



Key findings from a national survey of 1,200 registered voters conducted March 7-14, 2010.



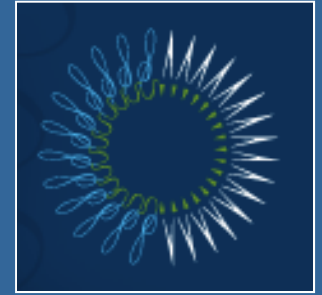
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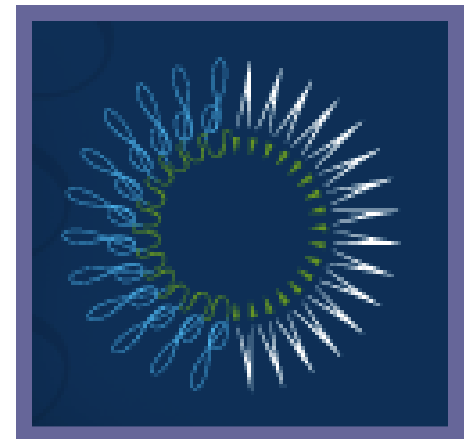
Methodology:



On behalf of the Pew Center on the States, Public Opinion Strategies conducted phone interviews with 1,200 registered voters (1,080 landline and 120 cell phone only respondents) on March 7-14, 2010 with a margin of error of $\pm 2.83\%$.

For this survey, we used a replicate sample format. The total number of 1,200 interviews were segmented into replicate samples of 600 each. The samples thus mirrored each other in terms of demographic and geographic characteristics.

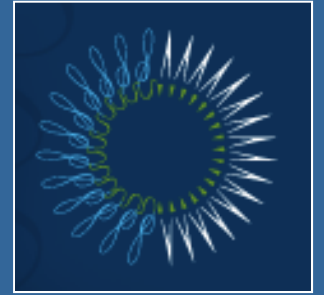
Key Takeaways



Voters have a few fundamental thoughts about public safety...

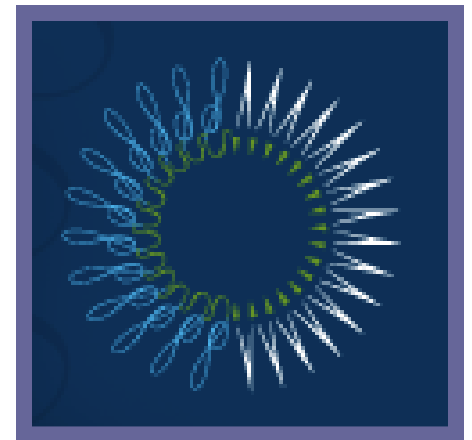
- 1. The emphasis must be on keeping communities and people safe, first and foremost.**
- 2. Without question, voters want a strong public safety system where criminals are held accountable and there are consequences for illegal activities**
- 3. They do believe a strong public safety system is possible while reducing the size and cost of the prison system.**

Key Takeaways



Voters do demonstrate receptivity to public safety reform approaches that can simultaneously reduce reliance on prison and shrink state budgets.

Lessons Learned



Voters say the primary reason to send someone to prison is to “protect society.”

	<u>2001</u>	<u>2010</u>
Protect Society	21%	31%
Rehabilitate	40%	25%
Punish	21%	20%
Provide Justice to Victims*	NIA	10%
Deter Others	12%	8%

**Provide justice to victims was not asked in 2001*

In your opinion, what should be the main purpose of sending a person to prison...



What do people “know” about the criminal population?

What percentage of people in prison in the United States are currently serving time for a violent offense?

Mean Score:

43%

What percent of people currently in prison in the United States do you think could be released from prison who would not pose a threat to overall public safety?

Mean Score:

22%

What percentage of the people currently in prison in the United States have a history of substance abuse of alcohol or drugs?

Mean Score:

64%

What percent of the offenders released from prison will return to prison within three years for violating their parole or committing another crime?

Mean Score:

61%



There are BIG perceptual differences in the way people approach violent and non-violent offenders.

