



**POLLING MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** CHRIS PERKINS – PARTNER, LAUREN LUXENBURG – ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE  
**SUBJECT:** KEY FINDINGS OF TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM SURVEY  
**DATE:** MARCH 4, 2015

**Methodology**

On behalf of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, Wilson Perkins Allen Opinion Research conducted a study of likely voters in Texas. Respondents were screened to ensure that they were neither a member of the news media nor a public relations company. WPA selected a random sample of registered voters from the Texas voter file using Registration Based Sampling (RBS). The sample for this survey was stratified based on gender, age, ethnicity, and geography. This methodology allows us to minimize post-survey “weighting” which can reduce the reliability of survey results.

Respondents were contacted by phone via a live telephone operator interview February 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The study has a sample size of 1000 likely voters with a margin of error of ±3.1% in 95 out of 100 cases.

**Overall**

- **One in three likely voters (34%) in Texas believe that crime has gone up in the last five years and nearly half (48%) believe that crime has stayed the same.**

*“Do you believe that, over the last five years, the crime rate in your community has?”*

	<b>Results</b>
<i>Gone up</i>	34%
<i>Stayed the same</i>	48%
<i>Gone down</i>	13%

- **Nearly three in four voters (73%) support reforming the criminal justice system so that non-violent drug offenders found guilty of drug possession but not drug trafficking are more likely to be sent to a drug treatment program instead of prison.**

*“As you may know, Texas reformed its criminal justice system so that non-violent drug offenders found guilty of drug possession but not drug trafficking are more likely to be sent to a drug treatment program instead of prison. Would you say that you support or oppose this criminal justice system reform?”*

<b>Service</b>	<b>Results</b>
<i>Support</i>	73%
<i>Oppose</i>	20%

- **Three in five voters (61%) agree that we should spend more money on finding effective education and treatment programs rather than spending more money on our prison system.**

*"Which one of do you agree with more?"*

<b>Service</b>	<b>Results</b>
<i>People say that...we should spend more money on our prison system so that repeat criminals can be kept away from the public longer.</i>	26%
<i>Don't Know or Refused</i>	2%
<i>People say that...we should spend more money on finding effective education and treatment programs so that people leaving prison don't commit new crimes.</i>	61%

### **Non-Violent Offenders**

- **Likely voters agree with the following statements about non-violent offenders:**
  - Three in four voters (76%) agree that drug offenders should receive drug treatment instead of being sent to prison.
  - Three in five voters (60%) agree that the costs imprisoning a non-violent offender should factor into decisions about whether to send them to prison.
  - Three in four voters (76%) agree that non-violent offenders should have the opportunity to rehabilitate their behavior.
  - Four in five voters (85%) agree that non-violent offenders should have the opportunity to repay their victims for any damages caused by their crimes.

*"Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement..."*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<i>Drug offenders who are not drug traffickers should be placed on probation and receive drug treatment instead of being sent to prison.</i>	76%	20%
<i>The costs imprisoning a non-violent offender should factor into decisions about whether to send them to prison.</i>	60%	35%
<i>Non-violent offenders should have the opportunity to rehabilitate their behavior before facing the prospect of prison time.</i>	76%	21%
<i>Non-violent offenders should have the opportunity to repay their victims for any damages caused by their crimes before being sent to prison.</i>	85%	11%

### **Truancy**

- **Likely voters agree with the following truancy statements:**
  - Three in four voters (77%) agree that schools should be responsible for appropriately responding to kids who skip class.
  - Seven in ten voters (71%) agree the justice system should only be involved in extreme cases involving chronic truancy.

*"Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement..."*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<i>Schools should be responsible for appropriately responding to kids who skip class.</i>	77%	18%
<i>The justice system should only be involved in extreme cases involving chronic truancy.</i>	71%	24%

- Nearly three in four voters (73%) support a bill that would have minors tried as juveniles in juvenile courts when it comes to truancy.

*“Would you say that you support or oppose a bill that would have the minors tried as juveniles in juvenile court?”*

Service	Results
Support	73%
Oppose	20%

### Non-Violent Offenders

- Nearly four in five voters (77%) agree more with the point that some criminals who are facing a first or low-level offense shouldn't automatically be sent to prison and that probation and treatment programs produce better results.

*“Which one of do you agree with more?”*

Service	Results
People say that...regardless of the crime committed we should send all criminals to prison to help send a signal that Texas doesn't take crime lightly.	17%
Don't Know or Refused	2%
People say that...some criminals who are facing a first or low-level offense shouldn't automatically be sent to prison and that probation and treatment programs produce better results.	77%

- Nearly three in five voters (59%) support legislation that would seal the records of non-violent, non-sexual first time offenders, meaning that it would not be available to the public.

