

Poll: More than half of N.J. residents find Dharun Ravi sentencing too lenient

Published: Thursday, June 07, 2012, 12:01 AM Updated: Thursday, June 07, 2012, 12:51 PM



Kathleen O'Brien/The Star-Ledger

By



Enlarge

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Dharun Ravi is sworn in during a hearing at the Middlesex County Courthouse in New Brunswick, where he appeared to request he start his 30-day sentence. 5/30/12 (John O'Boyle/The Star-Ledger)

[Dharun Ravi requests to begin jail time gallery \(15 photos\)](#)

Just over half of New Jersey residents believe **the 30-day jail sentence** given to Dharun Ravi for spying on his gay roommate was "not tough enough," according to a Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

That view held consistent across the normal divides of politics, gender and race.

Another 39 percent found Ravi's sentence of jail time plus probation, a fine and community service to be "the punishment he deserves," while just 7 percent called it "too tough."

"It suggests with all the discussion about bullying, people are taking this much more seriously than they did before — and that maybe the judge should've too," said poll director David Redlawsk.

The case — which triggered an impassioned national debate about bias laws, gay rights and sexual privacy in the internet era — was followed by an astonishing 97 percent of respondents.

"To have only three percent say they'd heard nothing about the case is very unusual," said Redlawsk, a political science professor at Rutgers. "The story really captured their attention."

The more people knew about the case, the more likely they were to say Ravi should have received a tougher sentence.

"Wow," said Stephen Russell, a University of Arizona expert in anti-gay bullying, when told of the results. "It's a bit of a surprise, because I might have imagined more people thinking the sentence was 'too tough.'"

He suggested the case served as a referendum on bullying, with the poll capturing the frustration of people who feel their hands are tied when it comes to eliminating it.

The telephone poll of 1,191 adults was conducted May 31-June 4 just as Ravi apologized for his actions and surrendered to begin his jail term. His apology was rejected by the parents of Tyler Clementi, the roommate who committed suicide shortly after learning Ravi had made his assignments with a male visitor the subject of dorm gossip.

Prosecutors are appealing the sentenced handed down by Superior Court Judge Glenn Berman, who deviated from state guidelines which mandated a lengthier prison term because he said he felt Ravi's actions didn't warrant going to prison with those convicted of murder, armed robbery and rape.

Ravi's peers — those 18 to 29 — were the age group most likely to see the sentence as too lenient. While 51 percent of all respondents felt the sentence was too light, that number jumped to 57 percent in the youngest category.

Redlawsk said he could've seen that group going either way — either identifying the Clementi, the victim, or with Ravi, the freshman who landed in deep trouble for a

Video: Judge delivers sentence of 30 days in jail to Dharun Ravi

Superior Court Judge Glenn Berman delivered a sentence of 30 days in jail to Dharun Ravi. In addition to the sentence he has to do community service and pay a \$10,000 fine. (Video courtesy of News12 TruTV/InSession)

OPINIONS ON THE RAVI TRIAL

Question: How much have you heard about this story?



Question: Was the sentence given to Ravi too tough, not tough enough, or did Ravi get the sentence he deserves?



Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

"They seem to have come down on the side of Tyler," said Redlawsk.

College-age students have shown themselves to be the "least patient" with anti-gay harassment, said Russell.

Video: Dharun Ravi surrenders to begin jail sentence

On Thursday, Dharun Ravi surrendered to the Middlesex County Sheriff's Office to begin his 30-day jail sentence. Ravi was convicted in March of using a remote webcam to spy on his roommate Tyler Clementi during an intimate encounter with a man. (Video by Michael Monday/The Star-Ledger)

Recent immigrants — those born outside the United States — were the group most likely to feel Ravi's sentence was too tough. Yet only 12 percent believed that, while a plurality of 43 percent said he received the sentence he deserved. The other 40 percent thought it wasn't harsh enough.

The divisions that usually show up in polls were absent in this one, Redlawsk noted. The opinions of Republicans, Democrats and independents were almost identical, as were those of blacks and whites.

Amidst the overall consensus, however, there were small pockets of deviation:

- Men and women felt the same about the case, overall, with one exception: 10 percent of men called the sentence too tough, while only 3 percent of women did.
- Hispanics showed the highest dissatisfaction with the sentence, with 62 percent deeming it not tough enough.
- Born-again Christians were also more likely overall (59 percent) to criticize the verdict as too lenient.

Russell said that matches earlier research showing that among those who object to homosexuality on religious grounds, "the more religious you are, the least tolerant you are of intolerance."

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