

New Poll Shows Strong, Bipartisan Support for More Criminal Justice Reform in Oklahoma

Oklahoma voters across the political spectrum, including very conservative voters, support common sense and impactful criminal justice reforms. In fact, 75% of all registered voters, and 60% of very conservative voters, support reforming the criminal justice system and 90% of voters believe the criminal justice system needs to change.

Voters are proud of the progress Oklahoma has made, with 75% still supporting State Question 780, which passed in 2016, and 79% supporting the retroactive release of people who were still in prison for simple possession after SQ 780 went into effect. They also recognize there is further to go: 52% believe that reforms were an important first step but more needs to be done to reduce the jail and prison population compared to only 13% who believe reforms have gone too far in the state.

The results could not come at a more critical time for policymakers. Oklahoma has the third highest imprisonment rate in the country, and taxpayers spend \$552 million on the prison system each year without any real public safety benefits. Oklahoma voters want leaders who support criminal justice reform: 64% of voters are more likely to support a candidate who wants to reform the criminal justice system; this includes 59% of Republican voters. This poll demonstrates that voters in Oklahoma overwhelmingly want elected leaders to continue to take bold action and further reduce the prison population.

These are just some of the findings from a statewide survey of 600 registered voters in Oklahoma conducted by Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of FWD.us. The poll has a margin of error of +/-4 percent and was fielded July 23-25, 2022.

Key Survey Findings:

OKLAHOMA VOTERS BELIEVE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING AND ARE OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF REDUCING THE STATE'S JAIL AND PRISON POPULATIONS.

- 75% of Oklahoma voters support reforming the state's criminal justice system.
- 73% of registered voters, and 64% of Republican voters specifically, believe it is important to reduce the number of people incarcerated.
- Two-thirds of voters believe the best way to fund crime reduction is by addressing the root causes, by investing in drug or mental health treatment and K-12 education. Only 3% of voters believe additional funding should go towards jails and prisons.
- A strong majority of voters believe the criminal justice system needs to change (90%). When asked about what the system was doing well and not so well, 47% of voters disapprove of how the criminal justice handles rehabilitating people who committed crimes in the past compared to 42% who approve, and voters were evenly split 46%-46% on whether the system keeps costs low and efficiently spends taxpayer money.
- 64% of voters are more likely to support a candidate who wants to reform the criminal justice system, including 59% of Republican voters, compared to 13% of all voters and 16% of Republicans who would be less likely to support such a candidate.

OKLAHOMA VOTERS SUPPORT PRIOR REFORMS AND BELIEVE MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE.

- 52% of Oklahoma voters believe reforms were an important first step but more work is needed to reduce incarceration.
- A strong bipartisan majority of voters (75%) support State Question 780, including 69% of Republican voters.
- Voters strongly support using commutation power to make State Question 780 retroactive; 79% support releasing people from prison who were convicted before drug possession became a misdemeanor.

BY WIDE MARGINS, OKLAHOMA VOTERS SUPPORT COMMON-SENSE POLICY REFORMS AIMED AT REDUCING INCARCERATION.

- 80% of voters support a new felony classification system with consistent sentencing ranges based on the seriousness of the crime and shorter prison sentences for some offenses.
- 75% of voters support removing non-violent convictions from a person's criminal record after they have completed their sentence, including probation and parole, and remained crime free.
- 64% of voters support ending the practice of keeping people who have been charged with a misdemeanor or non-violent felony in jail before their trial.
- 57% of voters support eliminating sentence enhancements for people convicted of only non-violent crimes currently and in the past.
- 72% of voters support making sure people do not return to prison for violating the rules of probation if they have not committed a new crime.

Approval for criminal justice policy reforms cuts across political party affiliations, with a majority of voters voicing support for common sense criminal justice reform proposals

FIGURE 1.

“HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ARE IN JAIL OR PRISON HERE IN OKLAHOMA?”

