



# Public Opinion on Juvenile Justice in America

## Overview

Voters support sending serious juvenile offenders to corrections facilities, but they favor a range of less-costly alternatives for lower-level offenders, according to a nationwide poll conducted in 2014 by a bipartisan team of pollsters, the Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies. Voters see juvenile corrections facilities as government programs that should be subject to a basic cost-benefit test, and they strongly support a more robust probation system and more intervention by families, schools, and social service agencies. When it comes to the juvenile justice system, voters want offending youth to get the services and supervision they need to change their behavior and stop committing crimes—even if that means less incarceration.

## Key findings

1. Voters support diverting lower-level juvenile offenders from corrections facilities and investing the savings into probation and other alternatives.
2. Support for juvenile justice reform is strong across political parties, regions, and age, gender, and racial-ethnic groups.

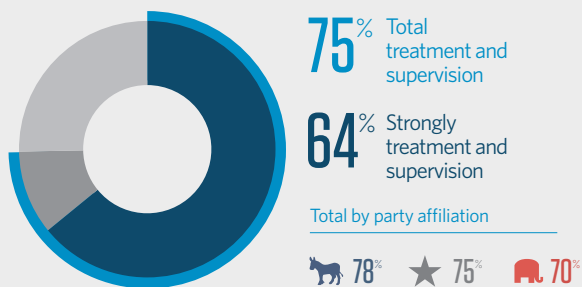
Figure 1

## Voters Prioritize Services and Supervision Over Incarceration for Juvenile Offenders

“Which of the following is more important to you personally?”

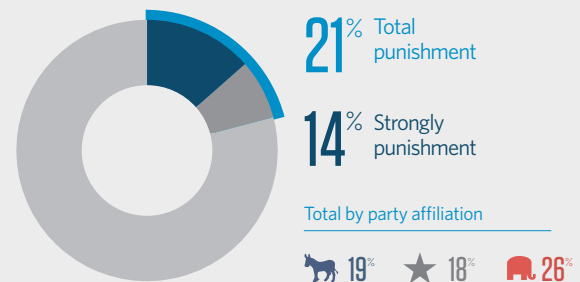
### Statement A

“Getting juvenile offenders the treatment, counseling, and supervision they need to make it less likely that they will commit another crime, even if that means they spend no time in a juvenile corrections facility.”



### Statement B

“Making sure juvenile offenders receive a serious punishment and not just get a slap on the wrist, even if that means they are sent to a juvenile corrections facility.”



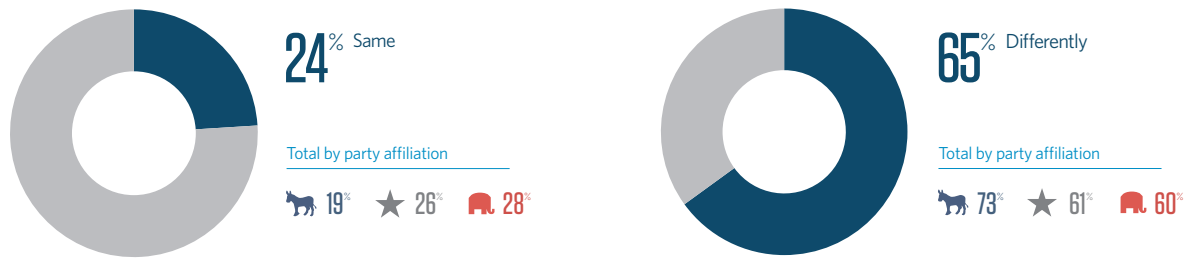
Party affiliations represent Democratic, independent, and Republican voters.

## Underlying attitudes

Figure 2

### Voters Say Juvenile Offenders Should Be Treated Differently From Adult Offenders

“Generally speaking, do you think the justice system should treat adult offenders and juvenile offenders the same, or should it treat juvenile offenders differently from adult offenders?”



