offences – 45.2%; intentional murder – 60.9%). Many respondents also felt that instead of having the death penalty be mandatory for all cases, the sentence should be decided on a case-by-case basis (drug trafficking – 18.2%; firearm offences – 12.5%; intentional murder – 13.7%) (Table 7 refers).

*Table 7: Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to Having the Mandatory Death Penalty for the Specific Crimes Covered*

| Theme                   | Reason   | % Among those who were neutral* |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Drug Trafficking</b> |  |                                 |
| Discretionary           | Circumstantial factors must be considered                        | 39.1                            |
| Discretionary           | Sentence should be decided case by case                          | 18.2                            |
| Ambivalence             | Not sure   | 6.7                             |
| Allow Rehabilitation    | Give offender a second chance                                    | 6.0                             |
| Disproportionate        | Death penalty is too harsh                                       | 5.7                             |
| Ambivalence             | Prefer to leave it to the government to decide on policy stance  | 5.2                             |
| Disproportionate        | May not have resulted in injury or death                         | 5.0                             |
| Disproportionate        | Drug trafficking is less severe                                  | 3.8                             |
| Allow Rehabilitation    | Prefer rehabilitation  | 2.4                             |
| Others                  | Don't really bother  | 2.3                             |
| <b>Firearm Offences</b> |  |                                 |
| Discretionary           | Circumstantial factors must be considered                        | 45.2                            |
| Discretionary           | May not have resulted in injury or death                         | 19.4                            |
| Discretionary           | Sentence should be decided case by case                          | 12.5                            |
| Disproportionate        | Death penalty is too harsh for attempting to discharge a firearm | 3.8                             |
| Prefer                  | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide                 | 3.6                             |

|  |   |      |
|--|---|------|
| Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence        |   |      |
| Ambivalence  | Not sure  | 3.3  |
| Ambivalence  | Prefer to leave it to the government to decide on policy stance | 2.8  |
| <b>Intentional Murder</b>                            |   |      |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered                       | 60.9 |
| Discretionary  | Sentence should be decided case by case                         | 13.7 |
| Prefer Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide                | 13.7 |

% of respondents who were neutral to the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as a punishment: drug trafficking – 14.4%; firearms offences – 16.1%; intentional murder – 11.6%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents were omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

A considerable proportion of respondents who were neutral towards having the mandatory death penalty felt that the drug trafficking or firearm offences committed may not have resulted in any death or injury and therefore did not deserve the death penalty (drug trafficking – 5%; firearm offences – 19.4%). There was also a small group of respondents who felt that the penalty was too harsh or that the respective offences were considered less severe when compared to other offences, especially in cases where the offender attempted to discharge a firearm but was not successful.

*Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Disagreed/Disagreed that the Mandatory Death Penalty was an Appropriate Punishment for the Specific Crimes Covered*

A small proportion of (Intentional Murder – 7.9%; Firearm Offences – 12.8%; Drug Trafficking – 20%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the mandatory death penalty was appropriate for the three specific crime types covered (Table 5 refers). As with respondents who took a neutral stance, many who strongly disagreed or disagreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment felt that circumstantial factors had to be considered for sentencing (drug trafficking – 13.6%; firearm offences – 14.3%; intentional murder – 22%). Some of these respondents also indicated that they would have preferred rehabilitation for the offenders instead of sentencing the offenders to death (drug trafficking – 20.8%; firearm offences – 13.6%; intentional murder – 12.6%), or to give them a second chance (drug trafficking – 19.1%; firearm offences – 11%; intentional murder – 10.3%). Reasons that were related to a preference for rehabilitating offenders were more commonly seen for drug trafficking offences in comparison to intentional murder and firearms offences (Table 8 refers).

