

# New National Polling on Support for Criminal Justice Reform

OCTOBER 20, 2022

## Key Findings

Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a poll on behalf of FWD.us to understand voters' attitudes towards crime and the criminal justice system, their views on criminal justice reform, and how they think and feel about candidates that support policies designed to reduce the number of people incarcerated in jails and prisons.

Despite the increase in crime coverage, voters strongly support policies that would reform the criminal justice system and reduce prison sentences. **As the midterm elections approach, voters across the political spectrum want their candidates and elected officials to endorse policies aimed at reforming the criminal justice system**, including policy changes at the state and local level that will reduce incarceration.

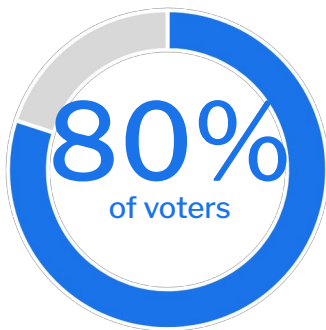
### Contact

Shannon Currie  
Vice President, Benenson Strategy Group  
[scurrie@bsgco.com](mailto:scurrie@bsgco.com)

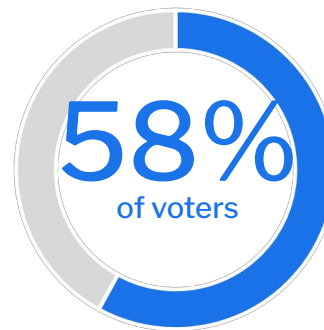
Ben Wilentz  
Associate, Benenson Strategy Group  
[bwilentz@bsgco.com](mailto:bwilentz@bsgco.com)

Robert Blizzard  
Partner, Public Opinion Strategies  
[robert@pos.org](mailto:robert@pos.org)

### General Views of Criminal Justice Reform



support criminal justice reform

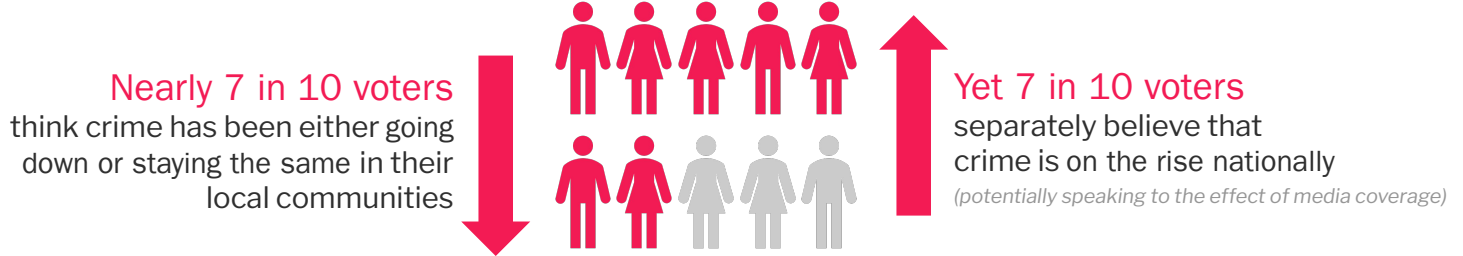


would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform

*compared to only 13% who would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform.*