From a series of focus groups we learned:

- **There is often considerable empathy expressed for a non-violent offender and their life circumstances.**
- **Participants look for punishments that do not include prison, opting for community service or other punishments.**
- **Substance abuse treatment and job training are often considered appropriate.**
- **Paying back the victim or restitution are viewed favorably.**
- **Recognition we should look at the “whole offender” and take that into account when determining the appropriate consequence.**

While patience wears thin for repeat offenders, a majority of voters do not “always” support prison for a first time offender for any number of non-violent offenses.

Activity	% Always for First Time Offender	% Always for Probation/Parole Offender
Possession of illegal drugs with intent to sell	47%	63%
Burglary of a residence during the daytime when no one is home	43%	58%
Possession of methamphetamines	38%	52%
Sale of illegal drugs	37%	55%
Stealing a car	32%	48%
Possession of cocaine	32%	44%
Shoplifting or theft resulting in loss of property of less than one thousand dollars	9%	17%
Possession of two ounces of marijuana	9%	17%

Voters are also supportive though of reducing prison time as a sentencing option IF there are mechanisms that will hold them accountable and make people feel safe.

Message	% Strongly Favor	% Total Favor
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders so that state funding can be used to keep violent criminals in prison for their full sentence.	58%	87%
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders and re-invest some of the savings to create a stronger probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.	52%	87%

The support for reduction in prison time is supported across political affiliation...

% Strongly Favor by Party

Message	GOP (37%)	IND (20%)	DEM (41%)
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders so that state funding can be used to keep violent criminals in prison for their full sentence.	49%	47%	67%
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders and re-invest some of the savings to create a stronger probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.	50%	53%	66%



And is supported across the country.

% Strongly Favor by Region

Message	Northeast (22%)	Midwest (22%)	South (34%)	West (23%)
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders so that state funding can be used to keep violent criminals in prison for their full sentence.	60%	55%	57%	50%
Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders and re-invest some of the savings to create a stronger probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.	56%	57%	58%	58%

**Voters want to make sure that,
whatever the punishment,
offenders do not commit further
crimes after being released from
prison.**

**This includes support for reducing
length of stay for offenders who are
more likely to succeed outside
prison.**

The bottom line... let's reduce crime.

It does not matter whether a non-violent offender is in prison for twenty-one or twenty-four or twenty-seven months. What really matters is the system does a better job of making sure that when an offender does get out, he is less likely to commit another crime.

% Strongly Agree

75%

% Total Agree

91%



There is significant support for reducing length of prison stays for non-violent inmates when they participate in programs aimed at reducing recidivism.

% Strongly Acceptable

% Total Acceptable

Allow prison inmates convicted of non-violent crimes to earn more time off their prison terms for completing programs like literacy and substance abuse treatment that are designed to increase their chances for success when they are released.

68%

90%

Allow inmates convicted of non-violent crimes to be released up to six months early if they have committed a non-violent offense, have behaved well in prison, and based on an evaluation are considered a low-risk for committing another crime.

65%

90%

Voters can support community-based alternatives to prison, such as a stronger probation and parole system.

Voters' top priority for a stronger probation and parole system is focused on holding offenders accountable.

Prison is not always required and voters recognize the important role that probation and parole can play in reducing crime.

An effective probation and parole system would use new technologies to monitor where offenders are and what they are doing, require them to pass drug tests, and require they either keep a job or perform community service.

% Strongly Agree

77%

% Total Agree

95%

When asked how the probation and parole systems could be strengthened, there was substantial and intense support behind these items, again reflecting a strong desire for accountability and consequence.

% Top Priority

% Top/High Priority

Requiring offenders to pay child support.

38% 79%

Requiring offenders to pay victim restitution, which is meant to cover the victim's expenses resulting from the crime.

35% 72%

Giving probation and parole officers more training.

31% 66%



Voters are moved by language that suggests they could be getting more bang for their investment in corrections.



Voters support spending less on prisons and reinvesting in programs that have been shown to reduce recidivism.

Prisons are a government program, and just like any other government program they need to be put to the cost-benefit test to make sure taxpayers are getting the best bang for their buck.