Table 8: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Disagreed/Disagreed that the Mandatory Death Penalty was an Appropriate Punishment for the Specific Crimes Covered

| Theme  | Reason   | % Among those who strongly disagreed/ disagreed* |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Drug Trafficking</b>                              |  |  |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Prefer rehabilitation  | 20.8   |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Give offender a second chance                                    | 19.1   |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered                        | 13.6   |
| Pro-Life   | Believe in sanctity of life                                      | 12.8   |
| Disproportionate                                     | Death penalty is too harsh                                       | 7.6  |
| Disproportionate                                     | May not have resulted in injury or death                         | 6.4  |
| Disproportionate                                     | Drug trafficking is less severe                                  | 6.0  |
| Discretionary  | Sentence should be decided case by case                          | 4.5  |
| <b>Firearm Offences</b>                              |  |  |
| Disproportionate                                     | May not have resulted in injury or death                         | 14.8   |
| Pro-Life   | Believe in sanctity of life                                      | 14.5   |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered                        | 14.3   |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Prefer rehabilitation  | 13.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Give offender a second chance                                    | 11.0   |
| Disproportionate                                     | Death penalty is too harsh                                       | 10.0   |
| Disproportionate                                     | Death penalty is too harsh for attempting to discharge a firearm | 7.0  |
| Ambivalence  | Not a problem in today's society                                 | 2.7  |
| Disproportionate                                     | Firearm offences are less severe                                 | 2.5  |
| <b>Intentional Murder</b>                            |  |  |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered                        | 22.0   |
| Pro-Life   | Believe in sanctity of life                                      | 17.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Prefer rehabilitation  | 12.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation                                 | Give offender a second chance                                    | 10.3   |
| Disproportionate                                     | Death penalty is too harsh                                       | 7.2  |
| Retributive  | Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty           | 5.7  |
| Prefer Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide                 | 5.0  |
| Discretionary  | Sentence should be decided case by case                          | 3.7  |
| Pro-Life   | No right to take the victim's life / Life is precious            | 3.5  |

\*% of respondents who strongly disagreed/disagreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking – 20.0%; firearms offences – 12.8%; intentional murder – 7.9%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents were omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

*Preferences for Discretionary Death Penalty versus Life Imprisonment Amongst Respondents who did not Agree that the Mandatory Death Penalty was an Appropriate Punishment*

To further understand the views of the respondents who did not agree (i.e., they were either neutral or strongly disagreed/ disagreed) that the mandatory death penalty was appropriate as a punishment for the three types of crimes covered in the survey, these respondents were further asked whether they felt that the discretionary death penalty or life imprisonment was more appropriate instead as the punishment for the specific offences.

Amongst the respondents who did not agree that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment, the proportion of respondents who chose the discretionary death penalty over life imprisonment as the more appropriate punishment was considerably higher for firearm offences (37.7%) and intentional murder (39.6%) as compared to drug trafficking (22.6%). Correspondingly, the proportion of respondents who chose life imprisonment over the discretionary death penalty was higher for drug trafficking (61.6%) as compared to firearm offences (45.9%) and intentional murder (45.9%) (Table 9 refers).

*Table 9: Preference for Discretionary Death Penalty or Life Imprisonment Amongst Respondents who did not Agree that the Mandatory Death Penalty was Appropriate as a Punishment for the Specific Crimes Covered\**

| Question   | Discretionary Death Penalty | Life Imprisonment | I Don't Know |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| You mentioned above that you (were neutral/disagreed) with having the mandatory death penalty for ...<br>Between the discretionary death penalty and life imprisonment, which do you think is the more appropriate punishment for ...? |                             |                   |              |
| intentional murder   | 39.6%                       | 45.9%             | 14.5%        |
| discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with intent to cause physical injury  | 37.7%                       | 45.9%             | 16.4%        |
| trafficking a significant amount of drugs  | 22.6%                       | 61.6%             | 15.8%        |

\*% of respondents who did not agree (i.e., was neutral or strongly disagreed/disagreed) that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking –34.4%; firearms offences – 28.9%; intentional murder – 19.5%.

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

Respondents were also asked to provide the reason(s) behind their choice. The most common reason cited by respondents who felt that the discretionary death penalty was a more appropriate punishment than life imprisonment was their preference for the authorities to decide on the appropriate sentence. They believed that the judge or police would be in a better position to decide if the death penalty should be given to the offender (drug trafficking – 67%; firearm offences – 68.1%; intentional murder – 78%). Further examination of these responses found that while these respondents were open to having the death penalty, they trusted that the authorities would be able to make the right decision to assess if the offender indeed deserved the death penalty. A sizable portion of respondents who chose the discretionary death penalty over life imprisonment stated that they felt that the death penalty remained a necessary punishment in Singapore’s judicial system and was a just punishment (drug trafficking – 9.9%; firearm offences – 11.6%; intentional murder – 15.4%) (Table 10 refers).

