

Public Attitudes Toward the Juvenile Justice System And Juvenile Justice Reform

The Public Policy Research Lab
Louisiana State University

May 2003

Question 1

In general, which do you believe costs the government more money, working to rehabilitate youthful offenders in prison or working to rehabilitate youthful offenders in a supervised program outside of prison?

1	working to rehabilitate youthful offenders in prison	50.7
2	working to rehabilitate youthful offenders in a supervised program outside of prison	40.1
8	Don't Know	9.0
9	Refused	0.2

Question 2

Do you believe young people are less likely to commit crimes in the future if the state seeks to rehabilitate them in a prison setting, or in a supervised program outside of prison?

1	Rehabilitate them in a prison setting	40.0
2	Supervised program outside of prison	54.1
8	Don't Know	5.4
9	Refuse to Answer	0.5

Question 3

I would like to ask you a few general questions about your overall opinion of the juvenile justice system in Louisiana. Remember for the purposes of these questions the Juvenile Justice system is how the state of Louisiana handles youthful offenders.

In general, do you think the juvenile justice system in Louisiana is doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?

1	Excellent Job	4.8
2	Good Job	21.2
3	Fair Job	47.6
4	Poor Job	18.1
8	Don't Know	8.1
9	Refused	0.2

Question 4

Thinking now just about adult offenders.

Do you think the criminal justice system in Louisiana should focus on providing rehabilitative programs for offenders so that they are less likely to commit crimes in the future or imprisoning offenders so that they are locked away from the community?

1	Rehabilitative programs	63.1
2	Imprisoning offenders	27.5
8	Don't Know	9.3
9	Refused	0.2

Question 5

What about for YOUTHFUL offenders? Do you think the juvenile justice system in Louisiana should focus on providing rehabilitative programs for youthful offenders so that they are less likely to commit crimes in the future or imprisoning youthful offenders so that they are locked away from the community

1	Rehabilitative programs	77.6
2	Imprisoning offenders	15.1
8	Don't Know	6.9
9	Refused	0.4

Question 6

In general, do you believe the JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM should concentrate more on rehabilitation with supervision, or imprisoning youth who commit crimes?

1	Rehabilitation with supervision	79.7
2	Imprisoning youth who commit crimes	13.5
8	Don't Know	6.8

Question 7 (Asked of those who answered imprisonment.)

Would you support imprisonment even if you learned that imprisonment was more expensive than community-based rehabilitation programs?

1	Yes	64.8
2	No	32.4
8	Don't Know	2.8

Question 8 (Asked of those who answered imprisonment.)

Would you support imprisonment even if you learned that individuals who are imprisoned are more likely to commit future crimes than individuals who go through community-based rehabilitation programs?

1	Yes	56.3
2	No	42.3
8	Don't Know	1.4

Next I would like to read you a few statements. Tell me if you strongly agree with statement, agree with statement, neither agree nor disagree, disagree with the statement or strongly disagree with the statement:

Question 9

A system that does little more than lock up youthful offenders will lead to more crime.

1	Strongly Agree	22.7
2	Agree	47.0
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.7
4	Disagree	17.5
5	Strongly Disagree	1.0
8	Don't Know	2.1

Question 10

In general, prison should be reserved for violent youthful offenders

1	Strongly Agree	21.7
2	Agree	56.0
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.0
4	Disagree	11.8
5	Strongly Disagree	1.0
8	Don't Know	1.5

Question 11

Substance abuse is a problem that should be handled mainly through counseling and treatment as opposed to incarceration.

1	Strongly Agree	25.9
2	Agree	51.5
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.9
4	Disagree	10.1
5	Strongly Disagree	1.3
8	Don't Know	1.3

Question 12

In the long run, it is less expensive to rehabilitate youth than to keep that person in jail.

1	Strongly Agree	25.0
2	Agree	50.8
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	6.3
4	Disagree	13.5
5	Strongly Disagree	0.8
8	Don't Know	3.6

Question 13

Youthful offenders often have emotional problems and need counseling.

1	Strongly Agree	29.5
2	Agree	56.2
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	5.5
4	Disagree	7.0
5	Strongly Disagree	0.6
8	Don't Know	1.1

Question 14

Most youthful offenders who commit crimes have the potential to be rehabilitated and to change for the better.

1	Strongly Agree	22.1
2	Agree	59.8
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.0
4	Disagree	8.4
5	Strongly Disagree	0.2
8	Don't Know	1.5

Question 15

Youthful offenders who were abused and neglected when they were young should be treated the same as other offenders if they commit the same crime.

1	Strongly Agree	19.8
2	Agree	43.5
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	12.2
4	Disagree	20.2
5	Strongly Disagree	2.3
8	Don't Know	1.9

Question 16

Most youthful offenders who commit crimes are first time offenders and do not commit another crime.

1	Strongly Agree	9.7
2	Agree	22.8
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.1
4	Disagree	44.5
5	Strongly Disagree	6.3
8	Don't Know	2.7

Question 17

Victims of a crime have a right to be involved in holding youth accountable for their actions.

