

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN GEORGIA

Recent polling indicates Georgia voters want a juvenile justice system that keeps communities safe and holds youth offenders accountable while helping them become productive citizens. Georgians strongly support proposals to reduce the size and cost of the juvenile corrections system and to reinvest savings into effective alternatives to secure facilities. Across party lines, voters support specific policies, recommended by the 2012 Special Council on Criminal Justice Reform for Georgians, that would divert youth offenders from secure facilities, shorten terms of out-of-home placement, and strengthen community supervision. These findings mirror voter attitudes toward adults in the criminal justice system as shown in our 2012 brief, “Public Attitudes on Criminal Justice in Georgia.”

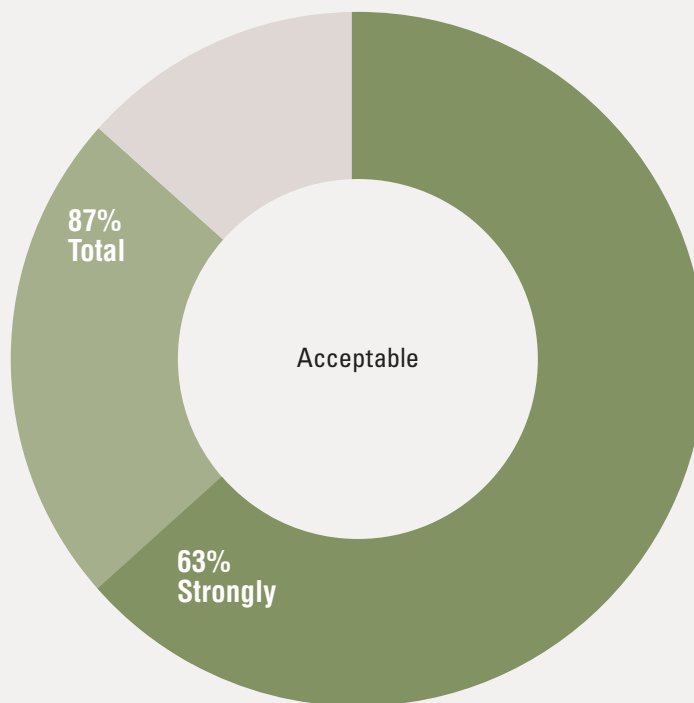
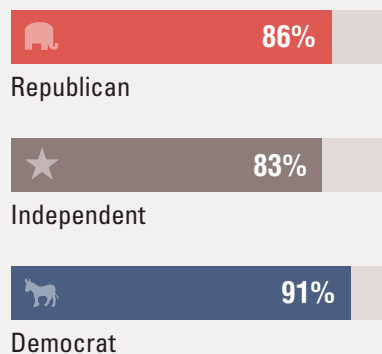
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Georgia voters want juvenile corrections dollars to produce public safety results that make youth offenders less likely to reoffend.
- 2 Georgia voters overwhelmingly support policy changes recommended by the special council that shift lower-level youth offenders from secure facilities to more effective, less costly alternatives.
- 3 Support for juvenile justice reform is strong across political parties, regions, age, gender, and racial/ethnic groups.

THE BOTTOM LINE

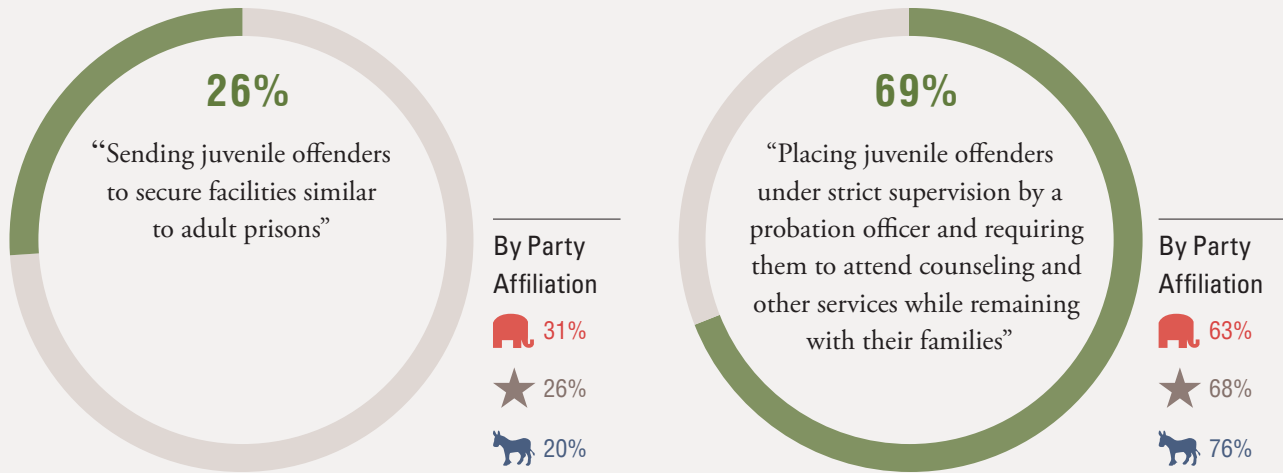
“Send fewer lower-risk juvenile offenders to a secure facility and use some of the savings to create a stronger probation system that holds juvenile offenders accountable for their crimes.”