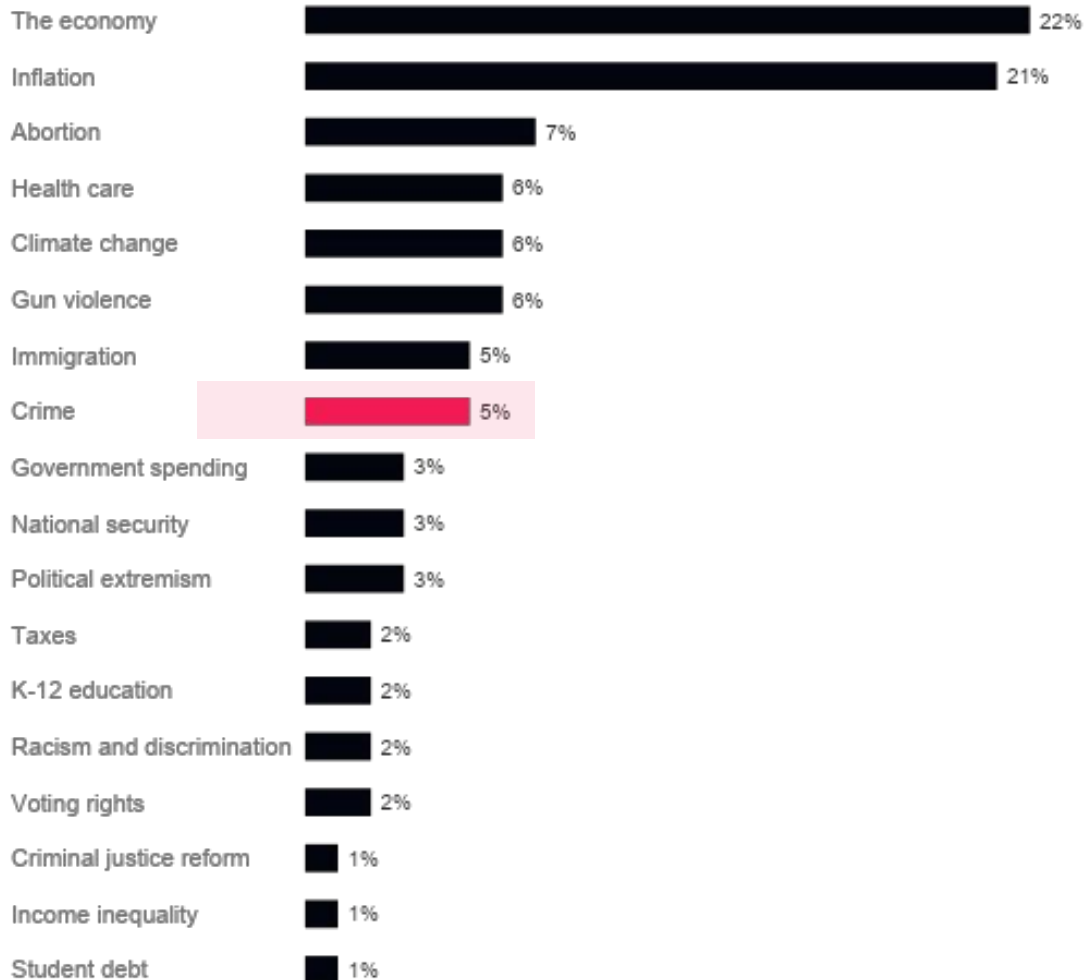
Support of Criminal Justice Reform	Strongly support	Total support
All Likely Voters	36%	80%
Dems	44%	85%
Inds	31%	80%
Reps	32%	74%

Issue  
Priorities



As a result, only 5% of voters name crime as the top issue in the midterm elections, far below the economy (22%) and inflation (21%), and below abortion (7%), health care (6%), climate change (6%), and gun violence (6%). Even among Republicans, only 6% ranked crime as the top issue that candidates should be focusing on in the upcoming 2022 elections.

