

**TO:** The Public Safety Performance Project of The Pew Charitable Trusts  
**FROM:** The Mellman Group & Public Opinion Strategies  
**RE:** Louisiana Survey: Key Findings On Criminal Justice Reform  
**DATE:** April 18, 2017

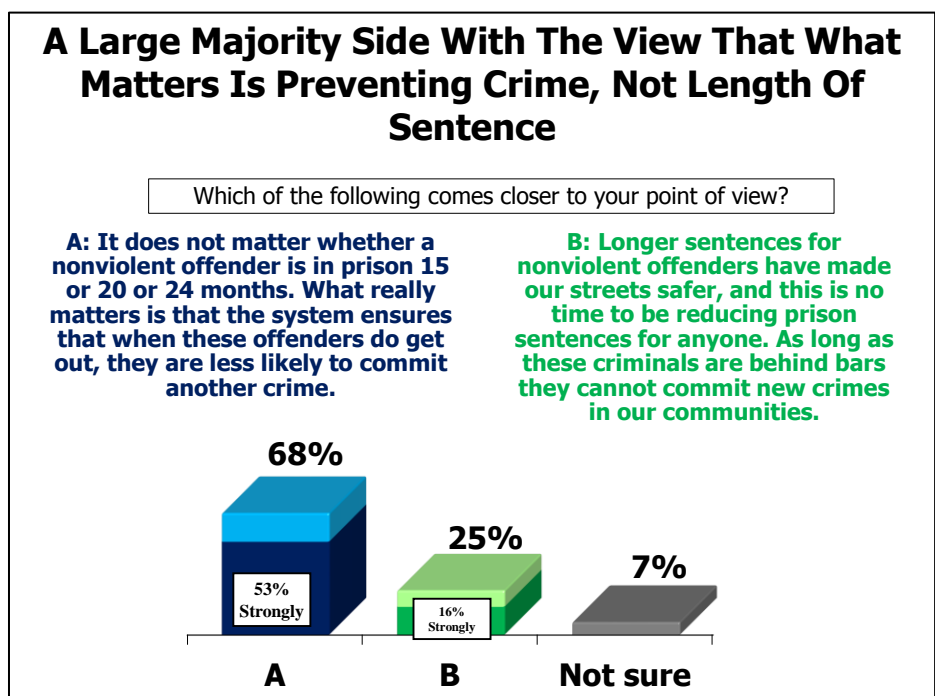
*This analysis represents the findings of a survey of 600 voters representing the likely November 2018 Louisiana electorate (based on participation in past elections) conducted by The Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for The Pew Charitable Trusts. Interviews were conducted by telephone March 27 - March 30, 2017, and included both cell phones and landlines randomly selected from official voter lists. The margin of error is +/-4.0% at the 95% level of confidence. When design effects are accounted for, the overall margin of error is +/-4.4 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. The data were weighted to reflect the electorate. The margin of error is higher for subgroups (see final page).*

Louisiana voters place greater importance on reducing re-offending than on maintaining long prison terms, and overwhelmingly support:

- Ending mandatory minimum prison sentences
- Reducing penalties for lower-level drug crimes
- Reducing the use of prison for nonviolent offenders while expanding the use of alternatives such as probation and parole as well as treatment for substance abuse and mental health issues
- Tailoring criminal-justice fine and fee payments to the offender’s income
- Limiting the use of prison in response to non-criminal violations of probation/parole

**VOTERS PRIORITIZE REDUCING RE-OFFENSE OVER MAINTAINING LONG SENTENCES**

Louisiana voters have a very pragmatic view about what counts when it comes to crime and punishment. A 68% majority (53% “strongly”) side with the view that it is not the length of the sentence that is important, but rather whether the system ensures that offenders are less likely to commit another crime. Only 25% support the view that longer sentences are more effective (7% not sure).



This view also extends across lines of party and ideology, with large majorities of Republicans (64%-29%), independents (67%-26%), and Democrats (74%-21%) converging on the pragmatic principle of crime prevention over prison time. And once again this view holds up across the ideological spectrum, as substantial majorities of conservatives (65%-27%), moderates (67%-28%), and liberals (77%-19%) are all in agreement. A very large majority of “very conservative” voters also support the pragmatic principle by 63% to 33%.

