

SURVEY ON SINGAPORE RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE DEATH PENALTY 2023

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Abstract

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had conducted a survey in 2021 to better understand public perceptions on the use of the death penalty for the most serious crimes, such as murder and trafficking a significant amount of drugs. The survey had found that there was very strong support for this among Singapore residents. The Ministry conducted the survey again in 2023. Compared to the 2021 survey, the 2023 survey found that a larger proportion of Singapore residents agreed with the use of the death penalty for the most 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). This serves as a deterrent against the commission of such crimes in Singapore, hence minimising the harms caused by these crimes to society.

As the death penalty is an integral part of Singapore's criminal justice framework, we continually seek to understand the public's attitudes towards it.

In 2021, MHA commissioned a survey to understand Singapore residents' attitudes towards the use of the death penalty. The Ministry conducted the survey again in 2023 to understand how the attitudes of Singapore residents might have changed over time.

Survey Methodology

Participants

A survey company was appointed to conduct face-to-face interviews with approximately 2,000 Singapore residents, comprising both citizens and permanent residents, aged 15 and above. Similar to the 2021 survey, the 2023 survey utilised stratified random sampling based on age, race, sex and citizenship status (refer to [Appendix 1](#) for the demographic characteristics of the sample) to ensure that the survey sample would be representative of the national resident population. The fieldwork for the survey took place between April and June 2023. 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 the most 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) Perceptions of the deterrent effect of the **mandatory** death penalty
- e) 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”.

The questions that were asked in the 2021 survey were retained, and the phrasing of these questions generally remained the same, in the 2023 survey. This ensured the comparability of the results between the two surveys.

The questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese, Malay and Tamil to allow respondents to participate using their preferred language, and the translated questionnaires were vetted by a third-party vendor to ensure that the translations were accurate.

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 the fieldwork to test whether the questions were clear and easy to understand.

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

Key Survey Findings

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

Under Singapore’s laws, the death penalty is a punishment for the most serious crimes. In the 2023 survey, over three-quarters of the respondents (77.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that the death penalty should be used for “the most serious crimes” (Exhibit 1). This proportion was higher compared to that for the same question asked in the 2021 survey (73.7%) and the difference was statistically significant.

Exhibit 1: Attitudes Towards the Use of the Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes

Question	2023 Survey	2021 Survey
The Death Penalty should be used for the most serious crimes.	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 77.4%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 73.7%
	Neutral – 14.3%	Neutral – 15.1%
	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 8.3%	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 11.2%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

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 in the 2023 survey indicated that they felt that the death penalty deterred such crimes (41.5%), the crimes were serious and posed a danger to society (20.1%), the death penalty helped to keep Singapore safe (13.0%), and that the death penalty was a fair punishment that was commensurate with the most serious crimes (12.8%) (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 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	41.5
Crime Causes Serious Harm	These are serious crimes/ Danger to society	20.1
Maintains Order	To keep Singapore safe	13.0
Just Punishment	It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime	12.8
Just Punishment	To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye	2.0

*77.4% 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 up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents have been omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

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

As shown in Exhibit 1, in 2023, a small proportion (14.3%) of the respondents indicated that they were neutral with regard to the use of the death penalty for “the most serious crimes”. More than half of the respondents who indicated that they were neutral cited reasons related to

preference for discretionary sentencing, preference for rehabilitation, and concerns over disproportionate punishment (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 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	26.0
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	20.5
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	14.3
Disproportionate	Drug trafficking is less severe	9.8
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used	3.8
Ambivalence	Not sure	2.4
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment is also a severe punishment	2.1
Prefers Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence	Judge/ Police is in a better position to decide	2.0

*14.3% 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 up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents have been omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

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

Among the small minority (8.3%) of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of the death penalty for the most serious crimes in 2023, the most frequently cited reason was the preference for offenders to be given a second chance (29.9%) (Exhibit 4). The next most commonly cited reason amongst this group of respondents was that they believed in the sanctity of life (19.1%). A smaller proportion of respondents indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of the death penalty as the punishment was too harsh (8.9%).