% Strongly Agree

% Total Agree

63% **84%**

Ninety-five percent of people in prison will be released. If we are serious about public safety, we must increase access to treatment and job training programs so they can become productive citizens once they are back in the community.

66% **89%**

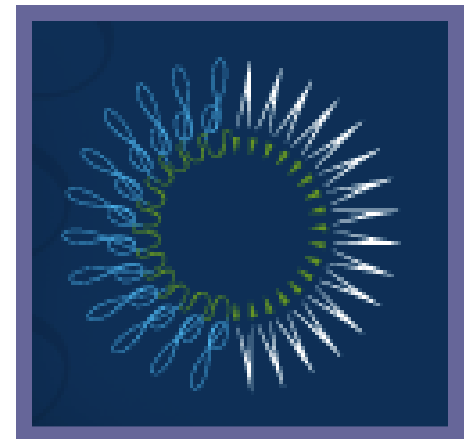


An important reminder... there is a budget rationale for making a shift in public safety thinking, but the stronger positioning rests with a public safety argument.

THIS ...tests better than... THIS

	<u>% Strongly Agree</u>		<u>% Strongly Agree</u>
➤ An effective probation and parole system would use new technologies to monitor where offenders are and what they are doing, require them to pass drug tests, and require they either keep a job or perform community service.	77%	➤ Our spending on corrections has grown from ten billion dollars to fifty billion dollars over the last twenty years but we are not getting a clear and convincing return on that investment in terms of public safety.	56%
➤ It does not matter whether a non-violent offender is in prison for twenty-one or twenty-four or twenty-seven months. What really matters is that the system does a better job of making sure that when an offender does get out, he is less likely to commit another crime.	75%	➤ Some of the money that we are spending on locking up low-risk, non-violent inmates should be shifted to strengthening community corrections programs like probation and parole.	51%

Toward a Policy Prescription



Voter recognition of serious budget struggles in the states sets the stage for public policy reform.

**Country Headed On
Wrong Track**

63%

**Economic Issues Most
Important State Issue**

54%

**Recognize State Has
Budget Shortfall**

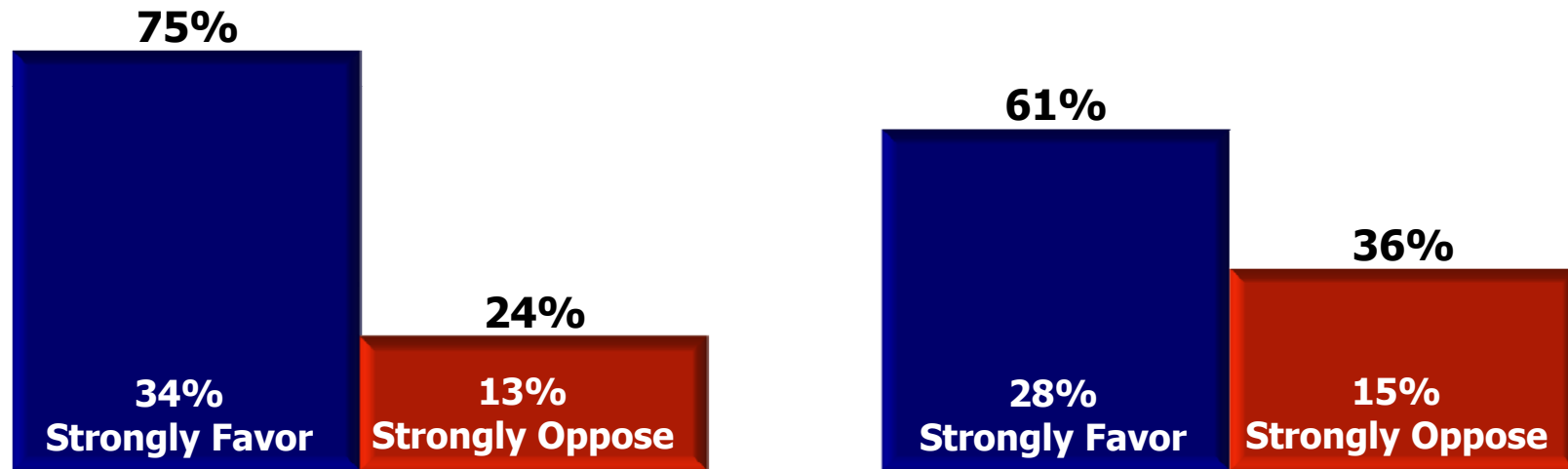
84%

Given the range of unpalatable options, voters are seemingly less offended at reduced funding for prisons than they are for education funding or higher taxes.

