

Black Voters Want More Safety *and* *More Justice*

New polling commissioned by FWD.us shows that **criminal justice reform remains a major priority for Black voters**, the vast majority of whom want bold policy changes to reduce incarceration.¹ With the midterm elections fast approaching, these results could not have come at a better time for elected officials and candidates who are campaigning on these issues.

Key Findings

FIG 1A

8 in 10 Black voters believe it is important to reduce the number of people in jail and prison

In your opinion, how important or unimportant is it to reduce the jail and prison population in the United States?



FIG 1B

81% of Black voters would either be more likely to vote for a candidate who supported reducing incarceration or say it would make no difference to their vote

And if a candidate for elected office supported reducing the jail and prison population, would you be more or less likely to vote for that candidate?

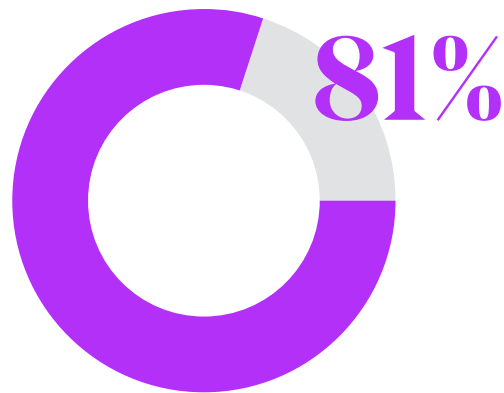


FIG 2

By a 3 to 1 margin, Black voters are more likely to believe there are too many people in prison than too few people in prison

Do you think there are too many people in prison in the United States, too few people in prison, or is the number of people in prison about right?



FIG 3

By a 4 to 1 margin, Black voters are more likely to believe we need more reforms to reduce incarceration than to believe we should undo policy changes that have reduced incarceration.

In recent years, lawmakers and voters in many states have approved reforms to the criminal justice system, including policy changes to reduce incarceration. When thinking about this, which of the following comes closest to your view, even if none are exactly right.

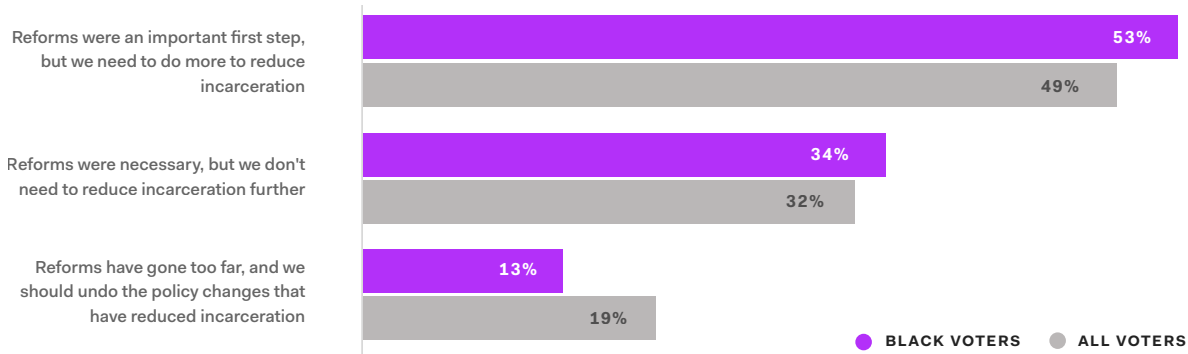


FIG 4

Black voters support a wide range of bold policy reforms to reduce incarceration

Below is a list of policy changes that elected officials might consider as part of criminal justice reform efforts. Please indicate whether you support or oppose each reform.