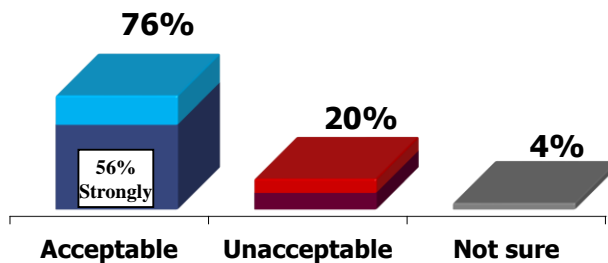
**THERE IS SUPERMAJORITY SUPPORT FOR ENDING MANDATORY MINIMUMS**

A supermajority of Louisiana voters support giving judges discretion over sentences, instead of imposing “mandatory minimums.” By 76% to 20%, Louisiana voters say they support a proposal that “instead of mandatory minimums, judges have the flexibility to determine

sentences based on the facts of each case.”

**A Supermajority Of Louisiana Voters Support Judicial Flexibility Over Mandatory Minimums**

As you may know, mandatory minimum sentences require those convicted of certain crimes to serve a specific length of time in prison. One proposal is that instead of mandatory minimums, judges have the flexibility to determine sentences based on the facts of each case. Would you find this proposal generally acceptable or generally unacceptable?



Support for this proposal extends across partisan and ideological lines, with large majorities of Republicans (76%-21%), independents (78%-17%), and Democrats (74%-22%) favoring judicial discretion over mandatory minimums. This view also holds up across the ideological spectrum, as majorities of liberals (78%-16%), moderates (74%-21%),

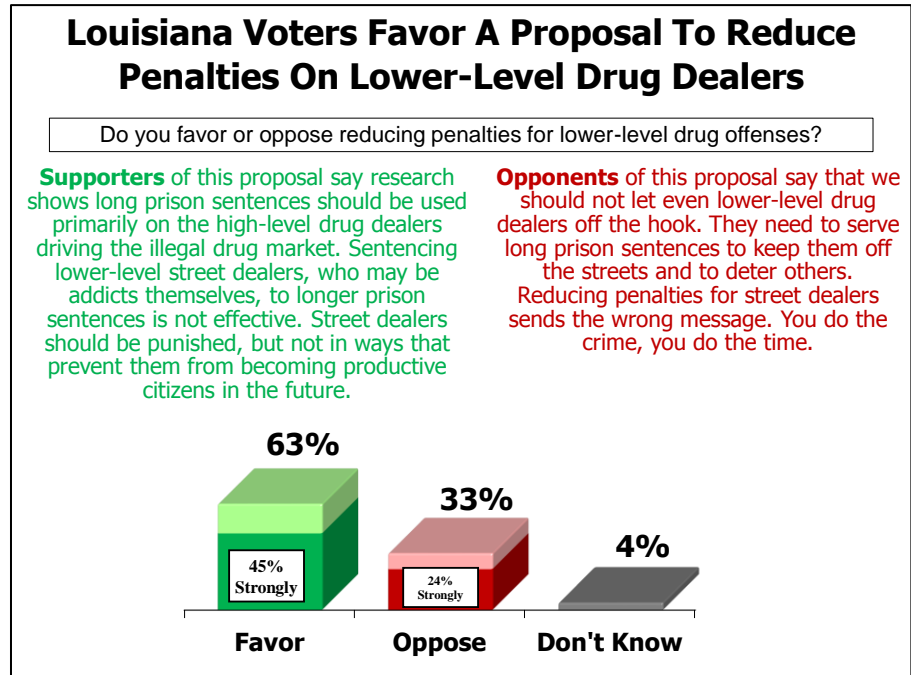
and conservatives (75%-22%) all agree on this question, including a very large majority of “very conservative” voters, who support discretion over mandates by 72% to 26%.

## A SUPERMAJORITY ALSO SUPPORTS REDUCING PENALTIES FOR LOW-LEVEL DRUG OFFENSES

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Louisiana voters also support maintaining “long sentences for serious drug traffickers, while reducing penalties for other lower-level drug offenses.” Just 33% oppose the idea.

