

New Polling Shows Criminal Justice Reform is a Winning Election Issue in Pennsylvania

October 2024

Key Insights

Recent polling, conducted by BSG on behalf of FWD.us, reveals widespread, bipartisan support for criminal justice reform in Pennsylvania. A significant 80% of likely voters support criminal justice reform, with 3 in 10 "strongly" in favor. This support transcends political affiliations: 72% of Republicans, 82% of Independents, and 86% of Democrats back reform. It spans racial demographics as well, with strong endorsement from white, Black, and Latino voters.

In an election that is likely to be determined by a small margin in a few battleground states, these numbers show both candidates for president can win crucial votes by taking a strong position on criminal justice reform. In fact, by a margin of 6 to 1, supporting criminal justice reform makes voters more, not less, likely to vote for a candidate.

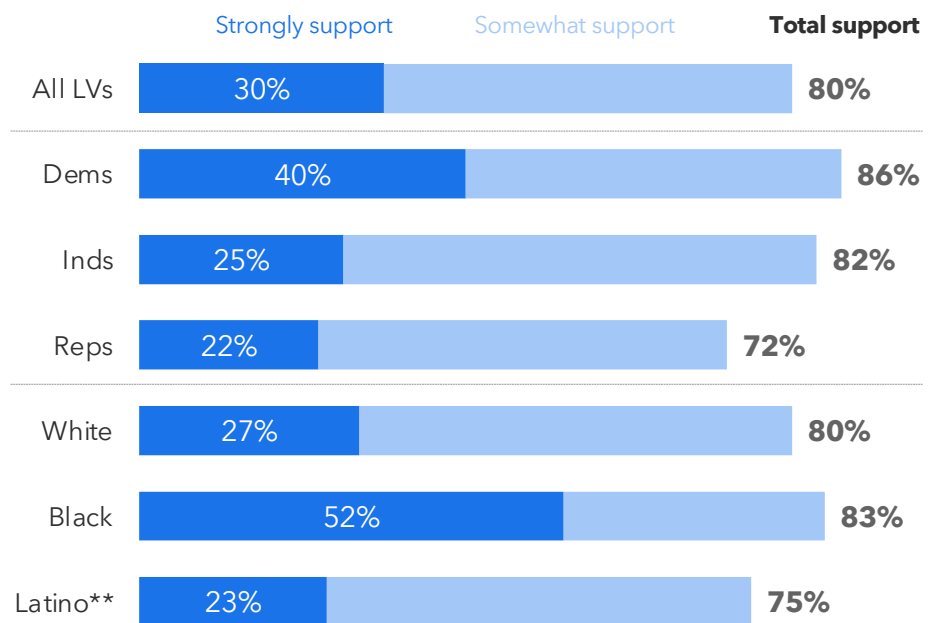
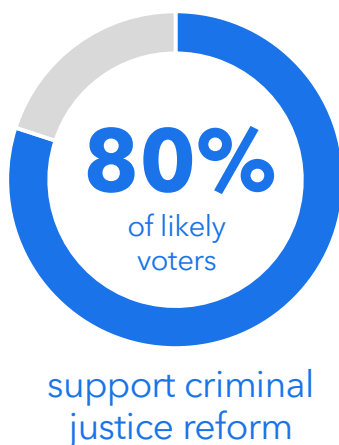
Support for criminal justice reform includes support for bold policies to reduce incarceration. Among likely voters in Pennsylvania, 69% believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population in Pennsylvania, including 81% of Democrats, 69% of Independents, and 56% of Republicans. There is also widespread recognition that mass incarceration contributes to making problems like homelessness, public drug use, and drug overdoses worse. A strong majority, 64% of voters, say mass incarceration contributes to these problems, and more than a quarter say mass incarceration contributes a lot to these issues.