1	Strongly Agree	27.9
2	Agree	49.6
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	10.5
4	Disagree	10.1
5	Strongly Disagree	1.0
8	Don't Know	1.0

Question 18

The juvenile justice system should teach youth offenders to take responsibility for their actions.

1	Strongly Agree	42.1
2	Agree	51.0
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	4.2
4	Disagree	2.1
5	Strongly Disagree	0.2
8	Don't Know	0.4

Question 19

The juvenile justice system should work with parents whenever possible to give youth offenders a greater chance of success at rehabilitation.

1	Strongly Agree	38.5
2	Agree	52.8
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	5.3
4	Disagree	2.1
5	Strongly Disagree	0.6
8	Don't Know	0.8

Question 20

Young people can be held accountable for their behavior through structured rehabilitative programs without necessarily placing them in prisons.

1	Strongly Agree	23.8
2	Agree	56.5
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.9
4	Disagree	8.9
5	Strongly Disagree	0.6
8	Don't Know	1.1
9	Refused	0.2

Question 21

Prison is more likely to make young people into productive citizens than other rehabilitative programs.

1	Strongly Agree	8.3
2	Agree	21.4
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	11.6
4	Disagree	45.5
5	Strongly Disagree	11.7
8	Don't Know	1.3
9	Refused	0.2

Question 22

If we react in a tough way the first time a youthful offender commits a crime, the youthful offenders will be less likely to break the law in the future.

1	Strongly Agree	22.3
2	Agree	46.7
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.6
4	Disagree	20.0
5	Strongly Disagree	0.8
8	Don't Know	1.5
9	Refused	0.2

Question 23

Youthful offenders should not be imprisoned with adult inmates.

1	Strongly Agree	40.1
2	Agree	43.2
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	4.6
4	Disagree	9.1
5	Strongly Disagree	1.9
8	Don't Know	1.0
9	Refused	0.2

Question 24

I would now like to ask your opinion about some specific changes the Louisiana Juvenile Justice Commission may consider proposing. Would you say the following policies are good ideas, bad ideas or would you need more information to decide?

"Provide more training to judges and lawyers about child development and other issues about youthful offenders so that they are better equipped to deal with cases involving youth."

1	Good idea	81.4
2	Bad idea	6.7
3	Need more information to decide	11.9

Question 25

Allow judges more discretion in determining an appropriate sentence for each individual as opposed to mandatory sentences.

1	Good idea	73.1
2	Bad idea	12.2
3	Need more information to decide	14.7

Question 26

Consolidate services and programs aimed at youth into a new department or agency that deals with the whole family instead of leaving them spread among several different agencies.

1	Good idea	84.9
2	Bad idea	5.3
3	Need more information to decide	9.8

Question 27

Create a centralized database to provide information to local officials about youthful offenders from both social services agencies and the juvenile justice system.

1	Good idea	84.7
2	Bad idea	6.1
3	Need more information to decide	9.2

Question 28

Require law enforcement and social service agencies to share information with each other.

1	Good idea	86.6
2	Bad idea	6.3
3	Need more information to decide	7.1

Question 29

Provide legal counsel for youthful offenders who otherwise cannot afford legal representation.

1	Good idea	91.1
2	Bad idea	2.8
3	Need more information to decide	6.1

Question 30

Louisiana currently has about 1,300 youthful offenders in juvenile prison. Of those about one-quarter have committed VIOLENT crimes, and about three-quarters are incarcerated for NON-VIOLENT crimes. These NON-VIOLENT crimes include such things as drug possession or theft.

Given that the cost of keeping a single youthful offender was in excess of \$57,000 a year some people have suggested closing one of the four juvenile prisons and using the savings to support community based rehabilitation programs. Do you think that would be a good idea, bad idea or would you need more information to decide?

1	Good idea	51.9
2	Bad idea	11.8
3	Need more information to decide	35.3
8	Don't Know	0.8
9	Refused	0.2

Question 31 (Of those who answered Bad Idea/Need More Information)

What if such a program cost the state about \$25,000 less per individual per year?

1	Good idea	45.2
2	Bad idea	15.1
3	Need more information to decide	39.7

Question 32 (Of those who answered Bad Idea/Need More Information)

What if it affected only non-violent offenders?

1	Good idea	53.6
2	Bad idea	19.2
3	Need more information to decide	27.2

Question 33 (Of those who answered Bad Idea/Need More Information)

What if research showed that individuals in these programs are less likely to commit future crimes than those who are imprisoned?

1	Good idea	66.5
2	Bad idea	11.7
3	Need more information to decide	21.8

Demographic Characteristics of Poll Respondents

	Sample	Census
	Characteristics	Estimates
<u>Education</u>		
Less than HS	8	25
HS	39	32
Some College	25	24
College	20	12
Graduate Degree	8	7
<u>Race</u>		
White	62	64
Nonwhite	38	36
<u>Income</u>		
Less than \$25K	24	31
\$25K - \$50K	45	30
\$50K - \$100K	23	29
More than \$100K	7	10
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	41	48
Female	59	52