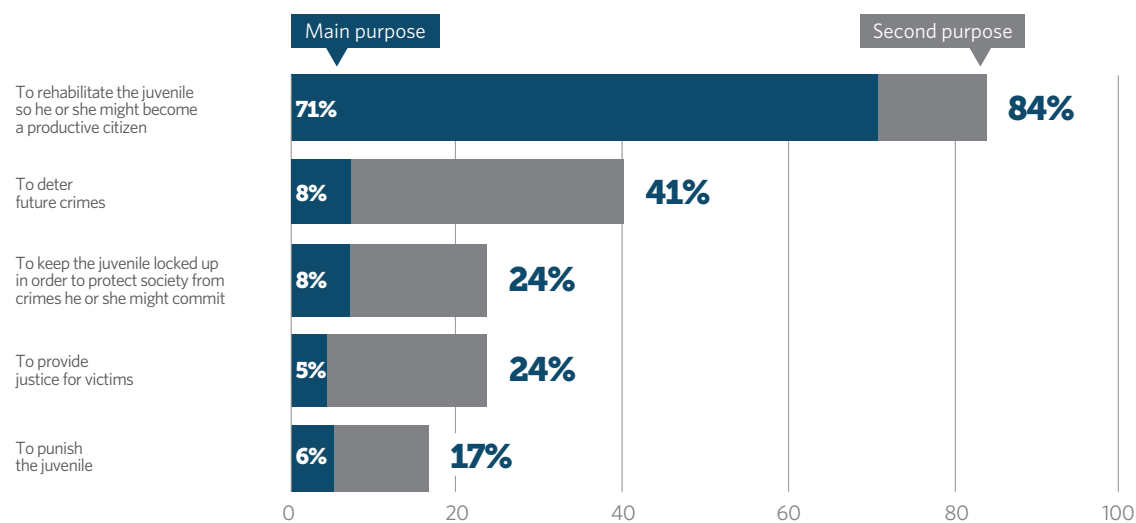
Party affiliations represent Democratic, independent, and Republican voters.

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Figure 3

### Voters Say the Juvenile Corrections System Should Focus on Rehabilitation

“In your opinion, what should be the main purpose of placing a juvenile offender in a juvenile corrections facility, such as group homes, boot camps, and secure facilities similar to adult prisons? What is the second most important purpose?”

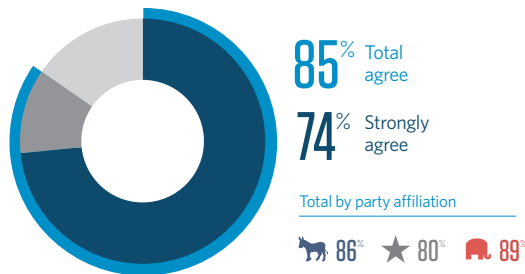


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Figure 4

## Voters Care Less About Whether or How Long Juvenile Offenders Are Incarcerated Than About Preventing Crime

“It does not matter whether a juvenile offender is sent to a juvenile corrections facility or supervised in the community. What really matters is that the system does a better job of making sure that he or she is less likely to commit another crime.”



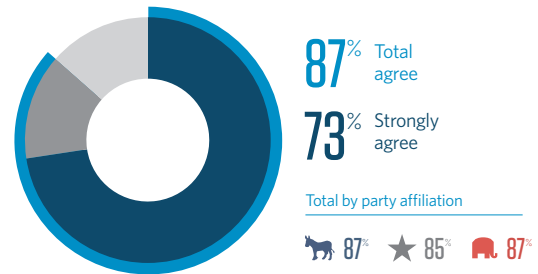
### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
79%	87%	86%	84%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
85%	82%	84%

“It does not matter whether a juvenile offender is in a juvenile corrections facility for 6 or 12 or 18 months. What really matters is that the system does a better job of making sure that when a juvenile does get out, he or she is less likely to commit another crime.”



### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
88%	89%	83%	88%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
88%	87%	84%

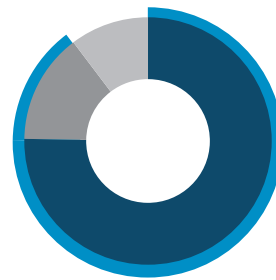
Note: Party affiliations represent Democratic, independent, and Republican voters.

