

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

November 2023

Mississippi voters across the political spectrum support criminal justice reform and policy changes to reduce the jail and prison population. According to new polling conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, 81% of Mississippi voters support criminal justice reform including 8 in 10 Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Support for criminal justice reform is particularly high among Republicans, including those who identify as “very conservative.”

The survey conducted by Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of FWD.us has a sample of N=600 registered voters and a margin of error of ±4.0%. The survey was fielded October 14-17, 2023 and respondents were contacted via landline and cell phone to ensure a representative sample of likely voters.

These findings are particularly important heading into a legislative session in which policymakers will be grappling once again with Mississippi’s stubbornly high prison population and the dangerous conditions inside the prison system. Despite past reforms to reduce prison growth, the prison population rose 16% from February 2022 to September 2023 and the corrections system continues to cost taxpayers more than \$400 million every year.

Key Survey Findings:

Mississippi voters, including very conservative voters, believe the criminal justice system needs major changes and support reforms that will safely reduce incarceration.

- **89% feel safe** in their communities, including **6 in 10 who feel “very safe.”**
- **81% support criminal justice reform**, including 8 in 10 Republicans, Independents, and Democrats.
- **68% believe the criminal justice system needs “major changes” or a “complete overhaul,”** including majorities of both parties and Independents.
- By a **9 to 1 margin, voters say they would be more likely** rather than less likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform.
- **72% believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population**, including majorities of both parties and Independents.
- **Strong majorities support proven policies** such as expanding earned time credits, eliminating mandatory minimums, eliminating second and third strike laws for nonviolent convictions, and changing drug possession from a felony to misdemeanor offense.
- Nearly **90% support allowing people to earn their way home** through the parole process.

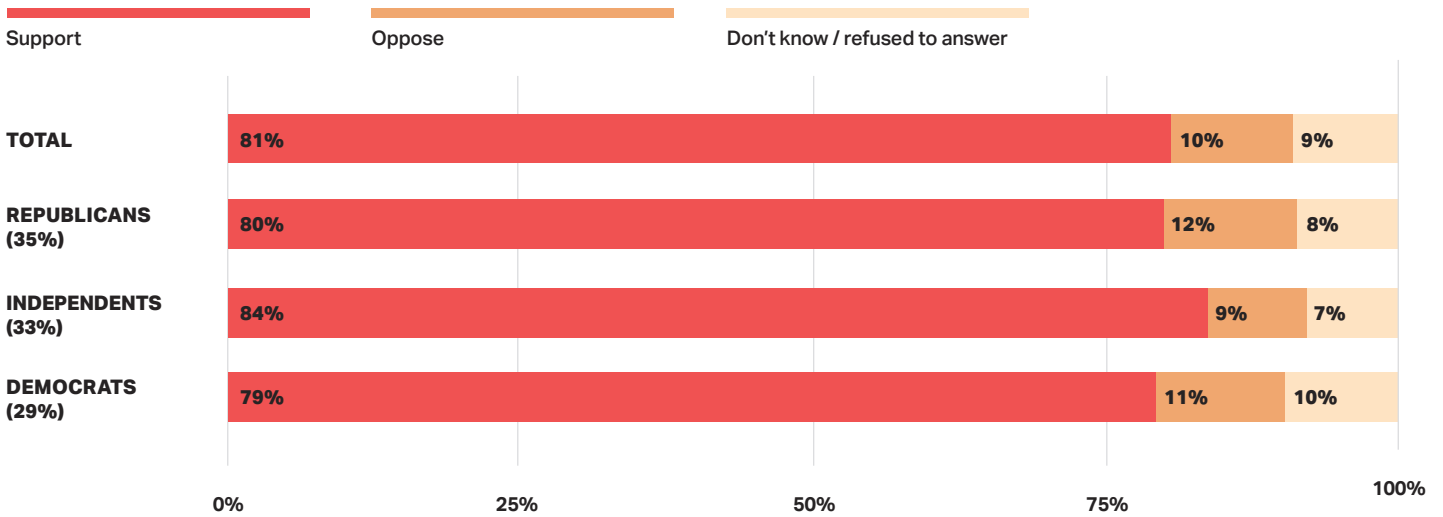
Despite past reforms to reduce prison growth, the prison population rose 16% from February 2022 to September 2023 and the corrections system continues to cost taxpayers more than \$400 million every year.