Total by Party Affiliation



GENERAL ATTITUDES

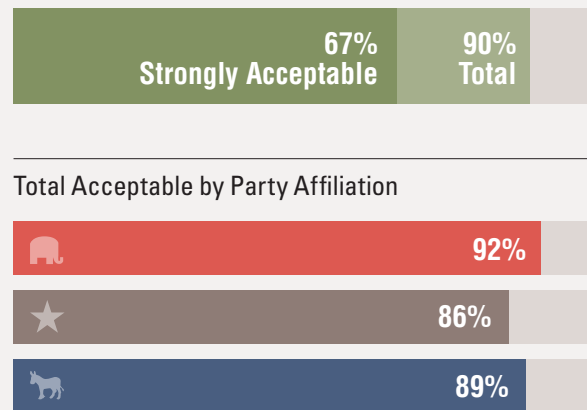
“Which do you think is more likely to improve public safety by making juvenile offenders less likely to commit crimes in the future?”



KEEP MINOR OFFENDERS OUT OF SECURE FACILITIES

“In 2011, half of juveniles in state facilities that are like group homes were placed there for lower-level offenses that are not felonies, or for an offense such as underage drinking or violating curfew. Experts estimate it costs Georgia taxpayers \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year to house a juvenile in such a facility.

“It has been proposed that Georgia only sentence juvenile offenders who have committed felonies to state facilities, and reinvest a portion of the budget savings in community-based options. These options would hold juvenile offenders accountable for their offenses, but keep them at home with their families under strict supervision by a probation officer, and require them to participate in appropriate treatment programs.”



REVISE THE DESIGNATED FELONY ACT

“Georgia’s Designated Felony Act sets a mandatory minimum sentence of one year, with the possibility of up to five years, in a secure facility for certain offenses. Since its passage in 1980, the Designated Felony Act has grown to include nearly 30 offenses ranging from murder to “smash-and-grab” burglary.”

“Separating the offenses in the Designated Felony Act into two classes based on the seriousness of the offense. Judges could still sentence juveniles who commit more serious offenses to up to 5 years, while juveniles committing less serious offenses could receive up to 18 months.”

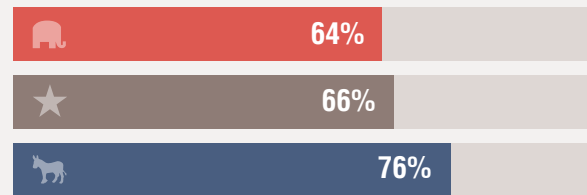
“Eliminating the mandatory minimum sentences in the Designated Felony Act and reinvest the savings back into effective community based options.”



Total Acceptable by Party Affiliation



Total Acceptable by Party Affiliation



SEND FEWER OFFENDERS TO STATE FACILITIES; REINVEST SAVINGS WITH COUNTIES

“There are two ways juvenile offenders can be handled. They can be kept in their own communities under supervision and provided with treatment or they can be sent to secure, state run facilities, which are more expensive. Keeping offenders in their communities would save the state money. It has been proposed that the state reward counties that send fewer lower-risk juvenile offenders to state-run facilities by sharing some of the savings with the counties to reinvest into their local public safety programs.”