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Figure 5

## Voters Are Sensitive to the Costs of the Juvenile Corrections System

“We should save our expensive juvenile corrections facilities for more serious juvenile offenders and create alternatives for less serious juvenile offenders that cost less.”



90% Total agree

75% Strongly agree

Total by party affiliation

🐎 91% ★ 89% 🐘 89%

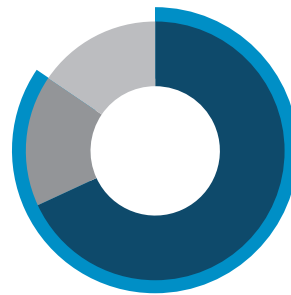
Note: Party affiliations represent Democrat, independent and Republican voters.

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Figure 6

## Voters Want a Strong Return on Their Investment in Juvenile Corrections Facilities

“State-funded juvenile corrections facilities are government programs, and just like any other government programs, they need to be put to the cost-benefit test to make sure taxpayers are getting the best bang for their buck.”



85% Total agree

68% Strongly agree

Total by party affiliation

🐎 81% ★ 86% 🐘 88%

Note: Party affiliations represent Democratic, independent, and Republican voters.

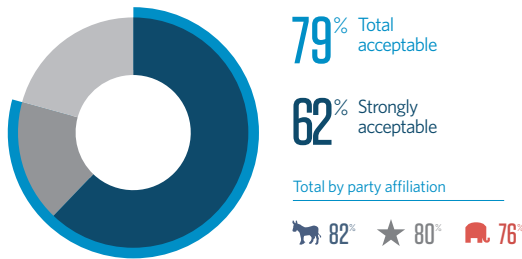
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## Policy solutions

Figure 7

### Voters Support Reducing the Number and Time Served of Low-Level Juvenile Offenders Sent to Corrections Facilities and Using the Savings to Improve Probation

“As a way to reduce the cost of the juvenile corrections system in your state, do you believe **sending fewer less-serious juvenile offenders to juvenile corrections facilities** and using some of the savings to create a stronger probation system that holds juvenile offenders accountable for their crimes in the community is generally acceptable or generally unacceptable?”



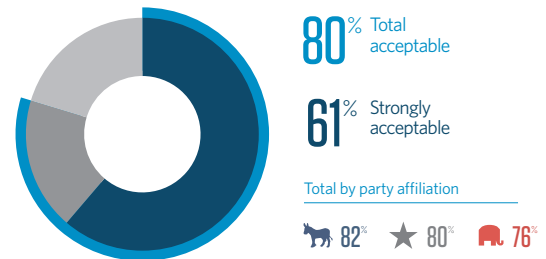
#### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
81%	79%	78%	80%

#### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
79%	85%	81%

“As a way to reduce the cost of the juvenile corrections system in your state, do you believe **reducing the time that less-serious juvenile offenders spend in juvenile corrections facilities** and using some of the savings to create a stronger probation system that holds juvenile offenders accountable for their crimes in the community is generally acceptable or generally unacceptable?”



#### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
79%	85%	77%	79%

#### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
82%	82%	80%

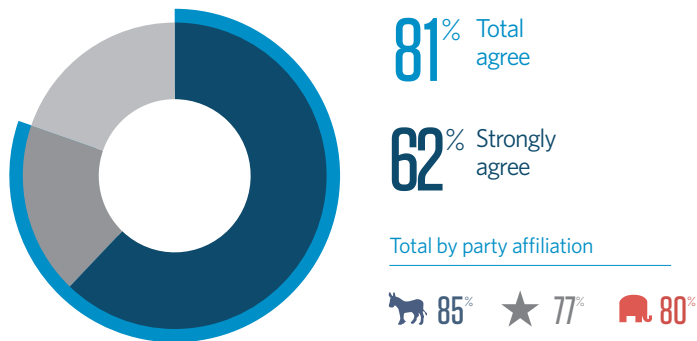
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Figure 8

## Voters Say That Nonviolent Juvenile Offenders Should Not Be in Corrections Facilities for More Than 6 Months

“There may be some circumstances where a nonviolent juvenile offender should be placed in a juvenile corrections facility, but they should never be removed from their homes for more than six months for a nonviolent crime.”



### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
81%	79%	80%	83%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Non violent crime victim	Law enforcement member
83%	80%	77%

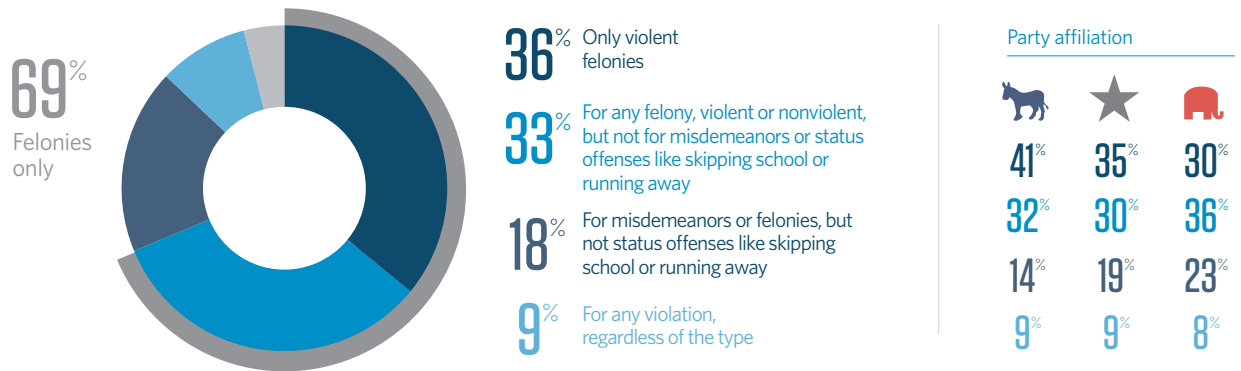
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Figure 9

## Most Voters Say Juvenile Corrections Facilities Should Be Used Only for Felony-Level Offenders

“For what kind of offenses do you think judges should be allowed to send juvenile offenders to juvenile corrections facilities?”



Geographic region				Household type		
Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Violent crime victimw	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
40%	34%	36%	34%	38%	35%	32%
33%	33%	31%	35%	34%	36%	29%
20%	20%	16%	19%	16%	18%	18%
4%	11%	11%	8%	9%	8%	16%

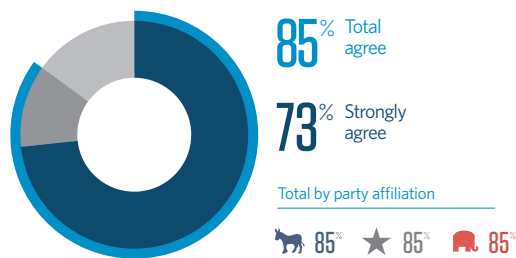
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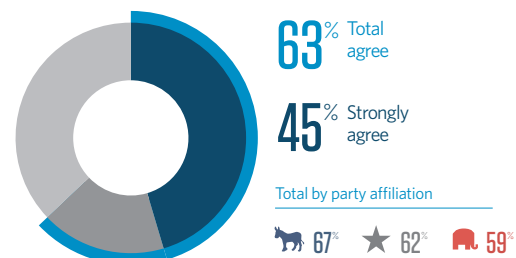
Figure 10

## Most Voters Say Status Offenders and Technical Violators Should Not Go to Corrections Facilities

“Juveniles should never be placed in juvenile corrections facilities for status offenses like skipping school or running away, which would not be a crime if they were an adult.”



“Technical violations of probation and other types of community supervision, such as violating curfew or testing positive for drugs, should not result in placement in a juvenile corrections facility.”



