

Lay judge conviction rate 99.8% so far

Kyodo

Five people were given death sentences and five trials resulted in acquittals in the first two years of the lay judge criminal trial system, court records show.

A review of the records indicates a tendency for heavier sentences to be imposed for sex crimes than under the old system.

More suspended sentences with probation were also issued, compared with trials in which only professional judges presided, according to the records compiled by the Supreme Court.

From May 21, 2009, when citizens started serving alongside professional judges for trials involving heinous crimes, and the end of this March, 3,377 people were indicted for crimes mandating trial under the lay judge system, of whom 2,060 received rulings.

Of them, 2,055, or 99.8 percent, were found guilty, including two people found not guilty on some counts.

In addition to the five people handed the death penalty, 43 people were sentenced to life in prison.

The death sentences were issued at district courts in Yokohama, Sendai, Miyazaki, Tokyo and Nagano between November 2010 and March.

The cases tried in Miyazaki and Nagano each involved the killing of three people, the cases in Yokohama and Sendai each involved the killing of two people, and the case in Tokyo involved the killing of one person. The defendant in the Tokyo case had earlier served time for another murder.

In all five cases, the defendants appealed their sentences to higher courts.

Prosecutors sought death sentences in two other cases, both involving the killing of two people.

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