Exhibit 4: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Disagreed/Strongly 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	29.9
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	19.1
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh	8.9
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	5.4
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	5.4
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	4.9
Human Rights	Death penalty is a violation of human rights	4.6

Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	2.9
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Alternative punishments such as a long prison term or caning would be more appropriate	2.4
Disproportionate	Drug trafficking and firearm offences are less severe	2.3
Risk of Miscarriage of Justice	Possibility of wrongful convictions	2.2

*8.3% of all respondents disagreed/strongly 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 up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents have been omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Attitudes Towards the Use of the **Mandatory** Death Penalty for the Most Serious 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 the **mandatory** death penalty, respondents were asked whether they agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment:

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

In the 2023 survey, the large majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the mandatory death penalty was appropriate as the punishment for these offences, with intentional murder being the offence that received the highest level of agreement (Exhibit 5). The proportions of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment for these offences were higher than in the 2021 survey, and the increases were statistically significant.

*Exhibit 5: Attitudes Towards the Use of the **Mandatory** Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes*

Question	2023 Survey	2021 Survey
The mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment for ...		
trafficking a significant amount of drugs	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 68.7%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 65.6%
	Neutral – 18.0%	Neutral – 14.4%
	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 13.3%	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 20.0%

discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with intent to cause physical injury	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 74.3%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 71.1%
	Neutral – 17.1%	Neutral – 16.1%
	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 8.6%	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 12.8%
intentional murder	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 85.0%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 80.5%
	Neutral – 10.4%	Neutral – 11.6%
	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 4.6%	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 7.9%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

*Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the **Mandatory Death Penalty** was an Appropriate Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes*

For all three offences, most of the respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment in the 2023 survey generally cited reasons such as the crimes were serious and posed a danger to the society, the death penalty deterred these crimes, or that the death penalty was a fair punishment that was commensurate with the crime (Exhibit 6). Specifically, a large proportion of respondents agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment for drug trafficking (51.7%) and firearm offences (40.0%) because these were serious crimes which posed a danger to society, while the proportion that indicated this reason for intentional murder (9.3%) was considerably lower. Across all these three crime types, a sizeable proportion of the respondents agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment because they felt that such a sentence was needed to deter against these crimes (drug trafficking – 30.6%; firearm offences – 16.7%; intentional murder – 17.3%).

*Exhibit 6: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Strongly Agreed/Agreed that the **Mandatory Death Penalty** was an Appropriate Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes*

Theme	Reason	% among those who strongly agreed/ agreed*
Drug Trafficking		
Crime Causes Serious Harm	Drug trafficking is a serious crime/ Danger to society	51.7
Provides Deterrence	To deter drug trafficking/ drug abuse	30.6
Just Punishment	It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime	7.1

Maintains Order	To keep Singapore safe	3.1
Just Punishment	Crime is committed intentionally	2.5
Firearm Offences		
Crime Causes Serious Harm	Firearm offences are serious crimes/ Danger to society	40.0
Provides Deterrence	To deter firearm offences	16.7
Maintains Order	To keep Singapore safe	11.0
Just Punishment	It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime	8.1
Just Punishment	There is intention to cause harm	6.3
Provides Deterrence	The danger/ destruction of firearms is evident in countries with lax firearm laws	4.1
Just Punishment	To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye	3.7
Just Punishment	There is intention to kill	2.8
Intentional Murder		
Just Punishment	It is a fair punishment / Commensurate with the crime	21.9
Just Punishment	Crime is committed intentionally	18.3
Provides Deterrence	To deter crimes	17.3
Just Punishment	To serve retributive justice / An eye for an eye	16.8
Crime Causes Serious Harm	Intentional murder is a serious crime/ Danger to society	9.3
Just Punishment	No right to take the victim's life/ Life is precious	7.5
Just Punishment	To give closure to victim's family members	2.1
Maintains Order	To prevent reoffending by the same individual	2.0

*% of respondents who strongly agreed/agreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking – 68.7%; firearms offences – 74.3%; intentional murder – 85.0%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents are highlighted. The percentages do not sum up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents have been omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

*Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to the **Mandatory Death Penalty** Being an Appropriate Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes*

A significantly smaller proportion of respondents (drug trafficking – 18.0%; firearm offences – 17.1%; intentional murder – 10.4%) were neutral with regard to the **mandatory** death penalty being an appropriate punishment for these three crime types (Exhibit 5) in the 2023 survey. Across all these three types, the most common reason cited by respondents who were neutral was that circumstantial factors had to be considered for sentencing (drug trafficking – 27.2%; firearm offences – 31.3%; intentional murder – 42.5%) (Exhibit 7). Many respondents in this category also felt that instead of stipulating that the **mandatory** death penalty be applied for all cases, the sentence should be decided on a case-by-case basis (drug trafficking – 13.7%; firearm offences – 16.4%; intentional murder – 18.2%). Some respondents also indicated that the offender should be given a second chance (drug trafficking – 23.0%; firearm offences – 5.0%; intentional murder – 14.7%).

*Exhibit 7: Reasons Provided by Respondents who were Neutral to the **Mandatory Death Penalty** Being an Appropriate Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes*

Theme	Reason	% among those who were neutral*
Drug Trafficking		
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	27.2
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	23.0
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	13.7
Disproportionate	Drug trafficking is less severe	5.3
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	4.5
Prefers Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence	Judge/ Police is in a better position to decide	3.3
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	3.3
Ambivalence	Not sure	2.9
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Alternative punishments such as a long prison term or caning would be more appropriate	2.4
Firearm Offences		
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	31.3
Disproportionate	Death penalty is appropriate only if victim died	18.8
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	16.4
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	5.0
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh if there is no intention to kill	4.2
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	4.1
Disproportionate	May not have resulted in injury or death	4.0
Offence is Irrelevant	Not a problem in today's society	2.3
Ambivalence	Not sure	2.3
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	2.1
Intentional Murder		
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	42.5
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	18.2
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	14.7
Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	5.1
Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	3.6
Pro-life	Believes in sanctity of life	2.1

% of respondents who were neutral to the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as a punishment: drug trafficking – 18.0%; firearms offences – 17.1%; intentional murder – 10.4%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents were omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Among respondents who indicated that they were neutral to the use of the **mandatory** death penalty for firearm offences, another commonly-cited reason was that the **mandatory** death penalty was disproportionate, as they felt that the death penalty would be appropriate for firearm offences only if the victim died (18.8%).

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

A small proportion of respondents (drug trafficking – 13.3%; firearm offences – 8.6%; intentional murder – 4.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was appropriate as the punishment for the three crime types covered in the 2023 survey (Exhibit 5). Many of the respondents in this category indicated that they preferred giving offenders a second chance instead of sentencing them to death (drug trafficking – 20.8%; firearm offences – 10.7%; intentional murder – 19.5%) (Exhibit 8). A sizeable proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of the **mandatory** death penalty also indicated that they felt that it was disproportionate to the crimes committed. In particular, a frequently-cited reason across the three crime types was that the **mandatory** death penalty was too harsh (drug trafficking – 12.1%; firearm offences – 10.1%; intentional murder – 5.5%). Specific to firearm offences, another commonly-cited reason was that the death penalty was appropriate only if the victim died (16.9%).

*Exhibit 8: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Disagreed/Strongly Disagreed that the **Mandatory Death Penalty** was an Appropriate Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes*

Theme	Reason	% among those who strongly disagreed/ disagreed*
Drug Trafficking		
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	20.8
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	12.1
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	9.5
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	9.3
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	7.4
Disproportionate	Drug trafficking is less severe	6.6
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Alternative punishments such as a long prison term or caning would be more appropriate	5.4
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	4.7
Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	4.3
Ineffective	Does not solve the main problem	3.6
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect	2.3
Ineffective	Mandatory death penalty is not an effective deterrent	2.1
Firearm Offences		
Disproportionate	Death penalty is appropriate only if victim died	16.9
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	11.0
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	10.7
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	10.1
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	9.3
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	8.5
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh if there is no intention to kill	5.1

Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	4.3
Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	2.4
Retributive	Death penalty is too easy on the offender	2.3
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Alternative punishments such as a long prison term or caning would be more appropriate	2.2
Disproportionate	May not have resulted in injury or death	2.1
Intentional Murder		
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	19.5
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	16.5
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	13.3
Retributive	Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty	11.8
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment should be used instead	6.8
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	5.5
Pro-Life	No right to take the offender's life/ life is precious	4.4
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Alternative punishments such as a long prison term or caning would be more appropriate	3.7
Human Rights	Death penalty is a violation of human rights	2.9
Ineffective	Death penalty is not an effective deterrent	2.4
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment can also keep the offender away from society	2.3
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change	2.3

*% of respondents who disagreed/strongly disagreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking – 13.3%; firearm offences – 8.6%; intentional murder – 4.6%.

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents were omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

A substantial proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the appropriateness of the **mandatory** death penalty for these three types of crime believed that circumstantial factors should be considered for sentencing (drug trafficking – 9.5%; firearm offences – 9.3%; intentional murder – 16.5%). A smaller proportion of respondents disagreed with the use of the **mandatory** death penalty for the three types of crime because they felt that the sanctity of life should be respected (drug trafficking – 7.4%; firearm offences – 11.0%; intentional murder – 13.3%).

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 disagreed/strongly 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.

In the 2023 survey, the proportion of respondents who chose the discretionary death penalty over life imprisonment as the more appropriate punishment was higher for firearm offences

(27.4%) and intentional murder (24.7%) as compared to drug trafficking (21.8%) (Exhibit 9). Correspondingly, the proportion of respondents who chose life imprisonment over the discretionary death penalty was higher for drug trafficking (56.1%) as compared to firearm offences (44.6%) and intentional murder (51.9%).

Exhibit 9: Preference for the Discretionary Death Penalty or Life Imprisonment Amongst Respondents who did not Agree that the Mandatory Death Penalty was Appropriate as a Punishment for the Most Serious Crimes

Question	2023 results	2021 results
<p><i>(For respondents who selected Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree for the question “The mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment for trafficking a significant amount of drugs.”)</i></p> <p>Between the discretionary death penalty and life imprisonment, which do you think is the more appropriate punishment for trafficking a significant amount of drugs?</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 21.8%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 56.1%</p> <p>I don’t know – 22.1%</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 22.6%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 61.6%</p> <p>I don’t know – 15.8%</p>
<p><i>(For respondents who selected Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree for the question “The mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment for discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with intent to cause physical injury.”)</i></p> <p>Between the discretionary death penalty and life imprisonment, which do you think is the more appropriate punishment for discharging or attempting to discharge a firearm with the intent to cause physical injury?</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 27.4%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 44.6%</p> <p>I don’t know – 28.0%</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 37.7%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 45.9%</p> <p>I don’t know – 16.4%</p>
<p><i>(For respondents who selected Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree for the question “The mandatory death penalty is appropriate as the punishment for intentional murder.”)</i></p> <p>Between the discretionary death penalty and life imprisonment, which do you think is the more appropriate punishment for intentional murder?</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 24.7%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 51.9%</p> <p>I don’t know – 23.4%</p>	<p>Discretionary Death Penalty – 39.6%</p> <p>Life Imprisonment – 45.9%</p> <p>I don’t know – 14.5%</p>

*% of respondents who did not agree (i.e., was neutral or disagreed/strongly disagreed) that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment: drug trafficking – 31.3%; firearms offences – 25.7%; intentional murder – 15.0%.