Budget Cutting Proposals Ranked by % Strongly Not Acceptable

Proposal	% Strongly Not Acceptable
Reducing funding for K-12	71%
Raising property taxes	60%
Reducing funding for health care services	58%
Reducing funding for higher education	55%
Raising business taxes	39%
Reducing funding for state prisons	27%
Raising income taxes for wealthy individuals	23%
Reducing funding for transportation projects	21%

There is broad support for reduced prison emphasis to help close budget deficits.

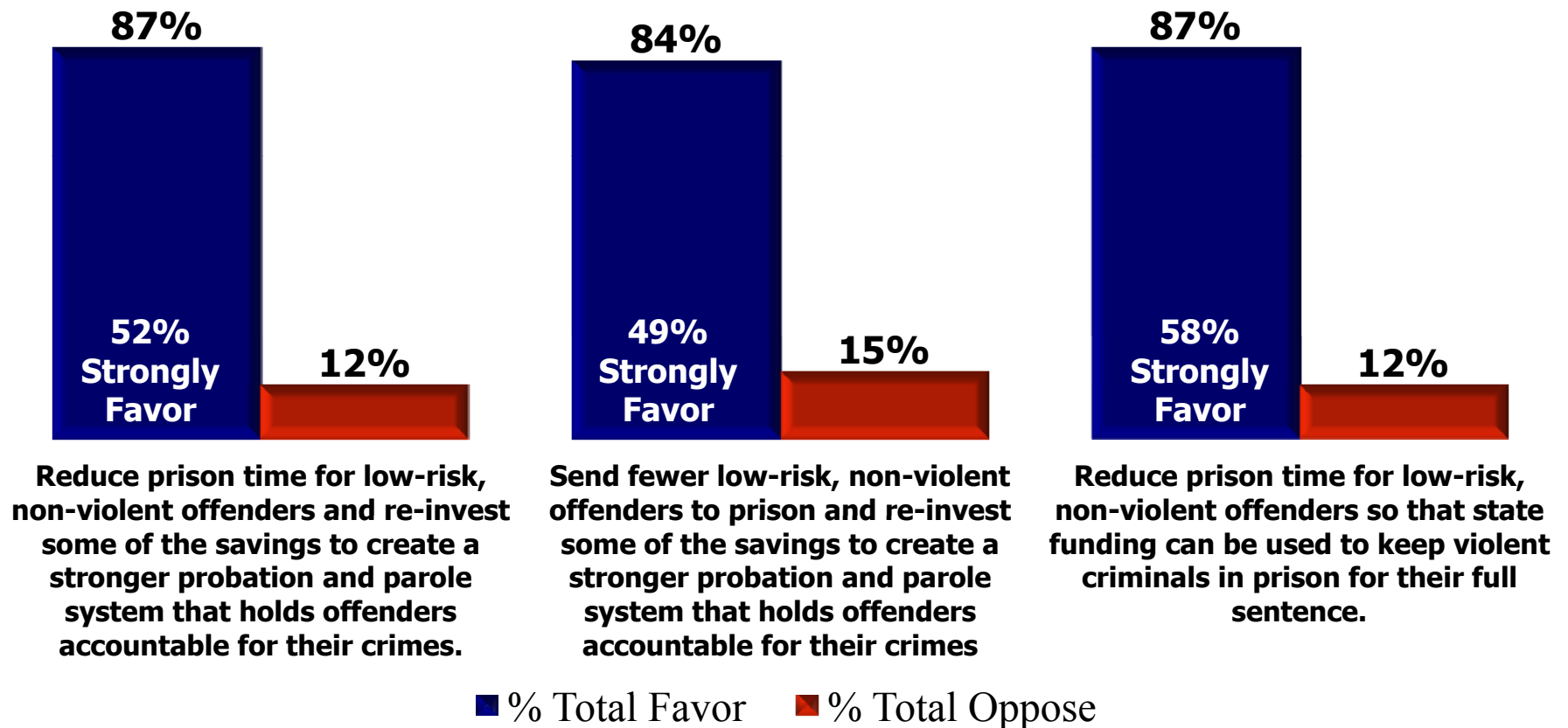