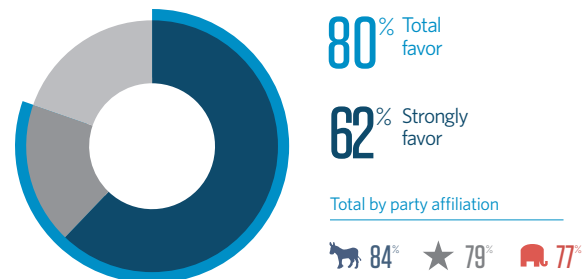
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Figure 11

## Most Voters Support Reinvesting Savings From Reducing Juvenile Facility Populations Into County Programs That Contribute to State-Level Savings

“It has been proposed that the state reward counties that send fewer less-serious offenders to state-funded juvenile corrections facilities by sharing some of the savings with the counties to reinvest into their local public safety programs. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?”



Note: Party affiliations represent Democratic, independent, and Republican voters.

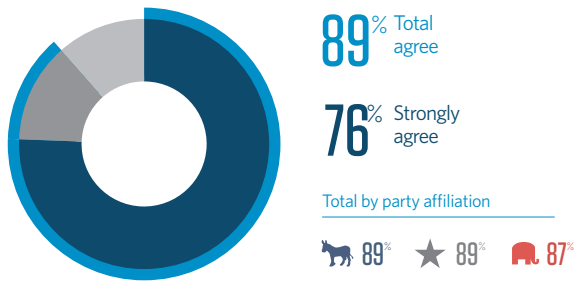
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Figure 12

## Nine in 10 Voters Want Families, Schools, and Social Service Agencies to Take More Responsibility for Youth Who Commit Low-Level Offenses

“Schools should be expected to address offenses that occur at school, such as damaging property or acting out, and only involve the juvenile justice system in extreme cases.”



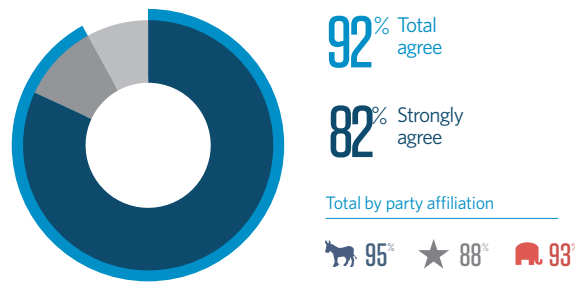
### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
93%	87%	88%	89%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
84%	91%	80%

“Schools should be expected to address offenses that occur at school, such as bullying or fighting, and only involve the juvenile justice system in extreme cases.”



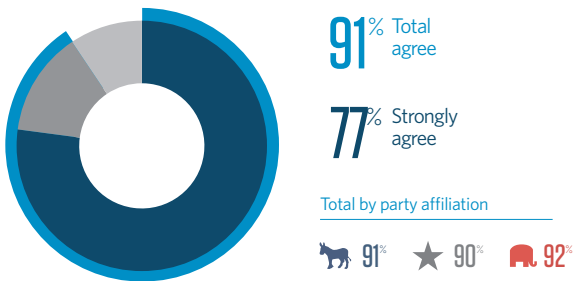
### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
91%	92%	90%	95%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
91%	94%	96%

“Parents and social service agencies need to take more responsibility for less-serious juvenile offenses like using drugs or running away, rather than turning them over to the juvenile justice system.”