Table 10: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Felt that the Discretionary Death Penalty was a More Appropriate Punishment than Life Imprisonment for the Specific Crimes Covered

| Theme  | Reason   | % Among those who think that the discretionary death penalty is more appropriate than life imprisonment |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Drug Trafficking</b>                              |  |   |
| Prefer Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide | 67.0  |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered        | 12.4  |
| Just Punishment                                      | Death penalty is still necessary                 | 9.9   |
| Discretionary  | Sentence should be decided case by case          | 4.8   |
| <b>Firearm Offences</b>                              |  |   |
| Prefer Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide | 68.1  |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered        | 12.4  |
| Just Punishment                                      | Death penalty is still necessary                 | 11.6  |
| Discretionary  | Sentence should be decided case by case          | 4.0   |
| <b>Intentional Murder</b>                            |  |   |
| Prefer Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence | Judge / Police is in a better position to decide | 78.0  |
| Just Punishment                                      | Death penalty is still necessary                 | 15.4  |
| Discretionary  | Circumstantial factors must be considered        | 3.9   |

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

Respondents who felt that life imprisonment was a more appropriate punishment than discretionary death penalty generally cited a preference for rehabilitating offenders, or were pro-life in nature. Many felt that life imprisonment would provide the offender with an opportunity to change (drug trafficking – 36.9%; firearm offences – 24.6%; intentional murder – 37.5%) and would provide the offender with a second chance in life (drug trafficking – 11.3%; firearm offences – 15.1%; intentional murder – 11.5%). A considerable proportion of respondents also cited the upholding of the sanctity of human life (drug trafficking – 13.8%; firearm offences – 11.6%; intentional murder – 14%) as the reason for their choice (Table 11 refers).

*Table 11: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Felt that Life Imprisonment was a More Appropriate Punishment than the Discretionary Death Penalty for the Specific Crimes Covered*

| Theme                     | Reason  | % Among those who think that the life imprisonment is more appropriate |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Drug Trafficking</b>   |   |  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change          | 36.9   |
| Pro-Life                  | Believe in sanctity of life                               | 13.8   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Give offender a second chance                             | 11.3   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Prefer rehabilitation                                     | 5.6  |
| Retributive               | Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty    | 4.7  |
| Disproportionate          | Death penalty is too harsh                                | 4.4  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect   | 4.4  |
| Safety                    | Life imprisonment can keep the offender away from society | 4.3  |
| Discretionary             | Circumstantial factors must be considered                 | 3.8  |
| <b>Firearm Offences</b>   |   |  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change          | 24.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Give offender a second chance                             | 15.1   |
| Pro-Life                  | Believe in sanctity of life                               | 11.6   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect   | 8.4  |
| Discretionary             | May not have resulted in injury or death                  | 8.0  |
| Disproportionate          | Death penalty is too harsh                                | 5.8  |
| Just Punishment           | It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime     | 4.1  |
| Safety                    | Life imprisonment can keep the offender away from society | 4.0  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Prefer rehabilitation                                     | 3.2  |
| Retributive               | Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty    | 2.9  |
| Discretionary             | Circumstantial factors must be considered                 | 2.8  |
| <b>Intentional Murder</b> |   |  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change          | 37.5   |
| Pro-Life                  | Believe in sanctity of life                               | 14.0   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Give offender a second chance                             | 11.5   |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Prefer rehabilitation                                     | 5.7  |
| Retributive               | Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty    | 4.8  |
| Disproportionate          | Death penalty is too harsh                                | 4.5  |
| Allow Rehabilitation      | Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect   | 4.4  |

|               |   |     |
|---------------|---|-----|
| Safety        | Life imprisonment can keep the offender away from society | 4.4 |
| Discretionary | Circumstantial factors must be considered                 | 3.9 |

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 1% of the respondents have been omitted from this table. Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

Amongst those who felt that life imprisonment was a more appropriate punishment than the discretionary death penalty, for all three types of crimes, there was a small group of respondents who provided reasons that were retributive in nature. They felt that putting the offenders behind bars for a prolonged period of time was more torturous as compared to executing the offender (drug trafficking – 4.7%; firearm offences – 2.9%; intentional murder – 4.8%) and therefore, would be a more suitable punishment for an offender of a serious crime. Quoting some respondents, the death penalty would be an “*easier way out*” for the offenders who had committed the serious crimes and was insufficient as a punishment.