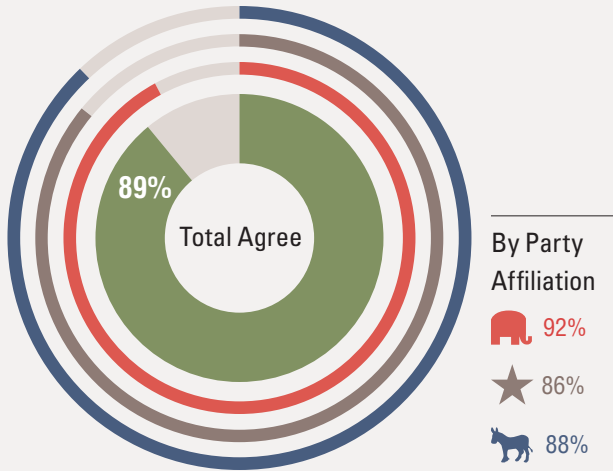


Total Favor by Party Affiliation

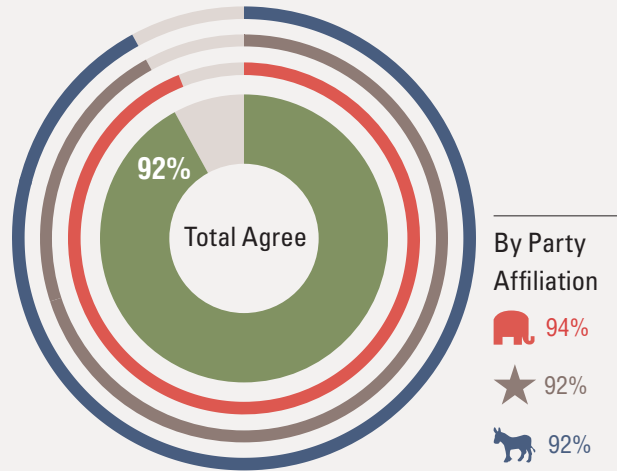


STATEMENTS THAT RECEIVED STRONG SUPPORT

“It does not matter whether a juvenile offender is in secure custody for 18 or 24 or 30 months. What really matters is that the system does a better job of making sure that when a juvenile does get out, he or she is less likely to commit another crime.”

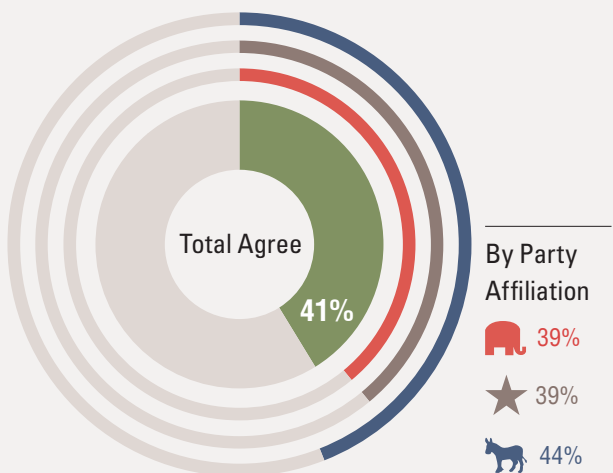


“We should save our expensive facilities for higher risk juvenile offenders and create alternatives to incarceration for lower-risk juvenile offenders that cost less.”

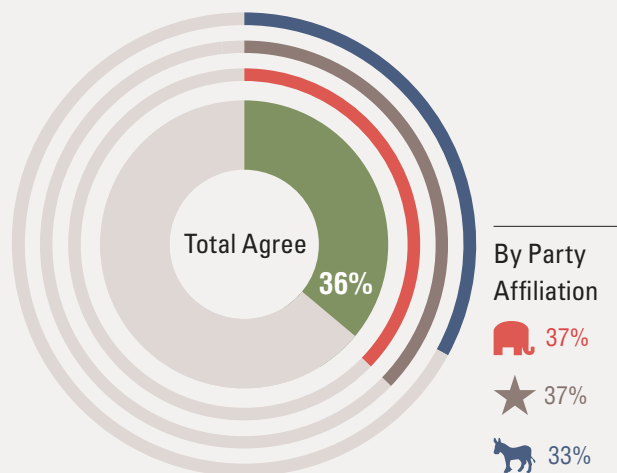


STATEMENTS THAT RECEIVED WEAKER SUPPORT

“It does not matter how much it costs to lock up juvenile offenders, we should pay whatever it takes to make sure our communities are safe.”



“Probation and community supervision for juveniles are just a slap on the wrist and not a substitute for a secure facility.”



METHODOLOGY

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts' public safety performance project, Public Opinion Strategies and The Mellman Group conducted a statewide survey in Georgia. The survey was conducted among 600 registered voters from January 9-13, 2013. The margin of error for a survey of this size is plus/minus 4.0 percent. The margin of error is higher for subgroups.

The full survey is available at www.pewstates.org/publicsafety.

POLL RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

59% self-identified as politically conservative

22% self-identified as politically liberal

14% victim or immediate family member a victim of a violent crime

45% victim or immediate family member a victim of a nonviolent crime

12% law enforcement households



Public Opinion Strategies is a leading national political, public policy, and public affairs research firm. Public Opinion Strategies is widely recognized as the nation's leading Republican polling firm, listing 15 U.S. senators, 6 governors, and over 75 members of Congress as clients. Public Opinion Strategies also works for some of America's largest corporations and associations in the public affairs realm.



The Mellman Group has provided sophisticated opinion research and strategic advice to political leaders, public interest organizations, Fortune 500 companies, and government agencies for over 30 years. Current clients include the majority leader of the U.S. Senate and the Democratic whip in the U.S. House.