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Of the respondents who were neutral to, or disagreed that the mandatory death penalty was an appropriate punishment, the differences in preferences for the discretionary death penalty versus life imprisonment between the 2021 and 2023 surveys varied across the three types of crimes examined:

- (a) Drug trafficking: The proportion that indicated that the discretionary death penalty was the more appropriate alternative punishment in 2023 (21.8%) was similar to that in 2021 (22.6%). However, the proportion who indicated that they preferred life imprisonment in 2023 (56.1%) was lower than the proportion who indicated such in 2021 (61.6%).
- (b) Firearm offences: In 2023, the proportion who indicated that the discretionary death penalty was the more appropriate punishment was lower (27.4%) as compared to 2021 (37.7%). However, the proportion who indicated that the imposition of life imprisonment for firearm offences would be more appropriate was also lower in 2023 (44.6%) compared to 2021 (45.9%).
- (c) Intentional murder: In 2023, 24.7% of respondents indicated that the discretionary death penalty would be the more appropriate punishment, and this was lower than the corresponding figure from 2021 (39.6%). Correspondingly, 51.9% indicated that life imprisonment was more appropriate, and this was higher than the proportion who indicated such in 2021 (45.9%).

Respondents were also asked to provide the reason(s) behind their choices. In the 2023 survey, the most common reason cited by respondents who preferred the discretionary death penalty over life imprisonment across all three crime types was their belief that law enforcement authorities or the judges were in a better position to decide on the appropriate sentence (drug trafficking – 60.3%; firearm offences – 55.5%; intentional murder – 56.9%) (Exhibit 10). A closer examination of these responses found that while these respondents were open to having the death penalty, they trusted that the authorities or the judges would be able to make the right decision to assess if the offender indeed deserved the death penalty, and there should hence be scope for the authorities/ judges to make this decision. A sizable portion of respondents who chose the discretionary death penalty over life imprisonment did so because they felt that there should be discretion in sentencing, as circumstantial factors needed to be considered during sentencing (drug trafficking – 11.0%; firearm offences – 20.6%; intentional murder – 21.7%) and sentences should be decided on a case-by-case basis (drug trafficking – 17.9%; firearm offences – 6.8%; intentional murder – 9.6%).

Exhibit 10: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Felt that the Discretionary Death Penalty was a More Appropriate Punishment than Life Imprisonment for the Most Serious Crimes

Theme	Reason	% among those who thought that the discretionary death penalty was more appropriate than life imprisonment
Drug Trafficking		
Prefers Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence	Judge/ Police is in a better position to decide	60.3
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	17.9
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	11.0
Provides Deterrence	To deter drug trafficking/ drug abuse	4.6
Disproportionate	Mandatory death penalty is too harsh	3.9
Firearm Offences		
Prefers Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence	Judge/ Police is in a better position to decide	55.5
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	20.6
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	6.8
Just Punishment	Death penalty is still necessary	3.7
Disproportionate	May not have resulted in injury or death	2.9
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	2.9
Disproportionate	Death penalty is appropriate only if victim died	2.7
Intentional Murder		
Prefers Authorities to Decide on Appropriate Sentence	Judge/ Police is in a better position to decide	56.9
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	21.7
Discretionary	Sentence should be decided case-by-case	9.6
Just Punishment	Death penalty is still necessary	5.4
Less Resources	Life imprisonment requires more government resources	2.5

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents were omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

In the 2023 survey, respondents who preferred life imprisonment over the discretionary death penalty largely cited reasons pertaining to a preference for rehabilitating offenders. Specifically,

many of these respondents felt that life imprisonment would provide the offender with a second chance in life (drug trafficking – 38.7%; firearm offences – 27.4%; intentional murder – 23.6%) and would provide the offender with the opportunity to change for the better (drug trafficking – 9.3%; firearm offences – 20.7%; intentional murder – 28.5%) (Exhibit 11). Among respondents who indicated a preference for life imprisonment for drug trafficking offences, 10.3% of them also indicated that life imprisonment was sufficient for the offender to reflect on his/her crimes.

