

New Polling Demonstrates Ongoing Support for Criminal Justice Reform and Policies to Reduce Incarceration

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Key Insights

Recent polling, conducted by BSG on behalf of FWD.us, underscores a significant and unwavering level of support for criminal justice reform among the American public. The data reveals not only high levels of support but also strong backing for candidates who advocate for policies aimed at reducing incarceration rates.

According to the poll, 78% of likely voters (LVs) support criminal justice reform, including 2 in 3 Republicans, 87% of Democrats and 82% of Independents. Across demographics there is strong support for reducing prison and jail populations, with particularly strong support among Democrats and Black voters. The poll also shows this support is largely unchanged from 2022, demonstrating that voters continue to want their elected officials to build on the progress that has been made to reform the criminal justice system.

The survey aimed to measure public perception of the functionality of the criminal justice system, attitudes toward candidates supporting policies to decrease incarceration rates, and public sentiment regarding crime. There is overwhelming support for many specific policy changes such as sentencing reforms, parole reforms, and the First Step Act.

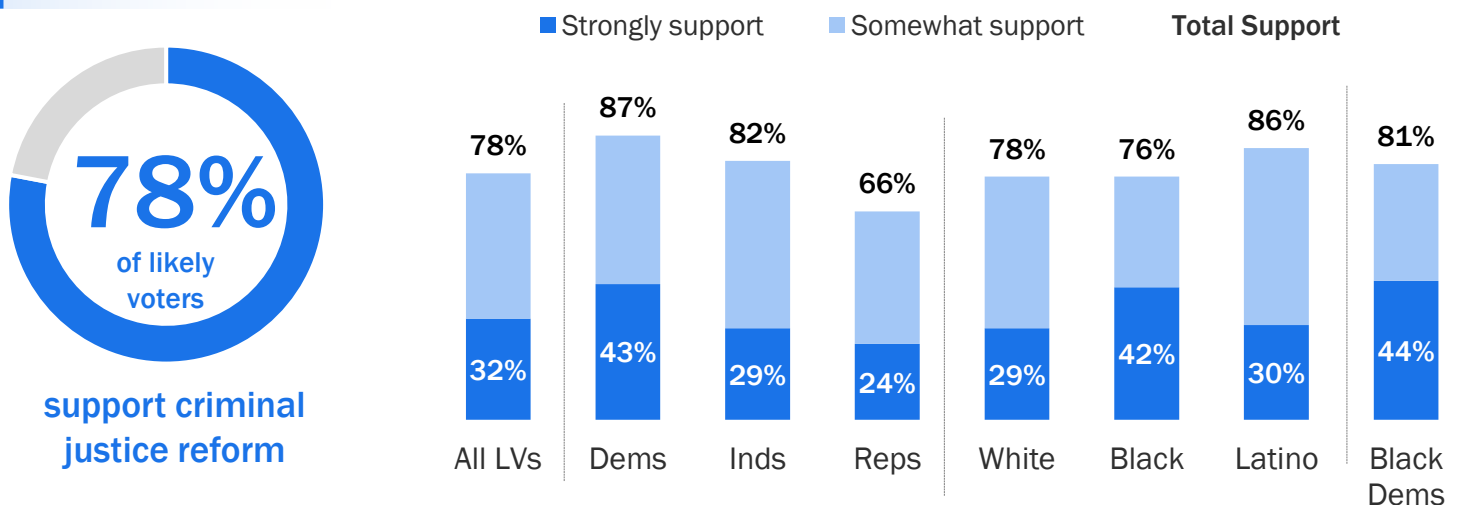
The enduring backing for criminal justice reform from the public delivers a clear message to policymakers, particularly in the context of the 2024 presidential election. It serves as a unified call to action that goes beyond political affiliations and demographic boundaries.