#### *Proportion of Respondents who Agreed that Some Form of Death Penalty was Appropriate*

Taking into consideration the responses to the question on the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as a punishment, as well as the responses to the follow-up question that was fielded to the subset of respondents who did not agree that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment on whether the discretionary death penalty or life imprisonment would be more appropriate instead, we found that overall, more than 70% of the respondents agreed that some form of the death penalty was appropriate for each of the three types of crime covered in this survey. The proportion who agreed that some form of death penalty was appropriate as a punishment was the highest for intentional murder (88.2%), followed by firearm offences (82%) and lastly drug trafficking (73.4%).<sup>1</sup>

#### Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of the deterrent effect of the death penalty. The data indicated that most respondents believed in the deterrent effect of the death penalty. A large majority of the respondents (83.2% - 85.9%) believed that the death penalty had been able to deter murder, firearm offences and drug trafficking offences in Singapore. 79% - 79.5% believed that removing it from the Singapore law would cause an increase in these serious crimes (Table 12 refers).

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<sup>1</sup> % of respondents who agreed that some form of death penalty was appropriate = (% of respondents who strongly agreed/agreed for the first question on the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as a punishment) + (% of respondents who were neutral/disagreed/strongly disagreed for the first question on the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as a punishment X Corresponding proportion of respondents who selected discretionary death penalty in the follow-up question). Example: % of respondents who agreed that some form of death penalty was appropriate for intentional murder = 80.5% + (19.5% X 39.6%) = 88.2%.

Table 12: Respondents' Perceptions on the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty

|  | Strongly Agree/ Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree/ Disagree |
|--|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| The death penalty deters ... in Singapore            |                       |         |                             |
| trafficking of significant amount of drugs           | 83.2%                 | 9.8%    | 7.0%                        |
| firearm offences                                     | 85.9%                 | 8.8%    | 5.3%                        |
| murder offences                                      | 85.9%                 | 8.9%    | 5.2%                        |
| Removing the death penalty would likely increase ... |                       |         |                             |
| the amount of drugs trafficked into Singapore        | 79.2%                 | 11.8%   | 9.0%                        |
| the number of firearm offences in Singapore          | 79.0%                 | 12.4%   | 8.6%                        |
| the number of murders in Singapore                   | 79.5%                 | 12.7%   | 7.8%                        |

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

When asked about their perceptions on whether the mandatory death penalty had any additional deterrent effect over the discretionary death penalty, 75% or more of the respondents agreed, or strongly agreed that the mandatory death penalty was more effective in deterring people from committing the various crimes compared to the discretionary death penalty. A similar proportion (73.7%-77.8%) also agreed that the death penalty was a more effective deterrent compared to life imprisonment (Table 13 refers).

Table 13: Respondents' Perceptions on the Deterrent Effect of the Mandatory Death Penalty versus the Discretionary Death Penalty and the Death Penalty versus Life Imprisonment

| Question   | Strongly Agree/ Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree/ Disagree |
|--|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Compared to the discretionary death penalty, the mandatory death penalty is more effective in deterring people from ... in Singapore |                       |         |                             |
| trafficking significant amount of drugs  | 74.9%                 | 16.3%   | 8.8%                        |
| committing firearm offences  | 77.9%                 | 15.0%   | 7.1%                        |
| committing murder offences   | 78.4%                 | 14.4%   | 7.2%                        |
| Compared to life imprisonment, the death penalty is more effective in deterring people from ... in Singapore                         |                       |         |                             |
| trafficking significant amount of drugs  | 73.7%                 | 16.5%   | 9.8%                        |
| committing firearm offences  | 77.4%                 | 14.7%   | 7.9%                        |
| committing murder offences   | 77.8%                 | 14.1%   | 8.1%                        |

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table.

### Confidence in the Singapore Criminal Justice System

As the death penalty is an irreversible punishment, it is important for criminal justice systems that impose the death penalty to have safeguards in place to ensure that there are no wrongful executions. The vast majority of the respondents in this survey indicated that they had confidence in Singapore's criminal justice system to ensure that the accused in death penalty cases were subjected to fair and rigorous investigations and trials (88.1-88.5%). In addition, the vast majority of respondents also believed that there were adequate safeguards in Singapore's justice system to ensure there were no wrongful executions (85.3%) (Table 14

refers). Less than 2% of respondents indicated that they did not have confidence that the Singapore’s criminal justice system would be able to do so.