Exhibit 11: Reasons Provided by Respondents who Felt that Life Imprisonment was a More Appropriate Punishment than the Discretionary Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes

Theme	Reason	% among those who thought that life imprisonment was more appropriate
Drug Trafficking		
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	38.7
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect	10.3
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh	9.7
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change	9.3
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	5.2
Disproportionate	Drug trafficking is less severe	4.1
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment is also a severe punishment	3.4
Disproportionate	Death penalty would hurt the family of the offender	2.3
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	2.0
Firearm Offences		
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	27.4
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change	20.7
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	8.1
Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	5.4
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh	4.9
Disproportionate	Death penalty is appropriate only if victim died	4.7
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment is also a severe punishment	4.3
Retributive	Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty	4.0
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment can also keep the offender away from society	3.9
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	2.3
Disproportionate	Firearm offences are less severe	2.2

Intentional Murder		
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment provides opportunity to change	28.5
Allow Rehabilitation	Give offender a second chance	23.6
Pro-Life	Believes in sanctity of life	7.7
Disproportionate	Death penalty is too harsh	6.9
Allow Rehabilitation	Prefers rehabilitation	6.5
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment can also keep the offender away from society	5.7
Retributive	Life imprisonment is more torturing than death penalty	3.9
Prefers Alternative Punishment	Life imprisonment is also a severe punishment	3.6
Allow Rehabilitation	Life imprisonment is sufficient for offender to reflect	3.2
Discretionary	Circumstantial factors must be considered	2.6
Risk of Miscarriage of Justice	Possibility of wrongful conviction	2.2

Note: Reasons cited by 5% or more respondents were highlighted. The percentages do not sum up to 100% as reasons cited by fewer than 2% of the respondents were omitted from this exhibit. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

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

Taking into consideration the question on whether the mandatory death penalty was appropriate, as well as the responses to the follow-up question on whether the discretionary death penalty or life imprisonment would be more appropriate instead, more than 75% 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.¹ The proportion who agreed that some form of the death penalty was appropriate was the highest for intentional murder (88.7%), followed by firearm offences (81.3%) and drug trafficking (75.5%). These proportions were comparable with those from the 2021 survey (drug trafficking – 73.4%; firearm offences – 82.0%; intentional murder – 88.2%).

Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the deterrent effect of the death penalty. The survey found that in 2023, the large majority of the respondents strongly agreed/ agreed that the death penalty deterred murder, firearm offences and drug trafficking offences in Singapore – an average of 89.4% across the three types of crime covered (**Exhibit 12**). A large proportion of respondents (an average of 83.6%) also strongly agreed/ agreed that removing

¹ % of respondents who agreed with some form of death penalty = (% of respondents who strongly agreed/agreed for the first question on the mandatory death penalty being appropriate as the 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).

the death penalty would likely increase the number of murders, firearm offences or the amount of drugs trafficked into Singapore.

Exhibit 12: Respondents' Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
The death penalty deters ... in Singapore			
trafficking of significant amount of drugs	87.9%	7.5%	4.6%
firearm offences	90.2%	7.2%	2.6%
murder offences	90.2%	6.7%	3.1%
Removing the death penalty would likely increase ...			
the amount of drugs trafficked into Singapore	82.8%	12.1%	5.1%
the number of firearm offences in Singapore	83.8%	12.0%	4.2%
the number of murders in Singapore	84.1%	11.7%	4.2%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Respondents were also asked whether they felt that the death penalty had an additional deterrent effect over life imprisonment. In 2023, an average of 81.7% of the respondents strongly agreed/ agreed the death penalty was a more effective deterrence compared to life imprisonment across the three types of crime ([Exhibit 13](#)).

Exhibit 13: Respondents' Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty versus Life Imprisonment for the Most Serious Crimes

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Compared to life imprisonment, the death penalty is more effective in deterring people from ... in Singapore			
trafficking significant amount of drugs	79.7%	12.5%	7.8%
committing firearm offences	82.4%	12.2%	5.4%
committing murder offences	83.0%	11.5%	5.5%

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

The proportions of respondents who strongly agreed/ agreed with the statements in this section on the deterrent effect of the death penalty were higher across the board in 2023 compared to the same questions in 2021 ([Exhibit 14](#)). The differences in proportions between the two surveys were statistically significant for all the questions in this section.