Reduce prison time for low-risk non-violent offenders in order to help close the budget deficit.

Send fewer low-risk non-violent offenders to prison in order to help close the budget deficit.

■ % Total Favor ■ % Total Oppose

Support intensifies when the focus is turned to reinvesting the savings into an even stronger public safety system.



There are some things we can and should avoid.



- **Do not frame changes to the corrections system only as a way to save the state money.**



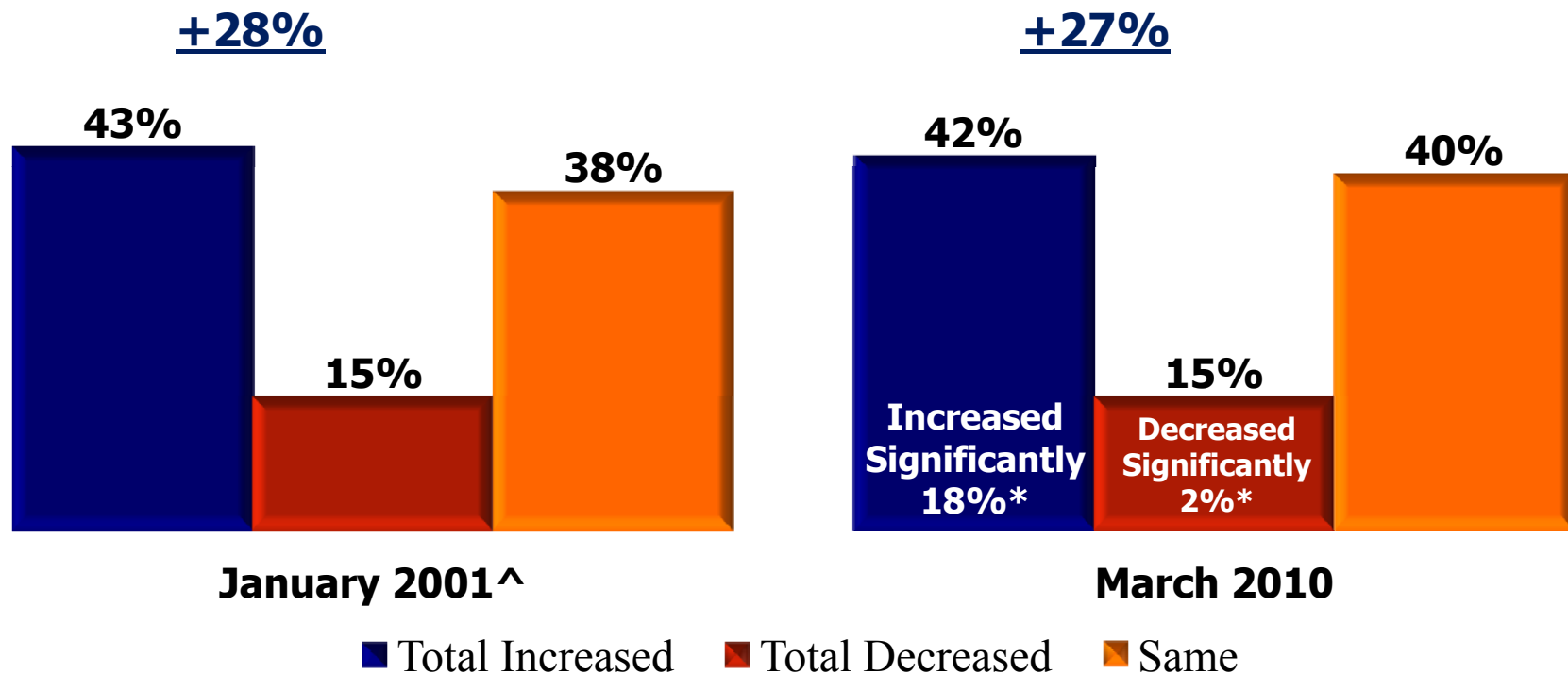
- **Assuming that people feel safer because of “tough on crime” policies enacted in the 90s.**