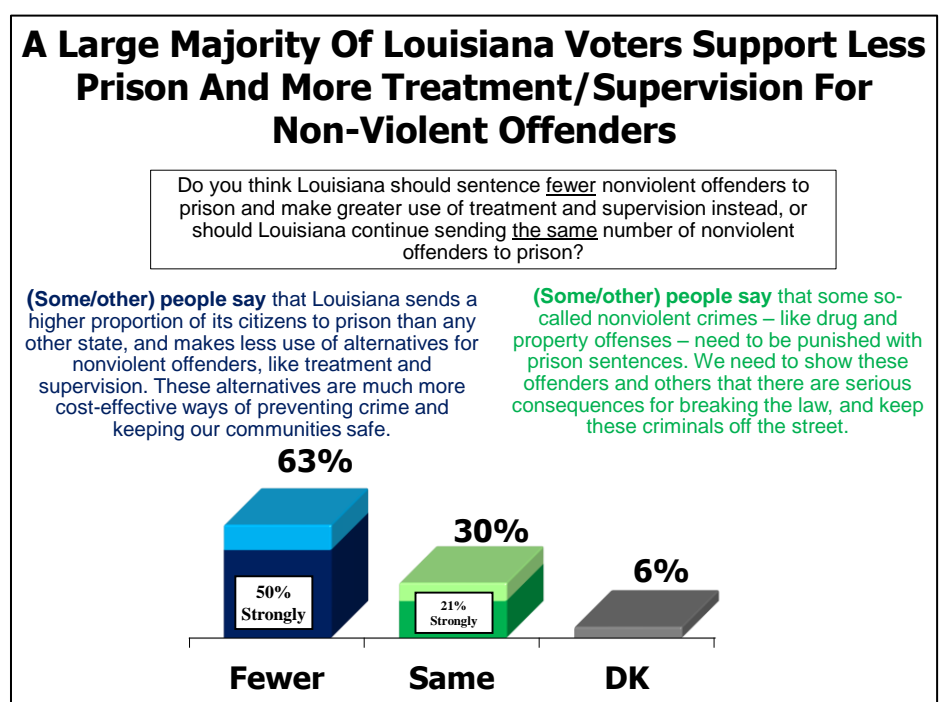
Again, majorities support this proposal across partisan and ideological lines (Republicans: 54% favor, 45% oppose; independents: 66%-28%; and Democrats: 69%-26%). This support also

extends across the ideological spectrum, as majorities of liberals (72%-26%), moderates (66%-30%), and conservatives (55%-39%), including those who describe themselves as “very conservative” (52%-44%) all concur on this proposal.



## VOTERS SUPPORT LESS PRISON FOR NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS AND GREATER USE OF ALTERNATIVES

This survey reveals that a strong majority (63%) of Louisiana voters agree with the view that Louisiana should sentence fewer nonviolent offenders to prison and make greater use of more cost-effective ways of preventing crime like treatment and supervision instead. Indeed, a 50% majority hold that view “strongly,” while fewer than 1 in 3 take an opposing position. These responses came as



voters heard arguments on both sides of the debate (as shown in the chart above), siding by more than a 2-to-1 ratio with the argument for expanding the use of cost-effective alternatives to prison for nonviolent offenders.

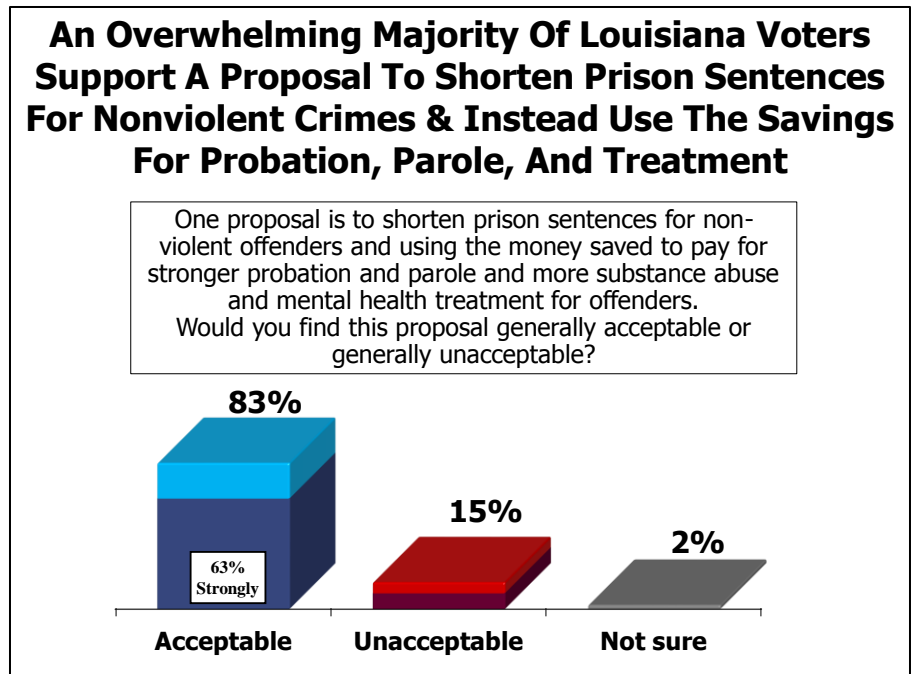
These views extend across demographic segment and party lines, with majorities of Republicans (55%-38%), independents (63%-28%), and Democrats (71%-24%) all siding with the view that too many are in prison and backing the need to expand more cost-effective prison alternatives. This view holds up across the ideological spectrum as well, with large majorities of conservatives (58%-36%), moderates (66%-26%), and liberals (70%-24%) all in agreement. In fact, even a majority of the most conservative voters—those who describe themselves as “very” conservative—support using alternatives to prison by 52% to 42%.