Exhibit 14: Comparison of Results between the 2023 and 2021 Surveys for Questions that Examined Respondents' Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty

Question	2023 results ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree")	2021 results ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree")
The death penalty deters ... in Singapore		
trafficking of significant amount of drugs	87.9%	83.2%
firearm offences	90.2%	85.9%
murder offences	90.2%	85.9%
Compared to life imprisonment, the death penalty is more effective in deterring people from ... in Singapore		
trafficking significant amount of drugs	79.7%	73.7%
committing firearm offences	82.4%	77.4%
committing murder offences	83.0%	77.8%
Removing the death penalty would likely increase ...		
the amount of drugs trafficked into Singapore	82.8%	79.2%
the number of firearm offences in Singapore	83.8%	79.0%
the number of murders in Singapore	84.1%	79.5%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages derived in the above exhibit.

Perceptions of the Deterrent Effect of the **Mandatory** Death Penalty

To better understand how respondents felt about the effectiveness of the **mandatory** death penalty as a deterrence, respondents in the 2023 survey were asked three new questions about: (a) the deterrent effect of the **mandatory** death penalty, (b) whether the replacement of the **mandatory** death penalty with the discretionary death penalty would result in an increase in serious crimes in Singapore, and (c) whether they would prefer to retain the **mandatory** death penalty in Singapore.

The survey found that the large majority (drug trafficking – 86.6%; firearm offences – 87.2%; intentional murder – 90.3%) of the respondents believed that the **mandatory** death penalty was a strong deterrent against the respective crimes (Exhibit 15). Similarly, when asked if the replacement of the **mandatory** death penalty with the discretionary death penalty would lead to an increase in the three types of serious crime in Singapore, the majority of the respondents (drug trafficking – 73.6%; firearm offences – 76.5%; intentional murder – 79.0%) strongly agreed or agreed that it would. When respondents were then asked if they would prefer to retain the **mandatory** death penalty for the three types of offences, most respondents indicated that they would prefer so (drug trafficking – 75.6%; firearm offences – 82.2%; intentional murder – 87.7%).

*Exhibit 15: Respondents’ Perceptions on the Deterrent Effect of the **Mandatory Death Penalty** for the Most Serious Crimes*

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
The mandatory death penalty is a strong deterrent against ... in Singapore			
trafficking a significant amount of drugs	86.6%	8.0%	5.4%
committing firearm offences	87.2%	9.0%	3.8%
committing intentional murder	90.3%	6.4%	3.3%
If the discretionary death penalty were applied – i.e., a situation where the death penalty may or may not be imposed – there will be an increase in ... in Singapore			
drug trafficking activities	73.6%	18.5%	7.9%
firearm-related activities	76.5%	16.9%	6.6%
intentional murder offences	79.0%	15.4%	5.6%
I would prefer that the mandatory death penalty be retained for ... in/into Singapore			
trafficking a significant amount of drugs	75.6%	13.6%	10.8%
firearm offences	82.2%	11.4%	6.4%
intentional murder offences	87.7%	7.7%	4.6%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Respondents were also asked in the 2023 survey whether the mandatory death penalty was a greater deterrent than the discretionary death penalty. This question had also been asked in the 2021 survey. Across all three crime types, most respondents in the 2023 survey (drug trafficking – 82.3%; firearm offences – 85.8%; intentional murder – 87.7%) felt that the mandatory death penalty was a greater deterrent than the discretionary death penalty ([Exhibit 16](#)). These proportions were higher than the corresponding results in the 2021 survey, and the increases were statistically significant.

Exhibit 16: Respondents’ Perceptions of Whether the Mandatory Death Penalty was a Greater Deterrent than the Discretionary Death Penalty for the Most Serious Crimes

Question	2023 results (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”)	2021 results (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”)
The mandatory death penalty is a greater deterrent than the discretionary death penalty, i.e., a situation where the death penalty may or may not be imposed, in cases of ...		
trafficking of significant amount of drugs	82.3%	74.9%
firearm offences	85.8%	77.9%
murder offences	87.7%	78.4%

Note: In the 2021 run, the question was phrased as “Compared to the discretionary death penalty, the mandatory death penalty is more effective in deterring people from ... in Singapore”. Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

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. In 2023, the large majority of the respondents had confidence in Singapore’s criminal justice system to ensure that accused persons in death penalty cases undergo fair and

rigorous investigations (88.7%) and trials (87.9%) (Exhibit 17). Most of the respondents also believed that there were adequate safeguards in Singapore’s justice system to ensure there were no wrongful executions (84.3%). The proportion of respondents that strongly agreed/ agreed for the three statements in this section remained relatively similar between the 2023 and 2021 surveys.

