



PROFILES ON MANITOBA

ATTITUDES
OF THE
MANITOBA POPULATION
TOWARD
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A telephone survey undertaken on a random sample of 1734 Manitoba households on the topic of capital punishment produced the following major results:

- 82.5% of the Manitoba population favour the death penalty for the killing of either police officers or prison guards.
- 86% favour the death penalty for pre-meditated murder.
- 32.5% favour the death penalty for drunk driving causing death.
- 48.1% favour the death penalty for sexual abuse of children.
- 35.4% of respondents state that their opinions have changed as a result of recent killings of police officers and prison guards.
- Those with lower levels of education support the death penalty more frequently than those with university education.
- Most of the Manitoba population feel that stricter gun control laws and the death penalty would reduce the frequency of murders.

1. INTRODUCTION

This seventh PROFILE ON MANITOBA measures public attitudes toward capital punishment and examines relationships between attitudes and respondents' gender and education levels. The study is based on random telephone interviews with 1734 Manitoba households conducted from November 26 to 29 and December 3 to 5, 1984. This sample size is theoretically accurate to within 2.5%, 19 times out of 20.

2. SUPPORT FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

There is currently a great deal of discussion in the media, the House of Commons, and among individuals concerning the pros and cons of the death penalty. Some feel that capital punishment should apply to all capital crimes, others only in the case of slain police officers and prison guards, yet others feel it should not exist at all. What is the opinion of the Manitoba population?

We asked people if they would support the application of the death penalty for a variety of crimes, as opposed to other polls which have asked only if people would support re-instating capital punishment without dealing with a range of potential circumstances.

TABLE 1
DO YOU SUPPORT THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY FOR THOSE FOUND
GUILTY OF THE FOLLOWING CRIMES?

	YES	NO	DK	NR
SEXUAL ASSAULT OF CHILDREN	48.1%	45.4%	5.6%	0.9%
KILLING OF EITHER POLICE OFFICERS OR PRISON GUARDS	82.5%	13.7%	3.1%	0.7%
PLANNED MURDER	86.0%	10.8%	2.5%	0.8%
RAPE LEADING TO DEATH OF THE VICTIM	82.0%	13.6%	3.6%	0.8%
DEATHS RESULTING FROM TERRORIST ACTS	77.9%	15.6%	5.5%	0.9%
DEATH RESULTING FROM DRUNK DRIVING	32.5%	59.1%	7.3%	1.0%
HOBBERY IN WHICH SOMEONE IS KILLED	60.9%	30.5%	7.2%	1.4%

It can be seen that a large majority of the respondents favour the death penalty for those crimes which are commonly discussed in association with capital punishment, such as pre-meditated murder and the killing of police officers and prison guards. It is also apparent that substantial numbers of people support the death penalty for such crimes as drunk driving causing deaths, and sexual assault of children. This result is surprising, especially since our question concerning sexual assault of children did not specify that death of a child would result, and was deliberately placed first so as to not be influenced by the other questions where deaths were specified.

Overall, these results show greater support for capital punishment than have other studies. Have the events of the past year, including the slaying of several on-duty police officers, seriously influenced the public's opinion?

TABLE 2

CAN YOU TELL ME IF THE RECENT DEATHS OF POLICE OFFICERS AND PRISON GUARDS HAVE CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DEATH PENALTY?

	(Percent)
YES	35.4
NO	61.0
DON'T KNOW	3.1
NO RESPONSE	0.5
	100.0

Interestingly, about one-third of the respondents report that recent events have caused them to change their opinions. We also found that of those who have changed their minds, a very high percentage, BUT NOT ALL, have come to favour capital punishment. This 35% may be indicative of a temporary change in public opinion and not an underlying value system.

It is important to realize that factors such as respondents' gender and education may influence the results obtained. It appears that there is no significant difference between males and females in favouring the death penalty, however the education level of respondents is a very strong factor in this study:

TABLE 3

DO YOU SUPPORT THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY FOR THOSE FOUND GUILTY OF THE FOLLOWING CRIMES?

	High School Or Less	Percent "YES" Some Post-Secondary	University
SEXUAL ASSAULT OF CHILDREN	54.7%	43.4%	24.5%
KILLING OF EITHER POLICE OFFICERS OR PRISON GUARDS	87.0%	80.1%	66.5%
PLANNED MURDER	90.0%	84.6%	70.6%
RAPE LEADING TO DEATH OF THE VICTIM	86.3%	79.3%	67.4%
DEATHS RESULTING FROM TERRORIST ACTS	80.8%	75.0%	69.4%
DEATH RESULTING FROM DRUNK DRIVING	36.3%	30.3%	18.8%
ROBBERY IN WHICH SOMEONE IS KILLED	68.0%	55.4%	36.3%

It is clear that the more educated respondents are less in favour of the death penalty as a means of dealing with the specified crimes than are those with lower levels of education. While 90% of those with an education of high school or less are in favour of the death penalty for pre-meditated murder, only 70.6% of those who have completed university education are so in favour. Half as many with university education than those with high school or less education favour the death penalty for sexual assault of children.