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General Views of Criminal Justice Reform



Support for Candidates

6 in 10 voters

Say that a candidate supporting criminal justice reform would make them **more likely** to vote for that candidate

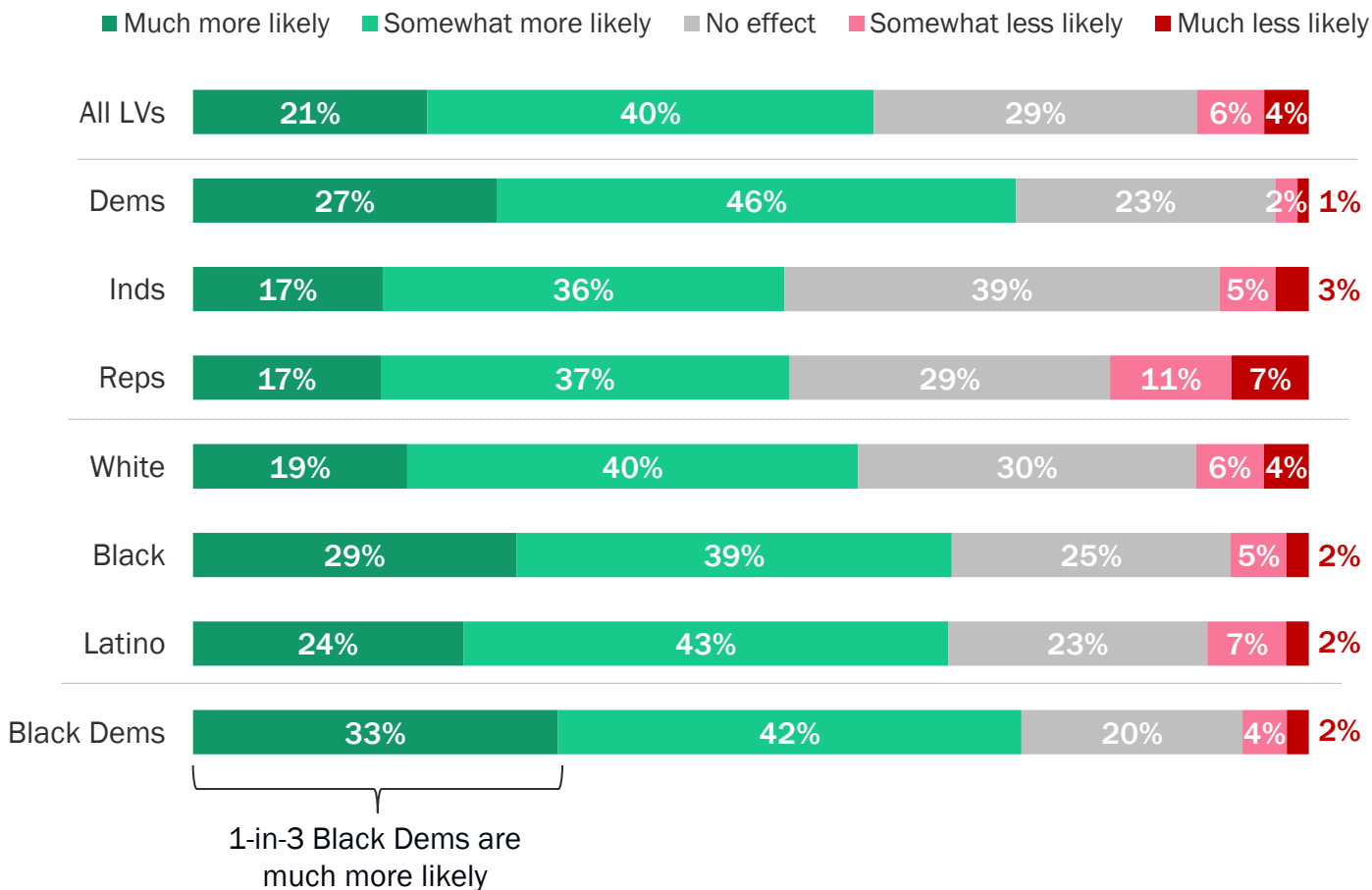


Just 1 in 10 voters

Say that supporting criminal justice reform would make them **less likely** to vote for that candidate

These support numbers are up since October 2022, when 58% said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform. Opposition is also down from 13% in 2022 to 10% in 2024. This data shows that criminal justice reform should not be a third rail issue for candidates, as it can lead to gains in support, particularly among Black Democrats.

And if a candidate for elected office supported criminal justice reform, would you be more or less likely to vote for that candidate?