*Table 14: Respondents’ Confidence in the Singapore Criminal Justice System*

| Question  | Strongly Agree/<br>Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree/<br>Disagree |
|---|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| I have confidence in the Singapore Police Force and the Central Narcotics Bureau to ensure that accused persons in death penalty cases undergo fair and rigorous investigations | 88.5%                    | 9.8%    | 1.7%                           |
| I have confidence in the Attorney General’s Chambers and the Courts to ensure that accused persons in death penalty cases undergo fair and rigorous trials                      | 88.1%                    | 10.3%   | 1.6%                           |
| I believe there are adequate safeguards in Singapore’s justice system to ensure that there are no wrongful executions   | 85.3%                    | 12.8%   | 1.9%                           |

Note: Sampling weights have been applied to the percentages derived in the above table

## **Conclusion**

Overall, findings from the Ministry of Home Affairs’ 2021 survey on Singapore residents’ attitudes towards the death penalty showed that majority of the domestic resident population agreed that Singapore’s policy positions on the death penalty were appropriate. A large majority was also confident that the Singapore criminal justice system was able to ensure that accused persons in death penalty cases undergo fair and rigorous investigations and trials, and that the Singapore criminal justice system had adequate safeguards in place to prevent wrongful executions. Most respondents also believed in the deterrent effect of the death penalty, with a large proportion believing that the mandatory death penalty was more effective than the discretionary death penalty in deterring people from committing serious crimes; and that the death penalty was a more effective deterrent than the life imprisonment in deterring people from committing serious crimes.

## APPENDIX 1 – Demographic Characteristics of Survey Sample

| Demographics of respondents |                     | Percentage (%) of respondents |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Citizenship</b>          | Singaporeans        | 86.5                          |
|                             | Permanent Residents | 13.5                          |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Gender</b>               | Male                | 50.4                          |
|                             | Female              | 49.6                          |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Age</b>                  | 15 - 19 Years       | 6.3                           |
|                             | 20 - 29 Years       | 15.2                          |
|                             | 30 - 39 Years       | 17.4                          |
|                             | 40 - 49 Years       | 16.5                          |
|                             | 50 - 59 Years       | 17.4                          |
|                             | 60 - 69 Years       | 15.6                          |
|                             | 70 Years and above  | 11.6                          |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>            | Chinese             | 73.2                          |
|                             | Malay               | 13.5                          |
|                             | Indian              | 10.3                          |
|                             | Others              | 3.0                           |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Religion</b>             | No Religion         | 20.6                          |
|                             | Buddhism            | 31.7                          |
|                             | Taoism              | 8.0                           |
|                             | Islam               | 16.6                          |
|                             | Hinduism            | 5.7                           |
|                             | Sikhism             | 0.4                           |
|                             | Roman Catholic      | 5.7                           |
|                             | Christianity        | 11.3                          |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Education</b>            | PSLE and below      | 17.2                          |
|                             | O-Level/N-Level     | 26.0                          |
|                             | ITE Certificate     | 5.1                           |
|                             | A-Level             | 4.7                           |
|                             | Diploma             | 17.8                          |
|                             | Degree and above    | 29.2                          |
|                             |                     |                               |
| <b>Housing type</b>         | HDB 1-Room          | 1.8                           |

|                                    |                                     |      |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|
|                                    | HDB 2-Room                          | 2.7  |
|                                    | HDB 3-Room                          | 19.1 |
|                                    | HDB 4-Room                          | 39.4 |
|                                    | HDB 5-Room/ Executive/<br>Shophouse | 31.3 |
|                                    | Condo & Landed                      | 5.7  |
|                                    |                                     |      |
| <b>Personal<br/>Monthly Income</b> | \$0 - \$1,999                       | 19.3 |
|                                    | \$2,000 - \$3,999                   | 39.2 |
|                                    | \$4,000 - \$5,999                   | 22.6 |
|                                    | \$6,000 - \$7,999                   | 10.5 |
|                                    | \$8,000 - \$9,999                   | 3.8  |
|                                    | \$10,000 and above                  | 4.6  |

Note: The percentages displayed for the demographic traits in the above table were unweighted.