3. DETERRENCE AND PREVENTION

Our poll sought out people's opinions concerning capital punishment as an effective deterrent of murder and also asked them about potential methods of preventing such crime:

TABLE 4

DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	DK	NR
STRICTER GUN CONTROL LAWS WOULD REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MURDERS	59.3%	2.6%	33.8%	4.1%	0.3%
THE DEATH PENALTY WOULD REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MURDERS	72.2%	2.5%	20.0%	5.1%	0.2%

It seems that more people think that the death penalty is an effective way of reducing the number of murders than think that stricter gun control laws would reduce the number of murders. It is not fair, however, to state that Manitobans' thinking is as simple as this, since there is plenty of room for measures which would combine both deterrence and prevention. When these questions were broken down by gender and education, several interesting patterns were revealed. We found that 71% of females, and only 47% of males, think that stricter gun control laws would effectively reduce the number of murders. Furthermore, 76% of females and 68% of males feel that the death penalty would act as a deterrent to murder. However, only 49% of those with completed university education feel that the death penalty would reduce the number of murders versus 79% of those with high school or less, and while 60% of those with high school or less feel stricter gun control laws would be effective, an equal amount (61%) of those with university education feel the same way.

4. SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, most Manitobans feel that the death penalty is a suitable measure to be applied to those who have committed crimes such as pre-meditated murder or the killing of police officers or prison guards. Also, a number of people favour the death penalty for crimes such as sexual assault of children and drunk driving causing deaths. People with university educations are less in favour of capital punishment than those with high school or less education. The very low rates of "don't know" and "no response" in this poll indicate a high level of interest in this topic among Manitobans in general.

Secondly, most people feel that both deterrent and preventive measures would effectively reduce the number of murders, with females favouring gun controls more frequently than males. However this is a complex matter that could be dealt with more thoroughly in the future.

Third, a substantial number of people have recently altered their opinions about the death penalty as the result of recent events. This may indicate that law makers and the judiciary should not regard current public opinion as the "norm", and institute immediate measures, but should carefully consider the many ramifications of this complex problem.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

A systematic random sample of 3000 telephone numbers was drawn directly from the Manitoba Telephone System data base. Households were contacted between 5:00 PM and 9:30 PM from November 26 to 29 and December 3 to 5, 1984. Any number which generated a "no answer" or busy signal was re-introduced back into the pool. Refusals were discarded. The sample size for this survey is 1734 and a total of 2152 households were contacted, for a refusal rate of 19 percent.

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE QUALITY

A sample size of 1734 for a population of 1.1 million provides an error level of less than 2.5 percent, 19 times out of 20. This level of precision exceeds that of the Gallup Poll and the 4 percent standard of scientific precision common in survey research. Refusals were about 19 percent.

To assess representativeness, Gender, Income, Location and Age are compared to what is known about the population of Manitoba from secondary sources such as the 1981 Census and 1982 tax files.

1. Gender	Institute for Social & Economic Research Poll #7 (1984)	Statistics Canada
Female	59%	51%
Male	41%	49%

Females tend to be over-represented in the survey just conducted. Therefore, estimates of response are weighted by a simple proportionality factor. This has only a very slight effect on results and is unimportant in viewing the survey as a whole.

2. Median Income	Institute for Social & Economic Research Poll #7 (1984)	Revenue Canada (1982)
Less than \$21,000	38%	38%
\$21,000 to \$35,000	28%	29%
Greater than \$35,000	25%	34%
No response	9%	

3. Location	Institute for Social & Economic Research Poll #7 (1984)	Statistics Canada *
Winnipeg	65%	57%
Non-Winnipeg	35%	43%

*Reported in Winnipeg Free Press December 4, 1984

4. Age	Institute for Social & Economic Research Poll #7 (1984)	Statistics Canada *
18 - 24	14%	16%
25 - 44	43%	39%
45 - 64	26%	28%
65 +	17%	10%

* These percentages are derived from the population of Manitoba age 18 and over.

There is a tendency for this sample to over-represent the 65+ and 25- to 44-yearold age group and to under-represent the 18 to 24 and 45 to 64 age group. This is most likely the effect of a differential refusal rate between two age groups, rather than as a result of the sampling procedure. Since age is a relatively unimportant variable in the context of this survey, estimates of responses for the age groups mentioned are not weighted by a simple proportionality factor as has been done in other surveys.

In summary, the sample drawn is very representative of the Manitoba population. The slight misrepresentations of gender and residence location (standard problems in telephone surveys) are resolved by weighting the estimates.

	Refusals
Winnipeg	76.4%
Non-Winnipeg	23.6%
Female	65.4%
Male	34.6%

These data show significantly higher refusals for Winnipeg respondents and for women; however, while refusals are non-random, this has not invalidated any of the results reported herein.

Other Profiles on Manitoba in this series are: (Volume 1)

1. Attitudes of the Manitoba Population Toward Bilingualism Policies Proposed by the Provincial Government.
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