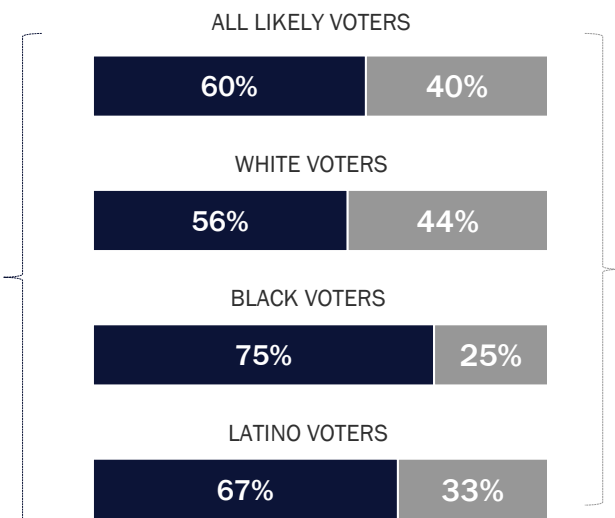


Impact of Mass Incarceration

Voters are much more likely to say that mass incarceration makes communities less safe than they are to say that we are safer with more people locked up.

In general, which of the following statements comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

Mass incarceration causes many of the problems that lead to unsafe communities such as homelessness, poverty, and drug or mental health challenges.

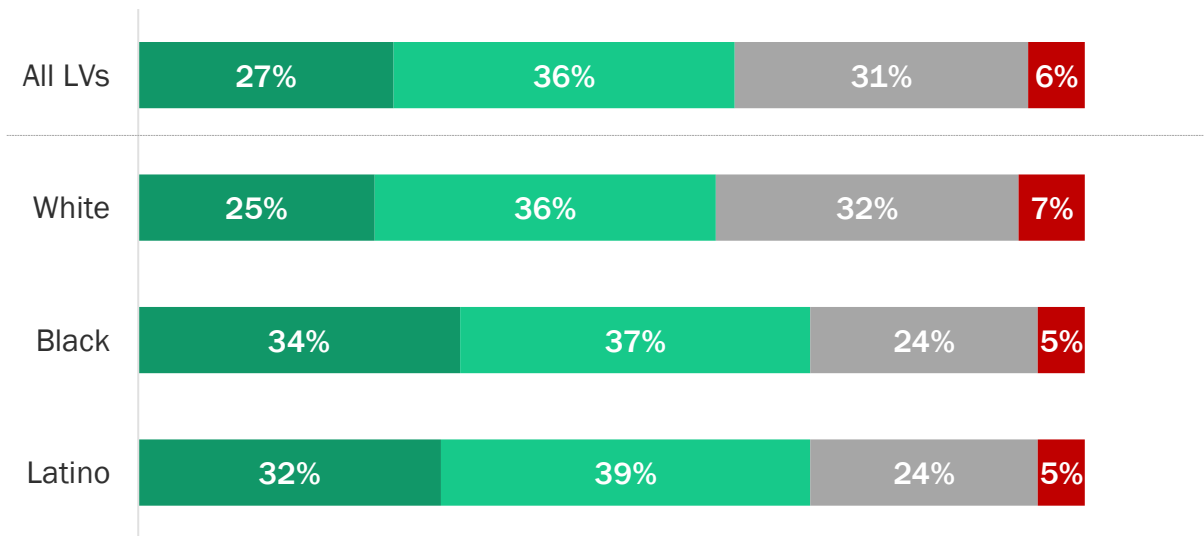


We have safer communities when there are more people in jail or prison.

Nearly 2 in 3 voters believe that mass incarceration contributes to social problems, as opposed to only 1 in 17 who believe that locking more people up alleviates issues of homelessness, drug use, and overdoses.

And how much do you think mass incarceration contributes to social problems such as homelessness, public drug use and drug overdoses?

■ Contributes a lot ■ Contributes a little ■ Makes no difference ■ Makes these problems better



Support for Reforms to Reduce Incarceration

Overall, **67% of voters believe the criminal justice system needs either a complete overhaul or major reform**, including 3 in 5 Republicans.

Additionally, **nearly half of voters say that recent criminal justice reform efforts have not gone far enough, compared to on 20% who feel they have gone too far.**

This number is driven primarily by Democrats (64% not far enough) and Black voters (63% not far enough).