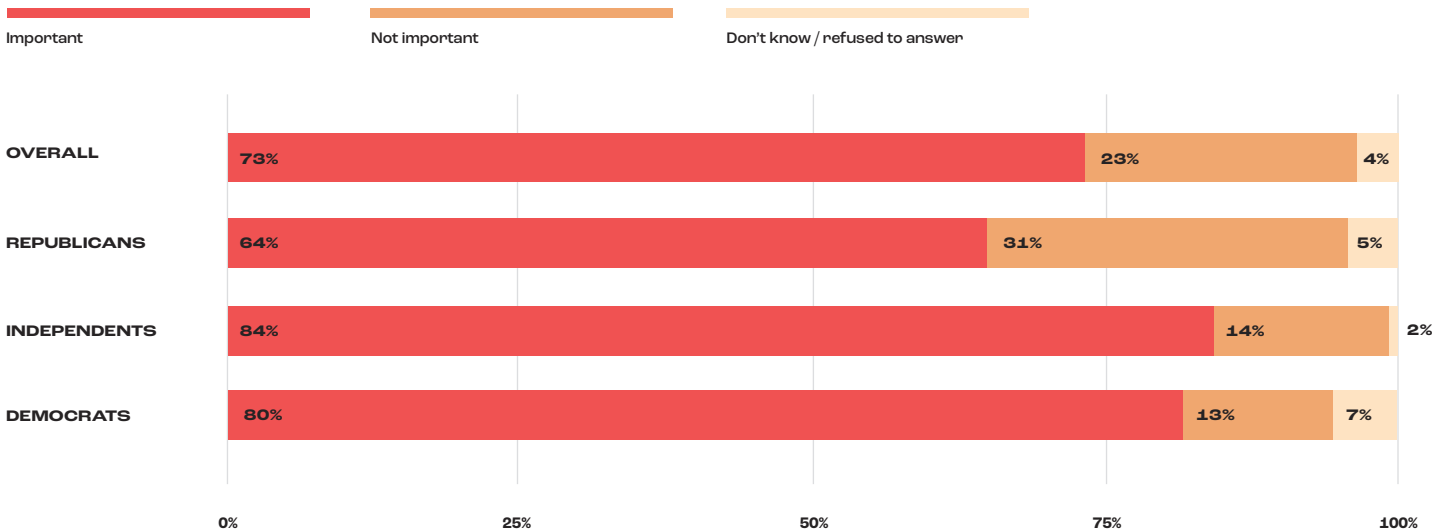


FIGURE 2.

“LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OKLAHOMA VOTERS HAVE ADOPTED MANY POLICIES AIMED AT REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN PRISON. WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING COMES CLOSEST TO YOUR OWN OPINION ABOUT THESE POLICY REFORMS?”

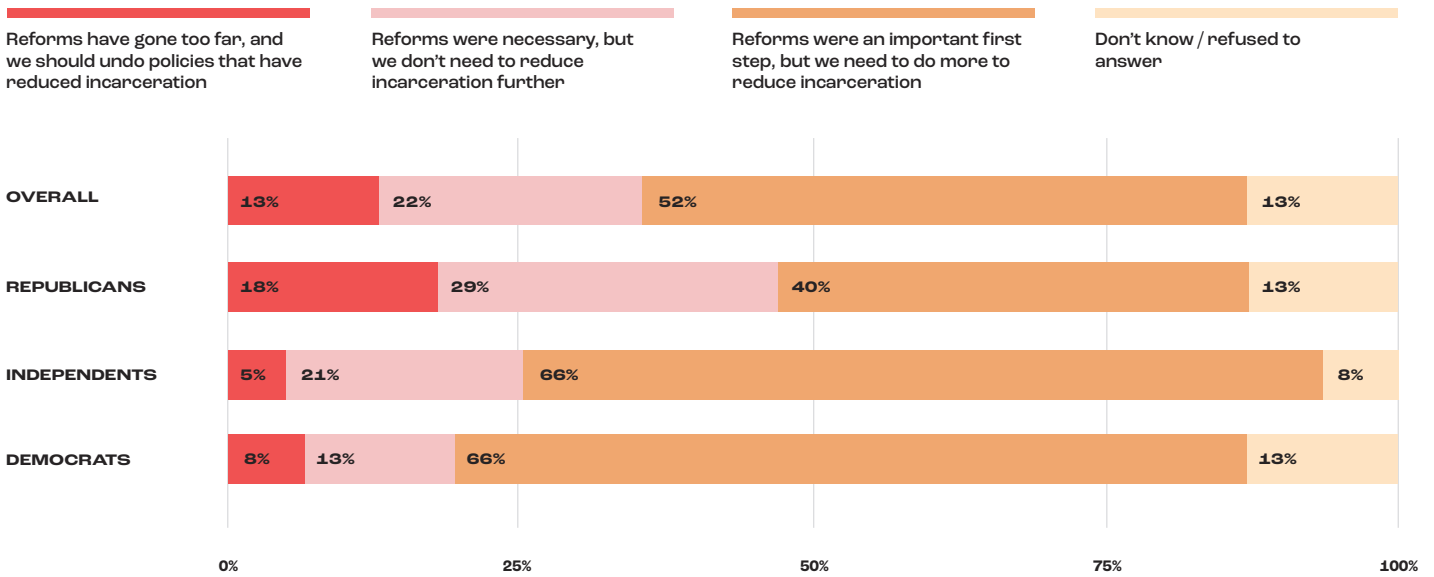


FIGURE 3.

VOTER SUPPORT FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS BY POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION

PROPOSAL	OVERALL	REPUBLICANS	INDEPENDENTS	DEMOCRATS
Creating a new felony classification system with consistent sentencing ranges based on the seriousness of the crime and shorter prison sentences for some offenses.	80%	74%	87%	87%
Support releasing people from prison who were convicted before drug possession was reclassified to a misdemeanor.	79%	75%	91%	83%
Removing non violent convictions from a person's criminal record after they have completed the terms of their sentence, including probation and parole, and remained crime-free.	75%	68%	81%	79%
Making sure that people do not return to prison for violating the rules of probation if they have not committed a new crime.	72%	64%	76%	78%
Ending the practice of keeping people who have been charged with a misdemeanor or non-violent felony in jail before their trials.	64%	58%	73%	68%

A majority of very conservative voters support policy solutions that will help lower the incarceration rate and improve the state's criminal justice system.

FIGURE 4.
SELF-IDENTIFIED "VERY CONSERVATIVE" VOTERS SUPPORT SMART CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