### A SUPERMAJORITY SUPPORTS REDUCING SENTENCES AND REINVESTING THE MONEY SAVED IN TREATMENT AND SUPERVISION

Asked directly about a proposed public policy, an overwhelming 83% majority of Louisiana voters accepted a proposal “to shorten prison sentences for nonviolent offenders and use the money saved to pay for stronger probation and parole and more substance abuse and mental health treatment for offenders.” Just 15% find this proposal unacceptable (2% not sure).

Here too we see the same pattern of consensus across partisan as well as ideological lines. Eighty percent (80%) of Republicans join independents (82%), and Democrats (87%) in support of this proposed reform. In ideological terms,

we also see a rare moment of consensus in our often polarized society, with 91% of liberals, 84% of moderates, and 78% of conservatives accepting this proposal, including 76% of those who say they are “very conservative.”

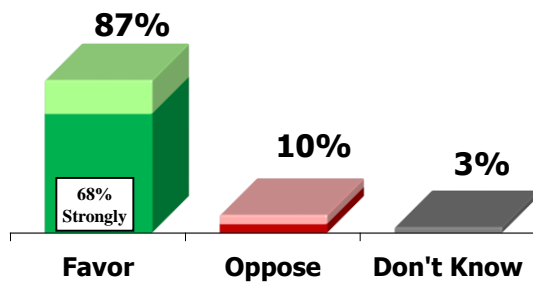


## AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY SUPPORTS FAIRNESS ON FINES & FEES

Louisiana voters also converge on near consensus on the issue of payment of judicial fines and fees. An 87% supermajority favor a proposal to "...keep the fines and fees the same, but allow offenders to pay them on a monthly basis, with the amount paid each month based on the

### Voters Overwhelmingly Favor A Proposal To Increase Fairness On Payment Of Judicial Fines And Fees

When a person is arrested, charged with, or convicted of a crime, the criminal justice system often imposes fines, fees, surcharges, and other financial penalties. One proposal would keep the fines and fees the same, but allow offenders to pay them on a monthly basis, with the amount paid each month based on the offender's income. Half of each payment would go to pay victims back for damages they suffered. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?



offender's income. Half of each payment would go to pay victims back for damages they suffered." A mere 10% oppose this idea (3% not sure).

Support for this reform also extends across both demographic and party lines, with large majorities of Republicans (85% favor to 12% oppose), independents (88% favor to 8% oppose), and Democrats (88% favor to 9% oppose) in support. In ideological

terms, we once again see a rare moment of consensus, with liberals (91% favor to 7% oppose), moderates (89% favor to 7% oppose), and conservatives (83% favor to 13% oppose) favoring the proposal, including 81% of those who say they are "very conservative" (13% oppose).

## A SUPERMAJORITY SUPPORTS THE PROPOSAL TO STOP PUTTING PEOPLE IN PRISON FOR NON-CRIMINAL PROBATION & PAROLE VIOLATIONS

Three quarters (75%) of state voters support "...limit[ing] the use of prison and jail in response to these non-criminal violations and instead us[ing] sanctions like community service and increased reporting." Less than a quarter (23%) find this notion unacceptable (2% not sure).

Here too support crosses partisan and ideological lines, with majorities of Republicans (64%-36%), independents (79%-19%), and Democrats (84%-13%) all finding the proposal acceptable. In a familiar pattern, this support also spans ideological boundaries, with supermajorities of liberals (84%-13%), moderates (79%-19%), and conservatives (68%-31%), including 66% of those who describe themselves as "very conservative" (32% unacceptable) all concurring on this proposal.

## APPENDIX

<b><u>Subgroup (with n-size)</u></b>	<b><u>Margin of Error at 95% Confidence</u></b>	<b><u>Margin of Error at 80% Confidence</u></b>
Democrats (n=221)	+/- 6.6%	+/- 4.3%
Independents (n=157)	+/- 7.8%	+/- 5.1%
Republicans (n=223)	+/- 6.6%	+/- 4.3%
North Louisiana (n=129)	+/- 8.6%	+/- 5.6%
Central/South Louisiana (n=148)	+/- 8.1%	+/- 5.3%
Baton Rouge (n=120)	+/- 8.9%	+/- 5.8%
New Orleans (n=203)	+/- 6.9%	+/- 4.5%

*\*A full methodological statement is available upon request.*