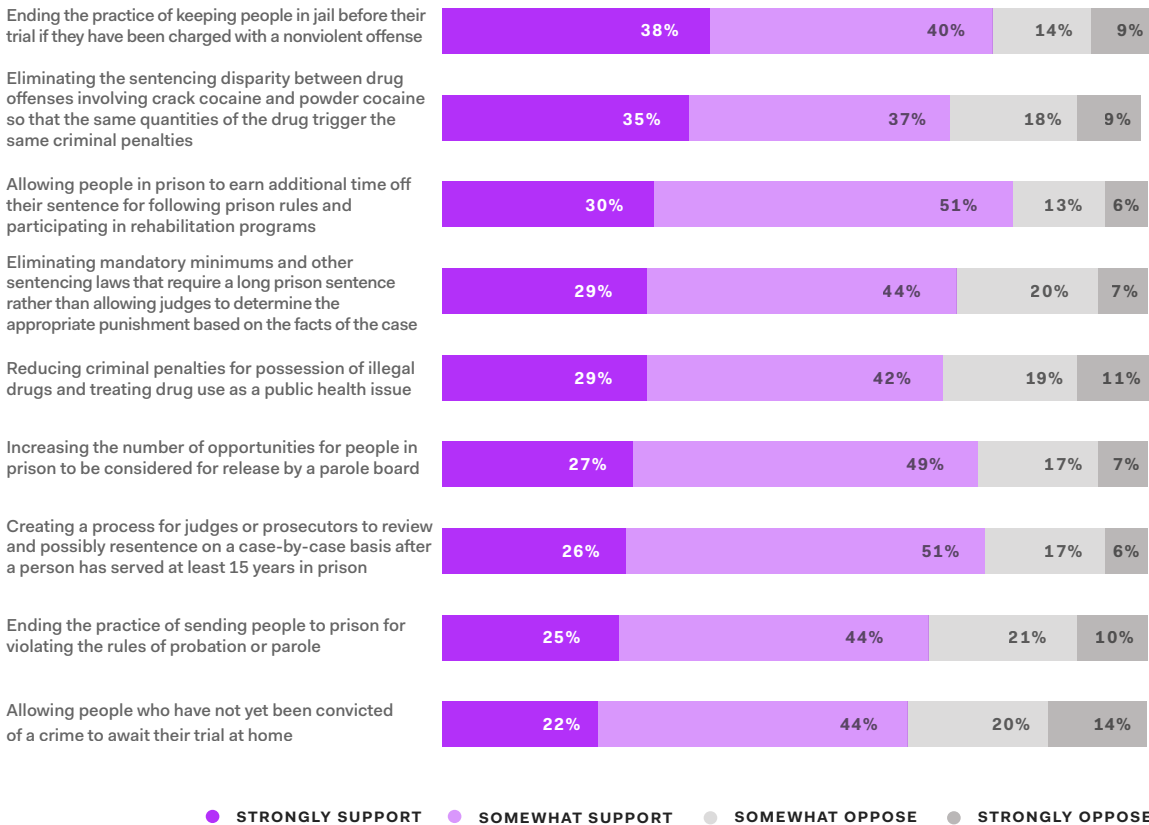


FIG 5

Black voters believe the economy and inflation are the most important issues in the midterm elections and prioritize other issues that affect their safety—such as gun violence, racism and discrimination, and political extremism—over crime.

Please select the top issue that you believe candidates should be focused on in the upcoming 2022 midterm election.