Contact

Shannon Currie
Vice President, BSG
scurrie@bsgco.com

Zoë Towns
Executive Director,
FWD.us
zoe@fwd.us

General Views of Criminal Justice Reform



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Support for Candidates

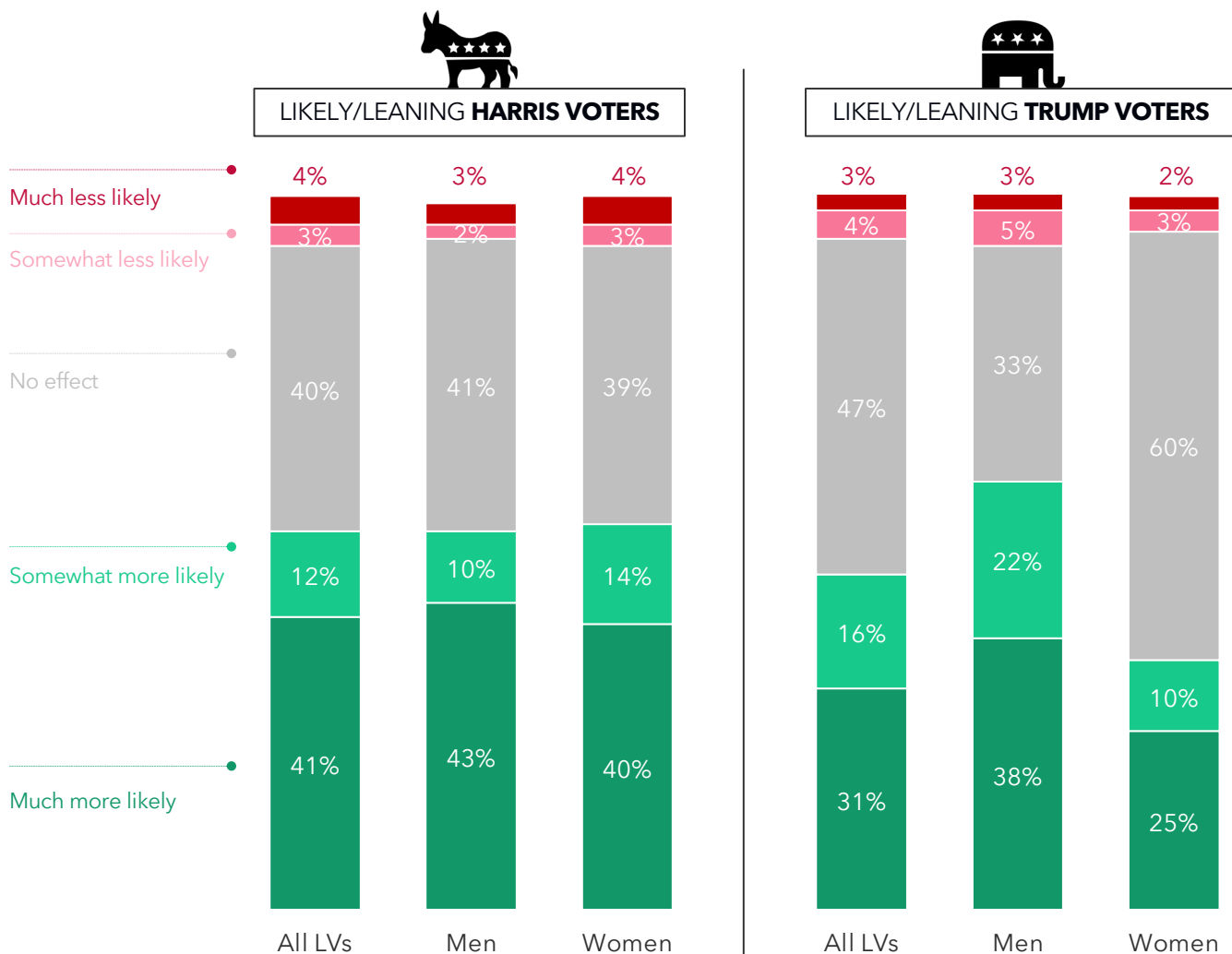


More than half (54%) of voters said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform.

Additionally, a further 37% of likely voters say that a candidate supporting criminal justice reform would not affect their choice in who to vote for.

With only 9% of voters saying they would be less likely to vote for a candidate if they supported criminal justice reform, these numbers show that candidates have little to lose from taking a strong position.

Would you be more or less likely to vote for [Kamala Harris/Donald Trump] if you knew [she/he] had taken a strong position in support of criminal justice reforms to reduce incarceration rates?