Voters across the political spectrum want changes to the criminal justice system.

Polling shows that voters are highly dissatisfied with the performance of the criminal justice system with **68%** believing the system needs either “major changes” or a “complete overhaul.” As a result, there is strong bipartisan support for criminal justice reform across party lines (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.

“And, generally speaking, do you support or oppose criminal justice reform here in Mississippi?”



Note: Percentages in this and all following figures may not total 100% due to rounding.

Criminal justice reform has strong support from very conservative Mississippi voters.

Support is particularly high among Republican voters, including Trump voters and those who identify as “very conservative” (Figure 2). By a wide margin, voters also say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform. In fact, Republicans and Independents are **7x** more likely rather than less likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform.

FIGURE 2A.

“And, generally speaking, do you support or oppose criminal justice reform here in Mississippi?”

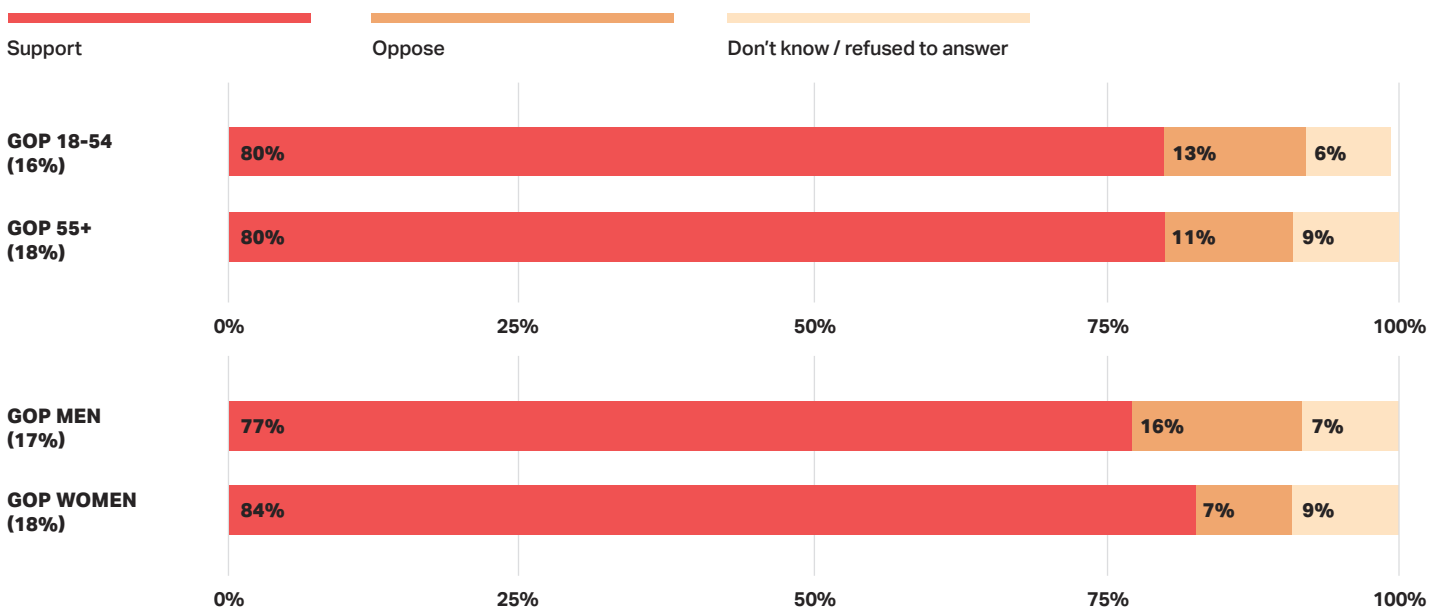
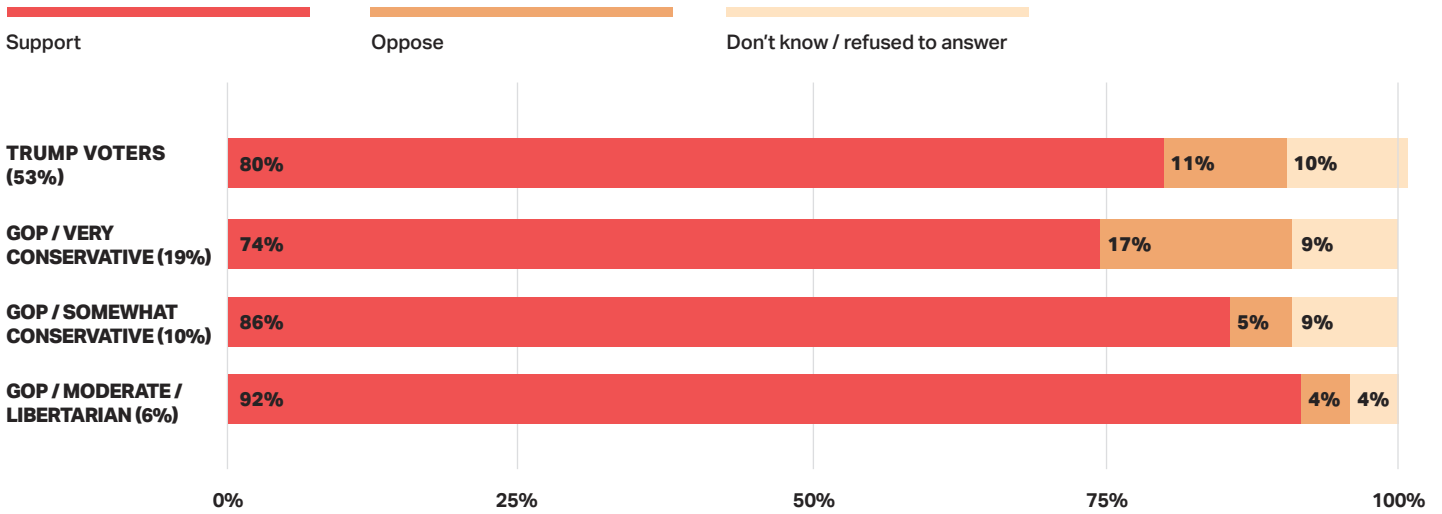