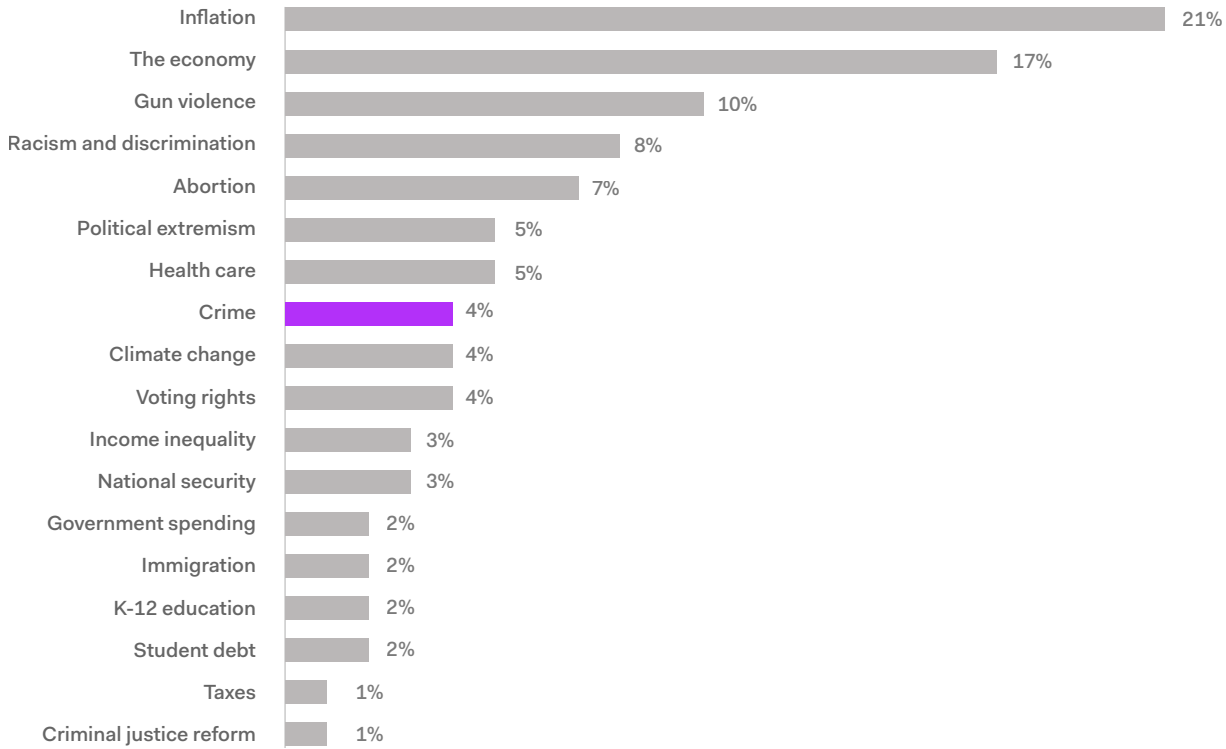
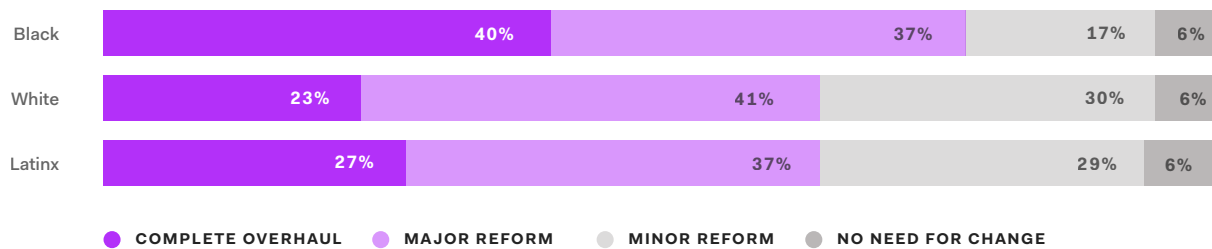


FIG 6

3 in 4 Black voters believe the criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul or major reform

Do you think the American criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul, major reform, minor reform, or is there no need for change



Context

For the past several years, both major political parties have touted their work on criminal justice reform as a way to demonstrate their commitment to one of the most pressing issues in Black communities. Recently, in a blatant attempt to scare voters and roll back important bipartisan policy victories, some politicians and opponents of criminal justice reform have seized on increases in gun violence and justifiable concerns about public safety to make crime the political wedge issue in this election cycle. Much of the rhetoric and political attack ads from these opponents have recycled the worst, most regressive framing of the “tough on crime” era to scapegoat criminal justice reform. Many claim to act on behalf of or in service to Black communities but veer far from the research on Black voters’ actual views on crime, safety, and incarceration.

While Black voters are not a monolith, their consensus on crime, safety and justice is clear: more arrests, more prosecutions, and more incarceration is not the best path to public safety and what communities really need to address gun violence and the inter-related problems of income inequality, housing insecurity, the mental health crisis, and drug overdoses is more investment in education, affordable housing, trauma recovery, treatment and other programs that also address the root causes of crime.