- **Voters can really never feel “too safe” and their responses to corrections reform will be driven by personal feelings of safety.**

Voters' feelings about crime have not abated in the last decade even though fewer violent crimes are committed today.

Perceptions of Violent Crime Incidence



[^]Data from a national survey by American Civil Liberties Union conducted January 2001 of 2,000 adults.

* Intensities not asked in January 2001 survey.

In 2010, do you think VIOLENT crime in this country increased, decreased... or stayed about the same? And would you say violent crime increased/decreased Significantly or Just Some?



Despite changes in the criminal justice system over the last decade or two, Americans still see room for reform.

Complete/Major Overhaul

50%

Complete Overhaul	16%
Major Reform	34%

Minor/No Need For Change

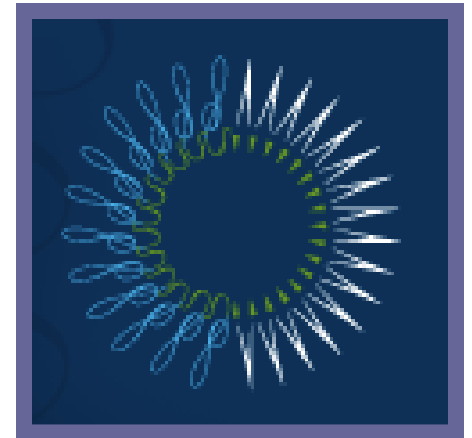
48%

Minor Reform	41%
No Need For Change	7%

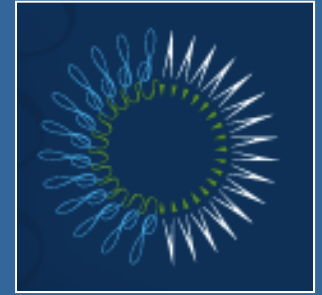
Do you think the American criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul, major reform, minor reform—or is there no need for change?



Messaging



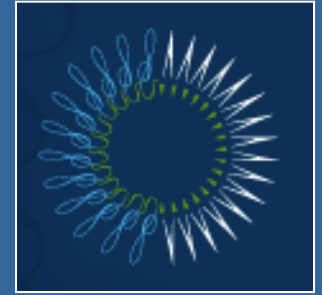
Messaging



Our messaging follows five key principles...

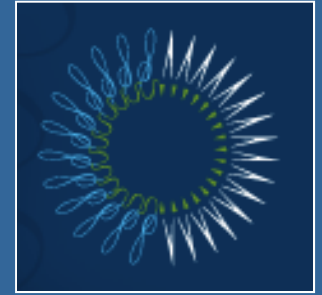
- 1. The emphasis must be on keeping communities and people safe, first and foremost.**

Messaging



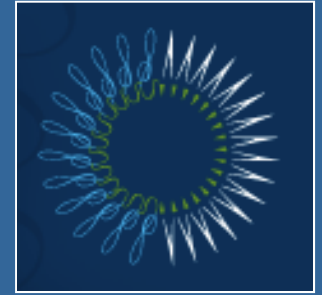
Our focus groups were illustrative of this point. When talking about “changing” the public safety system, it is important to ensure people that personal security is paramount. At the heart of what people want to know is... will this reduce crime? To be successful, we have to effectively answer that question with personal security assurances.