FIGURE 2B.

“And, generally speaking, do you support or oppose criminal justice reform here in Mississippi?”



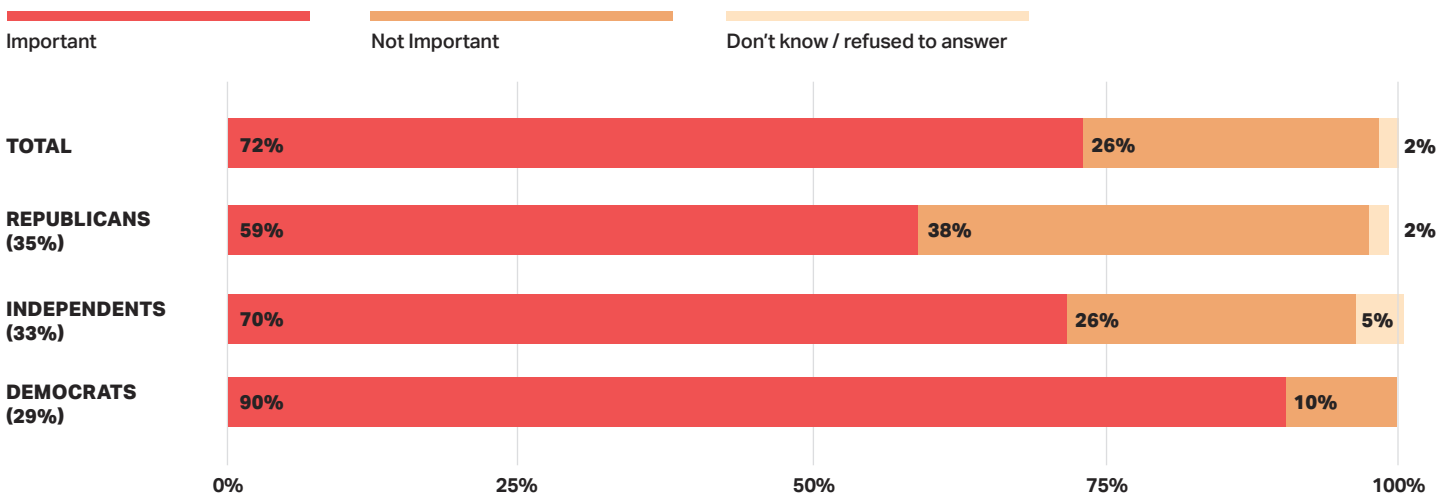
Support is very strong among Republican voters, including Trump voters and those who identify as very conservative.