Exhibit 17: Respondents’ Confidence in the Singapore Criminal Justice System

Question	2023 results	2021 results
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.	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 88.7% Neutral – 10.1% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 1.2%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 88.5% Neutral – 9.8% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 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.	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 87.9% Neutral – 10.6% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 1.5%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 88.1% Neutral – 10.3% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 1.6%
I believe there are adequate safeguards in Singapore’s justice system to ensure that there are no wrongful executions.	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 84.3% Neutral – 13.5% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 2.2%	Strongly Agree/ Agree – 85.3% Neutral – 12.8% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree – 1.9%

Note: Sampling weights were applied to derive the percentages in the above exhibit.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from MHA’s 2023 survey on Singapore residents’ attitudes towards the death penalty showed that the majority of Singapore residents agreed with the use of the death penalty for the most serious crimes, and that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment for trafficking of a significant amount of drugs, the discharge of firearms, and intentional murder. The large majority of Singapore residents also agreed that the death penalty was a strong deterrent, that it had a greater deterrent effect on serious crimes than life imprisonment, and that the **mandatory** death penalty had a greater deterrent effect than the discretionary death penalty. In addition, most respondents were 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.

In comparison with the previous survey conducted in 2021, the 2023 survey found that a higher proportion of Singapore residents: (i) agreed with the use of the death penalty for the most serious crimes in Singapore, (ii) agreed that the death penalty had a deterrent effect against the trafficking of a significant amount of drugs, the discharge of firearms and intentional murder, (iii) agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was an appropriate punishment for the three abovementioned offences, (iv) agreed that the death penalty was a more effective deterrent than life imprisonment against the three abovementioned offences, and (v) agreed that the **mandatory** death penalty was a more effective deterrent than the discretionary death penalty against the three types of offences.

APPENDIX 1 – Demographic Characteristics of Survey Sample

Demographics of respondents		Percentage (%) of respondents
Citizenship	Singaporeans	86.7
	Permanent Residents	13.3
Gender		
Gender	Male	49.3
	Female	50.7
Age		
Age	15 - 19 Years	6.1
	20 - 29 Years	15.1
	30 - 39 Years	16.3
	40 - 49 Years	17.2
	50 - 59 Years	17.2
	60 - 69 Years	15.7
	70 Years and above	12.4
Ethnicity		
Ethnicity	Chinese	75.2
	Malay	12.7
	Indian	9.3
	Others	2.8
Religion		
Religion	No Religion	18.4
	Buddhism	34.8
	Taoism	6.7
	Islam	16.1
	Hinduism	4.8
	Sikhism	0.3
	Roman Catholic	4.5
	Christianity	14.4
Education		
Education	PSLE and below	21.0
	O-level/N-level	19.0
	ITE Certificate	6.7
	A Level	6.0
	Polytechnic Diploma	13.5
	Professional qualification and postgraduate diploma	6.4
	Degree and above	27.4

Housing type	HDB 1-Room	2.1
	HDB 2-Room	3.5
	HDB 3-Room	18.1
	HDB 4-Room	39.2
	HDB 5-Room/ Executive/ Shophouse	30.1
	Condo & Landed	7.0
Personal Monthly Income (Only for Respondents who are Employed)	\$0 - \$1,999	20.5
	\$2,000 - \$3,999	34.2
	\$4,000 - \$5,999	22.1
	\$6,000 - \$7,999	11.3
	\$8,000 - \$9,999	4.8
	\$10,000 and above	7.1

Note: The percentages displayed for the demographic traits in the above table were not weighted.