The principal justification employed by advocates of the mandatory life sentence for murder invokes public opinion. It has long been claimed that replacing the mandatory sentence with anything less than automatic life imprisonment would undermine public confidence in the criminal justice system. Although the claim has been made repeatedly, in the almost 50 years since the introduction of the life sentence for murder no research has ever explored public attitudes to sentencing for murder or the mandatory life sentence. The current research project explored the nature of public attitudes to sentencing murder drawing upon a representative survey of the general public as well as focus group sessions. In this seminar we describe the state of public knowledge of murder statistics and the life sentence, as well as attitudes towards sentencing in specific cases of murder.

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