Voters across the political spectrum believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population and support a wide range of common-sense policy reforms to achieve that goal.

Polling shows that 72% of Mississippi voters believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population, including nearly 4 in 10 who say it is “very important” (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3.

“And, how important is it to reduce the number of people who are in jail or prison here in Mississippi?”



By wide margins, Republican, Democratic, and Independent voters support sentencing reforms to address Mississippi's extreme sentencing practices (Table 1).

TABLE 1.

"For each of the following, please indicate whether you support or oppose each reform..."

% SUPPORT % OPPOSE	TOTAL	GOP (35%)	INDEPENDENTS (33%)	DEMOCRATS (29%)
Eliminating mandatory minimums and other sentencing laws that require a long prison sentence and instead allow judges to determine the appropriate punishment based on the facts of the case.	73%-25%	72%-26%	72%-26%	75%-24%
Changing simple drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor offense.	69%-28%	52%-44%	75%-22%	84%-14%
Eliminating habitual sentencing enhancements, more commonly known as second and third strike laws, if the person only has non-violent convictions.	64%-33%	50%-47%	66%-32%	80%-18%

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding and small numbers of "don't know" responses.

Overwhelming majorities of voters support Mississippi's existing parole laws and earned time laws to allow more people to be released from prison (Figures 4 and 5).

FIGURE 4.

"As you may know, some people are eligible for parole in Mississippi once they have served a certain percentage of their sentence and have demonstrated rehabilitation to the Parole Board. Do you support or oppose allowing people to earn their way home through the parole process in Mississippi?"

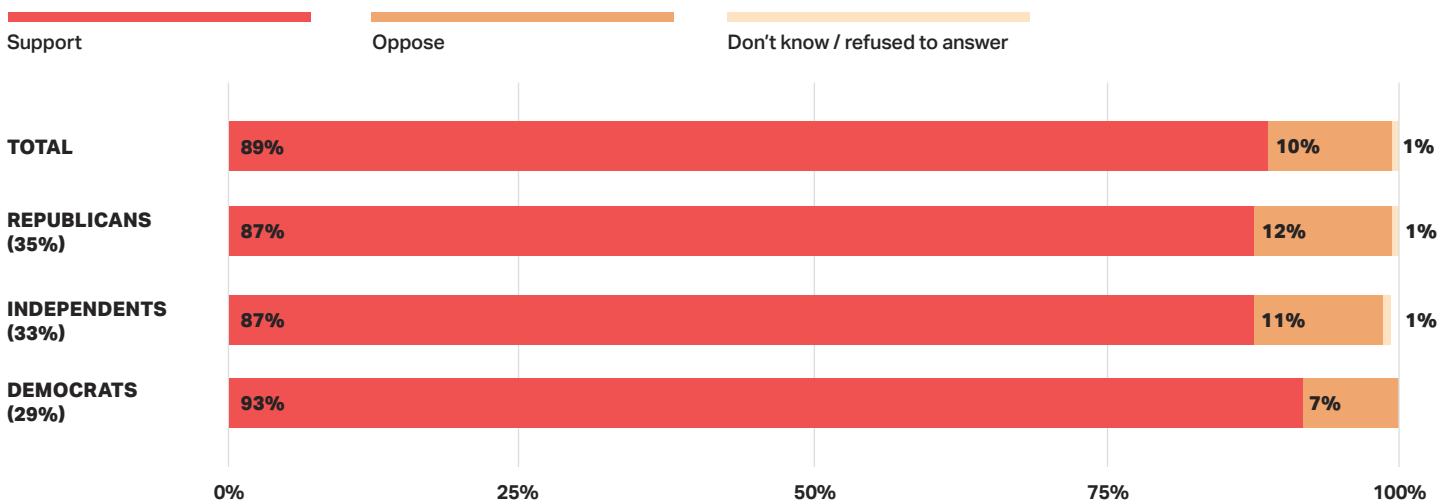


FIGURE 5.

“Do you support or oppose allowing people in prison to earn additional time off their sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs?”