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

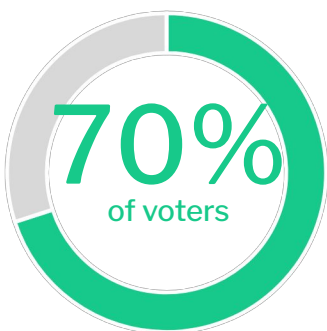
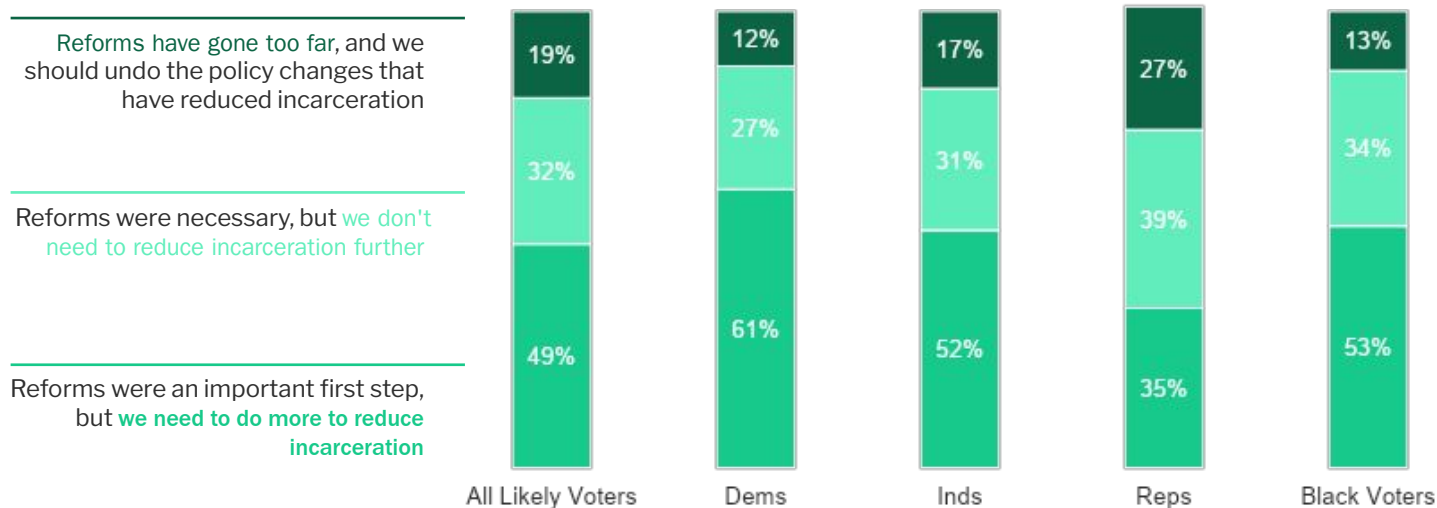


Support for Reforms to Reduce Incarceration

Overall, 66% of voters believe the criminal justice system needs either a complete overhaul or major reform, including 3 in 5 Republicans. Almost half of voters, including a majority of Democrats and Independents, agree that recent reforms to the criminal justice system were an important first step, but we need to do more to reduce incarceration. Only 1 in 5 voters, including just over 1 in 4 Republicans, feel that reforms to the criminal justice system have gone too far and should be undone.

Amount of Criminal Justice Reform Needed	Complete overhaul	Major reform	Minor reform	No need for change
All Likely Voters	26%	40%	28%	6%
Dems	30%	48%	17%	4%
Inds	22%	37%	35%	6%
Reps	25%	34%	33%	8%

Which of the following comes closest to your view, even if none are exactly right?



believe it is important to reduce the number of people in jail and prison.



Additionally, 71% of voters would either be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports reducing the number of people in jail or prison, or a candidate's support for reducing incarceration would make no difference in their vote. Only 29% of voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports reducing incarceration.

## Support for Specific Policies

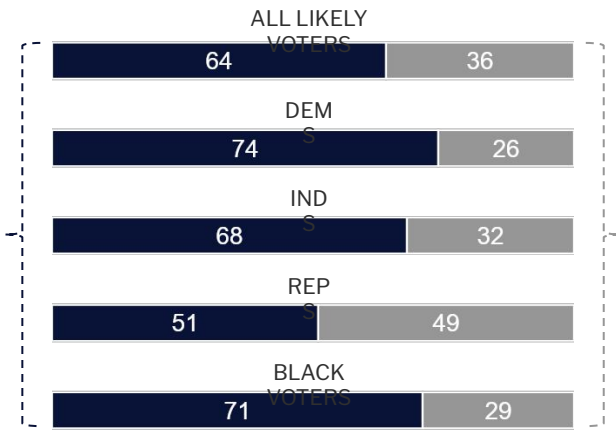
A majority of voters across party lines, including a strong majority of Black voters, support a broad array of policies to lower incarceration rates. Expanding earned time credits, Second Look resentencing, ending pretrial detention for nonviolent charges, and the sentencing reform contained in federal legislation known as the EQUAL Act garnered the most support.