### Geographic region

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
89%	92%	90%	92%

### Household type

Violent crime victim	Nonviolent crime victim	Law enforcement member
89%	91%	91%

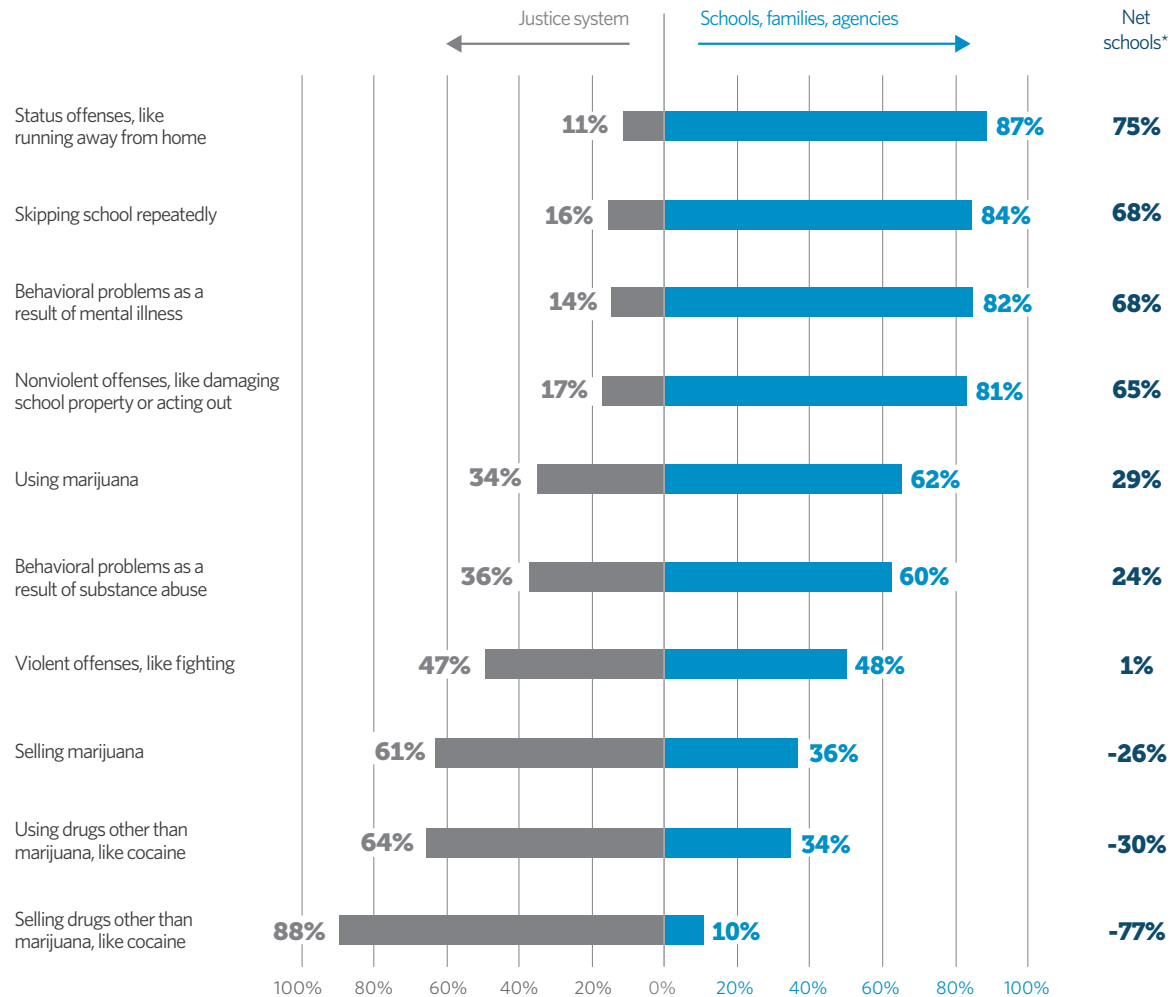
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Figure 13

## Voters Say Families, Schools, and Social Service Agencies Should Handle Low-Level Offenses and the Justice System Should Be Involved Only With More Serious Offenses

“Please tell me whether you believe schools, families, and social service agencies should deal with these behaviors or offenses themselves or these behaviors or offenses should be turned over directly to the juvenile justice system.”



\*Differentials may not add up due to rounding.

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## Methodology

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts' public safety performance project, the Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted phone interviews with 1,200 registered voters nationwide from June 21 to 26, 2014. The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 2.8 percent, with a higher margin for subgroups.

## Poll respondent demographics

**36%** identified as politically conservative

**32%** identified as politically moderate

**32%** identified as politically liberal

**17%** identified as victim or immediate family member of victim of violent crime

**45%** identified as victim or immediate family member of victim of nonviolent crime

**11%** identified as member of law enforcement household

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