Messaging



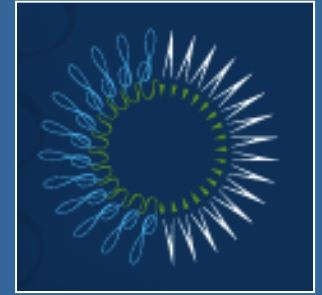
- 2. A system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes and to their victims.**

Messaging



- 3. We need to use language that powerfully communicates the emphasis on enhanced public safety.**

Messaging



We asked people to rate a series of terms used to describe a revised focus in our public safety system.

It is worth noting the more modest response to the phrase “community corrections.”

Term	Mean Score
Mandatory Supervision	67
Alternatives to Incarceration	60
Intensive Supervision	60
Community Supervision	58
Swift and Certain Sanctions	58
Sentencing Options	57
Alternative Sentencing	57
Community Corrections	56
Community Punishments	54
Intermediate Sanctions	48

These two phrases produced very different reactions when people were asked an open ended question about what these words mean.

**When voters hear
MANDATORY
SUPERVISION, they hear:**

- **An aggressive and appropriate response.**
- **Real monitoring.**
- **Accountability and consequence.**

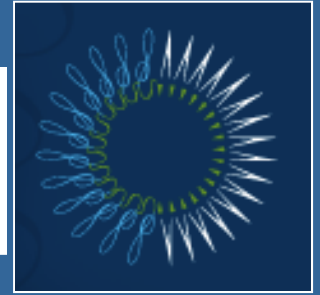
SAFE

**When voters hear
COMMUNITY
CORRECTIONS,
they hear:**

- **Doing community service.**
- **Community determined punishment.**

NOT AS SAFE

Lessons Learned

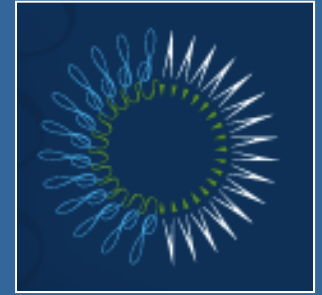


When testing “community corrections” in our focus groups, participants wondered...

- **Does that mean they will live close to me?**
- **Is that some kind of community service program (generally interpreted as a “light” punishment).**

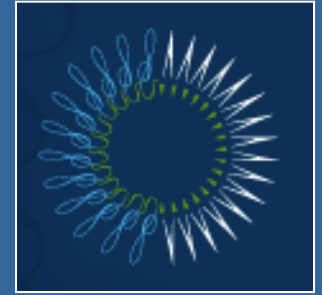
Both questions raise concern over the two fundamental premises that reform must address...will I be safer AND is this true accountability?

Messaging



- 4. Remember: using unfamiliar technical language could backfire.**

Messaging



- 5. There are ways to best frame the shift in thinking we are seeking that do powerfully communicate that a reduced emphasis on prison is possible while reducing crime.**

We tested a series of longer positioning “frames” to try and capture the rationale for reforming the probation and parole systems.

This statement... the “Texas Frame”... resonates strongly across the entire electorate:

“Texas” Frame

Texas is the very symbol of law and order in this country, but three years ago, leaders in Texas decided to take a very different direction on crime and punishment. Texas leaders said “no” to building eight more prisons at a cost of nearly a billion dollars and instead invested about a quarter of that into alternative programs. Texas has reduced its corrections spending and reduced its crime rate at the same time, showing that we can have less crime at a lower cost.

Very Convincing:

43%

Total Convincing:

86%

This frame works because it very directly says we should be getting more bang for our buck in the public safety system.

Cost Benefit Frame

Prisons are a government spending program, and just like any other government program, they should be put to the cost-benefit test. It costs about seventy-nine dollars a day to keep someone in prison, but only about three dollars and fifty cents to supervise someone on probation. States should analyze their prison populations and figure out if there are offenders in expensive prison cells who can be safely and effectively supervised in the community at a lower cost. Taxpayers should be getting a better return on their investments in public safety.

Very Convincing:

43%

Total Convincing:

83%

Assured that the really bad actors are locked up, voters show their receptivity to reform approaches that have cost consequences.

We have too many low-risk, non-violent offenders in prison. We need alternatives to incarceration that cost less and save our expensive prison space for violent and career criminals.

Strongly Agree:

65%

Total Agree:

86%





Turning Questions Into Answers

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