% who support each policy change	All Likely Voters	Dems	Inds	Reps	Black Voters
Allowing people in prison to earn additional time off their sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs	81%	84%	82%	76%	81%
Creating a process for judges or prosecutors to review and possibly resentence on a case-by-case basis after a person has served at least 15 years in prison	76%	81%	81%	67%	77%
Ending the practice of keeping people in jail before their trial if they have been charged with a nonviolent offense	75%	80%	78%	69%	77%
Eliminating the sentencing disparity between drug offenses involving crack cocaine and powder cocaine so that the same quantities of the drug trigger the same criminal penalties	72%	77%	74%	64%	73%
Increasing the number of opportunities for people in prison to be considered for release by a parole board	71%	77%	75%	60%	76%
Eliminating mandatory minimums and other sentencing laws that require a long prison sentence rather than allowing judges to determine the appropriate punishment based on the facts of the case	69%	76%	72%	60%	73%
Reducing criminal penalties for possession of illegal drugs and treating drug use as a public health issue	65%	75%	71%	51%	71%
Allowing people who have not yet been convicted of a crime to await their trial at home	63%	72%	61%	55%	66%
Ending the practice of sending people to prison for violating the rules of probation or parole	61%	73%	65%	47%	70%

Voters are nearly twice as likely to say that taxpayer money spent on incarceration would be better spent on community-based services than they are to say that incarceration is worth the cost because it protects public safety.

Which of the following statements on criminal justice reform that a candidate for elected office might make do you agree with more?

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and taxpayers spend \$200 billion on the criminal justice system every year. That's an expensive use of taxpayer money that would be better spent on community-based services that address the root causes of crime such as education, job training, and drug and mental health treatment.

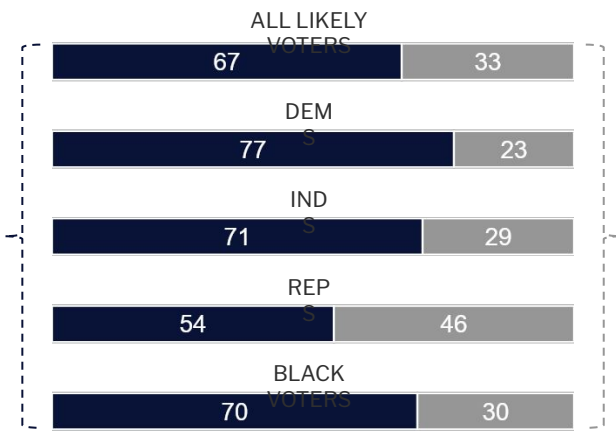


The size of the prison population and the cost to taxpayers doesn't matter. People who have committed crimes need to be punished with incarceration, and the cost of the criminal justice system is a price we need to pay to protect public safety.

2 in 3 voters believe that the best way to keep communities safe is to invest in community-based services rather than spend on jails and prisons, as opposed to only 1 in 3 who believe that the best way to keep communities safe is to have zero tolerance for crime and keeping people who have committed crimes in jail or prison.

Which of the following statements on criminal justice reform that a candidate for elected office might make do you agree with more?

The best way to keep our communities safe is to prevent crime from happening in the first place. This means spending more money on schools, mental health and drug treatment, affordable housing, and other services in the community rather than more money on jails and prisons.



The best way to keep our communities safe is to have zero tolerance for criminals who break the law. This means keeping people who have committed crimes in jail or prison so there's no chance they can threaten innocent people again.

**Methodology**

Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a survey of n=1405 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 ±2.5% at the 95% confidence level.