Black communities also have more and better information about policy solutions having been at the forefront of recent reforms that have secured more safety and justice together. **There is no criminal justice reform without Black voters. Black people have long been at the center of many of the most significant political, grassroots and intellectual advancements to end mass incarceration.**

This clear understanding that more public safety and less incarceration are complementary rather than conflicting is not surprising given that the structural inequality embedded in our society causes **Black communities to bear a disproportionate share of the harms of both incarceration and of crime.** In 2021, Black people were

15% more likely to be the victims of a violent crime than white people² and prior research shows that 68% of Black people or someone they care for have experienced gun violence.³ Black women are 2.5 times more likely to be murdered by men than white women and Black transgender women face higher levels of homicide than transgender women of any other race.⁴ Despite being victimized at higher rates than other Americans, **Black people are the least likely to receive the government support they need to heal and recover from crime.**⁵

At the same time, Black people have also long been the most harmed by incarceration and the extreme racial disparities that exist at every point in the criminal justice system and become even more acute at the deepest ends of the criminal justice system. **Black people make up less than 14% of the population⁶ but nearly 27% of the people who are arrested,⁷ 30% of the people on community supervision,⁸ and over 32% of the people in prison.⁹** As a result, Black people are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of white people¹⁰ and are 50% more likely to have an immediate family member who has spent time in jail or prison.¹¹

While there are many false narratives right now about the public safety priorities of Black voters, the results of the recent polling conducted by Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies show that **Black people are the most likely to want major reforms to the criminal justice system and to support policies to reduce incarceration.** And while crime is a concern to Black voters, it is less of a concern than other issues that affect the safety of Black communities such as gun violence, racism and discrimination, and political extremism. As a result, Black voters roundly reject a return to the failed policies that contribute to community violence and led to mass incarceration in the first place. Black voters want more safety and more justice and expect their elected officials and candidates to continue supporting bold criminal justice reforms.

Methodology

Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a survey of n=1,405 likely voters nationally, including an oversample of n=352 Black voters. The poll fielded from October 6 to October 10, 2022. The sample was weighted to ensure it was proportionately representative of likely voters nationwide. The overall margin of sampling error is $\pm 5.18\%$ at the 95% confidence level.

Endnotes

- 1 Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies, "New National Polling on Support for Criminal Justice Reform," October 2022, <https://www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FWD.us-Criminal-Justice-Release-Poll-Memo.pdf>
- 2 Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp. "Criminal Victimization, 2021." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. September 2022. Available online: "<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv21.pdf>"
- 3 Alliance for Gun Responsibility. "Gun Violence in the Black Community: Myths and Facts." March 15, 2022. Available online: <https://gunresponsibility.org/blog/gun-violence-in-the-black-community-myths-and-facts/>
- 4 Storm Ervin and Susan Nembhard, "Invest in Black Lives to Protect Black Lives: How the Public Sector Can Reduce Crime and Victimization," The Urban Institute, July 10, 2020. Available at: <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/invest-black-lives-protect-black-lives-how-public-sector-can-reduce-crime-and-victimization>
- 5 Common Justice. "Eliminating Barriers to Healing: An Examination of Victim Compensation in New York State." Available online: [https://8670822.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8670822/Reports/FAVC%20Report%2027_05%20Final%20\(1\).pdf](https://8670822.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8670822/Reports/FAVC%20Report%2027_05%20Final%20(1).pdf)
- 6 United States Census Bureau. "Quick Facts." Available online: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>
- 7 Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Crime in the U.S., 2019." Available online: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/persons-arrested>
- 8 Jake Horowitz & Connie Utada. "Community Supervision Marked by Racial and Gender Disparities." Pew Charitable Trusts. December 6, 2018. Available online: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/12/06/community-supervision-marked-by-racial-and-gender-disparities>
- 9 E. Ann Carson. "Prisoners in 2020 – Statistical Tables." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. December 2021. Available online: <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/prisoners-2020-statistical-tables>
- 10 Ashley Nellis. "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons." The Sentencing Project. October 13, 2021. Available online: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/#:~:text=Key%20findings,Black%20Wisconsinites%20is%20in%20prison>
- 11 FWD.us, "Every Second: The Impact of the Incarceration Crisis on America's Families," December 2018. Available online: <https://everysecond.fwd.us/downloads/everysecond.fwd.us.pdf>