

In Globe poll, most favor life term for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

Boston residents stick to beliefs

By [Brian MacQuarrie](#) Globe Staff, September 16, 2013, 12:00 a.m.
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“I’m a strong opponent of the death penalty because I feel it serves no purpose. It’s not a deterrent,” said Lawrence Watson, a Dorchester resident.

By a wide margin, Boston residents favor life without parole instead of the death penalty for Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev if he is convicted of the attack, a Boston Globe poll found.

The poll, conducted Sept. 5 through Sept. 12, showed that 57 percent of respondents support a life sentence for Tsarnaev, compared with 33 percent who favor the death penalty. Although capital punishment is barred in Massachusetts, Tsarnaev has been indicted on federal charges, including using weapons of mass destruction, that could bring the death penalty.

Federal investigators say that Tsarnaev, 20, and his brother, Tamerlan, detonated two pressure cookers packed with explosives near the finish line of the Marathon on April 15. Three people were killed and more than 260 were injured, many seriously. Tamerlan died April 19 in a shootout with police in Watertown.

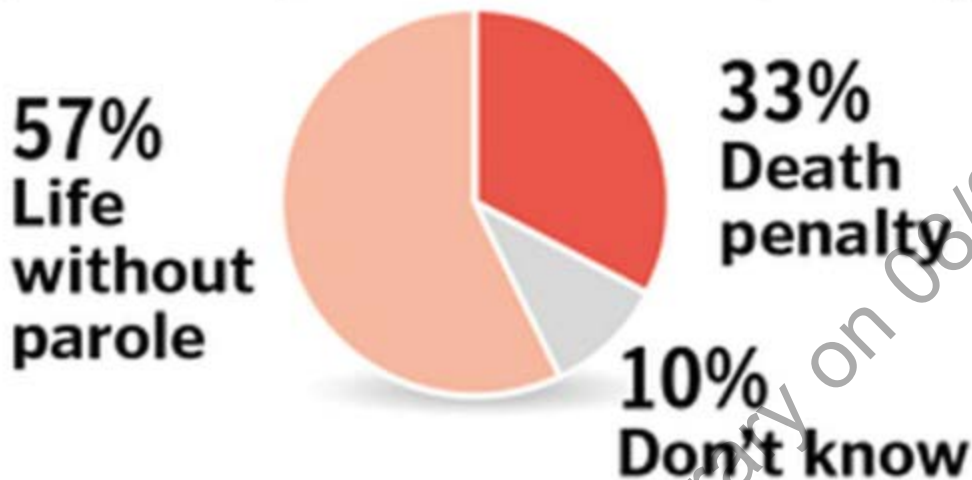
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The random telephone poll was conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center for the Globe and included responses from 704 adults in Boston. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

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“I’m a strong opponent of the death penalty because I feel it serves no purpose. It’s not a deterrent,” said Lawrence Watson, 49, of Dorchester, who participated in the survey. “In my opinion, individuals who commit murder don’t think about the penalty, or they think they’re so clever that they will get away with it.”

Q: If convicted, should Tsarnaev get life in prison or death penalty?



SOURCE: University of N.H. Survey Center
Margin of error: +/- 3.7 percentage points

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US Attorney General Eric Holder will decide whether to seek the death penalty in the case.

Preference for life without parole extended across political leanings, although Democrats overwhelmingly supported that option, 61 to 28 percent, while Republicans narrowly backed a life sentence, 49 to 46 percent.

Life without parole was endorsed by men and women, across all education levels, and among white, black, and Hispanic respondents.

The results “don’t surprise me, frankly,” said Andrew Smith, director of the UNH Survey Center. “Massachusetts is a state that has opposed the death penalty for a long time. There’s a long history there. People are not going to change their long-held positions.”

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Although a life sentence without parole received support in nearly all demographic categories, the penalty had more support from women than men — 64 percent and 50 percent respectively — and from older and more affluent Bostonians.

Lawmakers in Massachusetts, which has not executed anyone since 1947, have repeatedly defeated efforts to reinstate the death penalty. In 1997, however, an attempt to reestablish capital punishment failed by a single vote in the emotional aftermath of the abduction and murder of Jeffrey Curley, a 10-year-old from Cambridge.

Still, some respondents favor the death penalty in the Marathon bombing case because of the indiscriminate violence that was unleashed.

“A lot of people were hurt, and a lot of families were affected,” said Alicia Jno-Baptiste, 36, of Mattapan, who supports the death penalty for Tsarnaev if convicted. “They intended to kill thousands of people.”

Life without parole is insufficient, she said, because “you still get to live. You’re still alive. You can still be happy,” Jno-Baptiste said. “The people they were trying to kill, they won’t be able to do that stuff. He knows what he intended to do, and I think he could live with that in jail and be pretty OK.”

In other survey questions, Bostonians said by 53 to 37 percent that the US government can do more to prevent attacks such as the Marathon bombing. However, respondents told pollsters, by 43 to 36 percent, that they believed US intelligence agencies did not have information about the Tsarnaev brothers that could have prevented the bombings.

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In the wake of the attack, Smith said, “a lot of the story was how much did the feds know and could they have been more helpful in stopping the bombs. Only a third of the people really believe that. I think there’s a recognition among a lot of people that these are unusual events and they are difficult to predict.”

In May, Boston Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis testified in Washington before the House Homeland Security Committee that federal agents did not tell local officials that they had investigated Tamerlan Tsarnaev until after the FBI identified his body. Tamerlan reportedly met with Muslim insurgents in 2012 in the restive Dagestan region of southern Russia.

“We were not aware of the two brothers. We were not aware of their activities,” Davis testified. “We would have liked to have known.”

Boston Democrats, by 47 to 31 percent, said that federal intelligence agencies could not have stopped the bombing plot. Independents and Republicans were more open to the possibility that the blasts could have been prevented.

Independents, by 49 to 32 percent, said the attack could have been stopped. Republicans narrowly supported that premise, 40 to 38 percent.

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