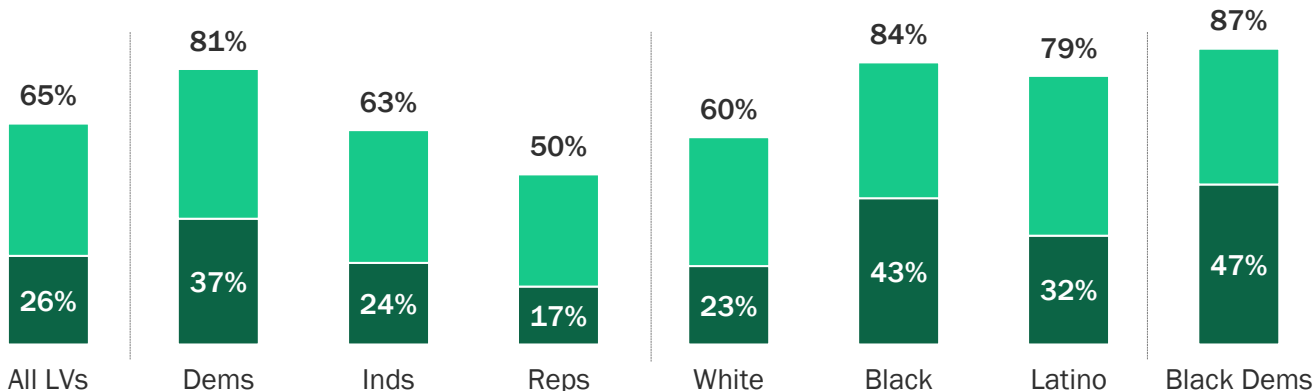
Amount of Criminal Justice Reform Needed	Complete overhaul	Major changes	Minor changes	Slight tweaks	No change
All Likely Voters	20%	47%	22%	5%	2%
Dems	21%	49%	19%	6%	1%
Inds	23%	44%	20%	4%	2%
Reps	16%	46%	26%	5%	4%

Nearly two-thirds believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population in the U.S., including half of Republicans and large majorities of Americans of color, particularly Black Democrats.

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

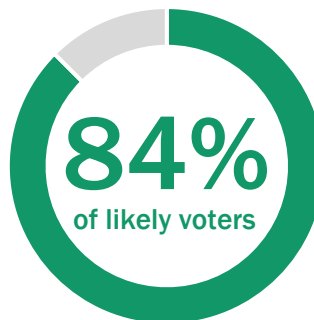
Very important Somewhat important

Total important



Build on First Step Act:

In 2018, President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act, which was a bipartisan effort to reduce the size of the federal prison population and promote rehabilitation over incarceration. Research has shown that 30,000 people have been released because of the First Step Act and that reoffending rates are lower among this group than among people who did not benefit from the law change. Knowing this, would you support or oppose efforts to protect these reforms and find further opportunities to safely reduce the federal prison population?



Support protecting the First Step Act and finding further opportunities to safely reduce the federal prison population, including 82% of Democrats, 85% of Independents, 84% of Republicans and 80% of Black voters.

Support for Policy Proposals

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 addressing drug/mental health issues as a public health issue, garnered the most support.

% who support each policy change	All Likely Voters	Dems	Inds	Reps	Black Voters
Second Look: Allow judges and prosecutors to review cases after a person has served at least 15 years in prison and reduce the sentence on a case-by-case basis.	78%	85%	78%	69%	81%
Earned Time: Increase the amount of time that people can earn off their prison sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs.	76%	83%	78%	68%	76%
Pre-Trial Detention: Ending the practice of keeping people in jail before their trial if they have been charged with a nonviolent offense	72%	80%	72%	63%	75%
Addressing Drug/Mental Health Issues: Reducing criminal penalties for possession of controlled substances and treating drug use as a public health issue	70%	84%	71%	55%	79%
Parole Expansion: Allow more people in prison to be considered for release by a parole board	66%	78%	67%	52%	78%
Eliminating Mandatory Minimums: 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	66%	78%	67%	54%	73%
Overhaul Probation and Parole: Ending the practice of sending people to prison for violating the rules of probation or parole	62%	73%	63%	49%	72%
Clemency Expansion: Increase the number of commutations through executive clemency, which is the authority governors and the president have to reduce prison sentences.	59%	72%	53%	51%	77%
Reduce Sentence Enhancements: Reduce the number of years that are added to a prison sentence for sentence enhancements, such as second and third strike laws, which require judges to increase the sentence, sometimes up to life in prison, if the person has prior felony convictions.	53%	66%	47%	44%	70%

Methodology

BSG conducted an online survey of n=1191 likely voters nationwide, including an oversample of n=273 Black voters. The poll fielded from February 13 to February 20, 2024. The sample was weighted to ensure it was proportionately representative of likely voters nationwide. The overall margin of sampling error is ±2.84% at the 95% confidence level.