*“Would you say that you support or oppose legislation that would seal the records of non-violent, non-sexual first time offenders, meaning that it would not be available to the public?”*

Service	Results
Support	59%
Oppose	35%

### Felony Thresholds

- Concerning felony thresholds, a strong majority of voters agree with these statements:
  - Four in five voters (81%) agree that laws that establish a monetary value of theft should keep pace with inflation.
  - Three in five voters (62%) agree that the dollar value of theft should reflect the value envisioned when the law was originally passed

*“Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement...”*

Statements	Agree	Disagree
Most items cost more today than they did in 1993. Laws that establish a monetary value of theft should keep pace with inflation to preserve the law's original intent.	81%	11%
A dollar today doesn't seem to go as far as it did 10 years ago. The dollar value of theft should reflect the value envisioned when the law was originally passed.	62%	26%

- **A majority of Texas voters (57%) support legislation that would update that dollar amount to \$1500 for committing a felony, and then adjust annually based on the rate of inflation.**

*“Would you say that you support or oppose legislation that would update that dollar amount to \$1500, then adjust annually based on the rate of inflation?”*

<b>Service</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Support</b>	57%
<b>Oppose</b>	37%

### **Prison Sentencing**

- **A majority of Texans voters agree with the following prison sentence statements:**
  - Nearly nine in ten voters (87%) agree that they would feel safer if they knew that prisoners released from prison were still being monitored by the relevant authorities.
  - Nearly seven in ten voters (69%) agree that they would prefer that a portion of an inmate’s overall sentence be dedicated to being monitored in the community.
  - Four in five voters (80%) agree that prisoners should spend a portion of their sentence in their community under supervision rather than being released with no supervision, even if their overall sentence length stays the same.

*“Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement...”*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<i>I would feel safer if I knew that prisoners released from prison were still being monitored by the relevant authorities.</i>	87%	10%
<i>I would prefer that a portion of an inmate’s overall sentence be dedicated to being monitored in the community.</i>	69%	24%
<i>Prisoners should spend a portion of their sentence in their community under supervision rather than being released with no supervision, even if their overall sentence length stays the same.</i>	80%	13%

- **A majority (57%) of Texas voters support legislation that would:**
  - Reduce the time an inmate spends in prison, so that they could spend some of their sentence being monitored under community supervision.

*“Would you say that you support or oppose legislation that would reduce the time an inmate spends in prison, so that they could spend some of their sentence being monitored under community supervision?”*

<b>Service</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Support</b>	57%
<b>Oppose</b>	33%

## ***Conclusion***

Likely voters in Texas strongly support (73%) reform of the criminal justice system so that non-violent drug offenders found guilty of drug possession but not drug trafficking are more likely to be sent to a drug treatment program instead of prison. Voters agree that we should spend more money on effective education and treatment programs (61%) rather than spending more money on our prison system (26%). When it comes to truancy, likely voters support (73%) a bill that would have the minors tried as juveniles in juvenile court. When it comes to felony thresholds, a majority (57%) support legislation that would update that dollar amount to \$1500, and then adjust annually based on the rate of inflation. And when it comes to time spent in prisons, a majority (57%) support legislation that would reduce the time, so that they could spend some of their sentence being monitored under community supervision.

## ***About Wilson Perkins Allen Opinion Research***

Since 1998, WPA Opinion Research has been a leading provider of political polling for campaigns from President to Governor and U.S. Senate to Mayor and City Council in all 50 states and several foreign countries. In the 2013-2014 election cycle, 83% of WPA clients won, compared to 62% of GOP candidates in those same states. WPA clients' win ratio has exceeded the standard by double digits for four straight political cycles.

In Texas, WPA is proud to be the pollster to Governor Greg Abbott, Senator Ted Cruz, six other statewide office holders and 34 Members of the State Legislature.

WPA has been nationally recognized for providing cutting edge research to help our clients win. The American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) awarded a "Pollie" to WPA for our Predictive Analytics and Adaptive Sampling techniques. This award highlighted these advanced methodologies, which allowed us to buck national GOP polling trends and deliver industry-leading results.

In addition to our political and policy research, WPA has conducted market research for more than 110 fortune 500 corporations, donor research for more than 200 of the largest and most successful not-for-profit organizations around the country, and alumni research for dozens of colleges and universities.