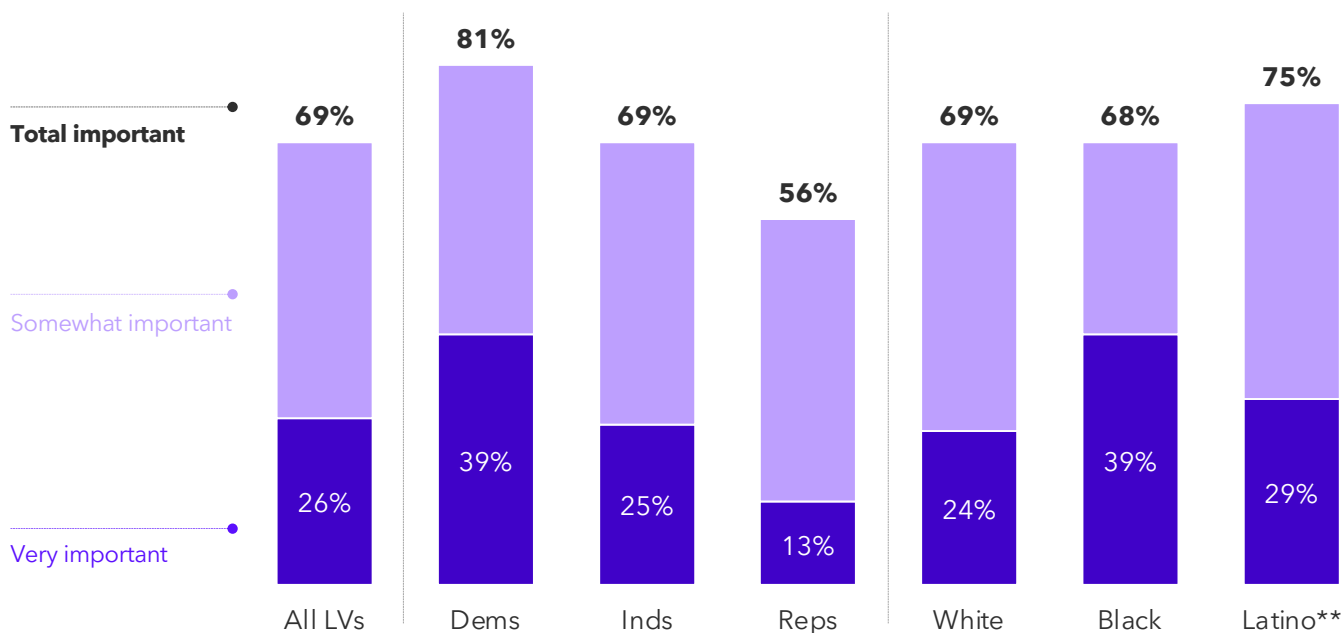


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Support for Reducing Incarceration

More than two-thirds of Pennsylvania voters believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population in the state, including 56% of Republicans, 69% of Independents, and 81% of Democrats.

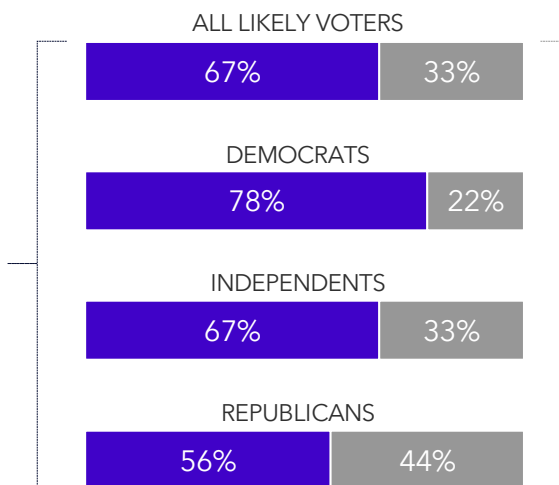
How important do you believe it is to reduce the jail and prison population in your state?



More than two thirds of Pennsylvania voters believe taxpayer money would be better spent on services in the community that address root causes of crime rather than on incarceration, including 56% of Republicans, 67% of Independents, and 78% of Democrats.

Which of the following statements on criminal justice reform that a candidate for elected office might make do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and taxpayers spend \$200 billion on the criminal justice system every year. That's an expensive use of taxpayer money that would be better spent on services in the community that address the root causes of crime such as education, job training, and drug and mental health treatment.



The size of the prison population and the cost to taxpayers doesn't matter. People who have committed crimes need to be punished with incarceration, and the cost of the criminal justice system is a price we need to pay to protect public safety even if it means spending less on services in the community.

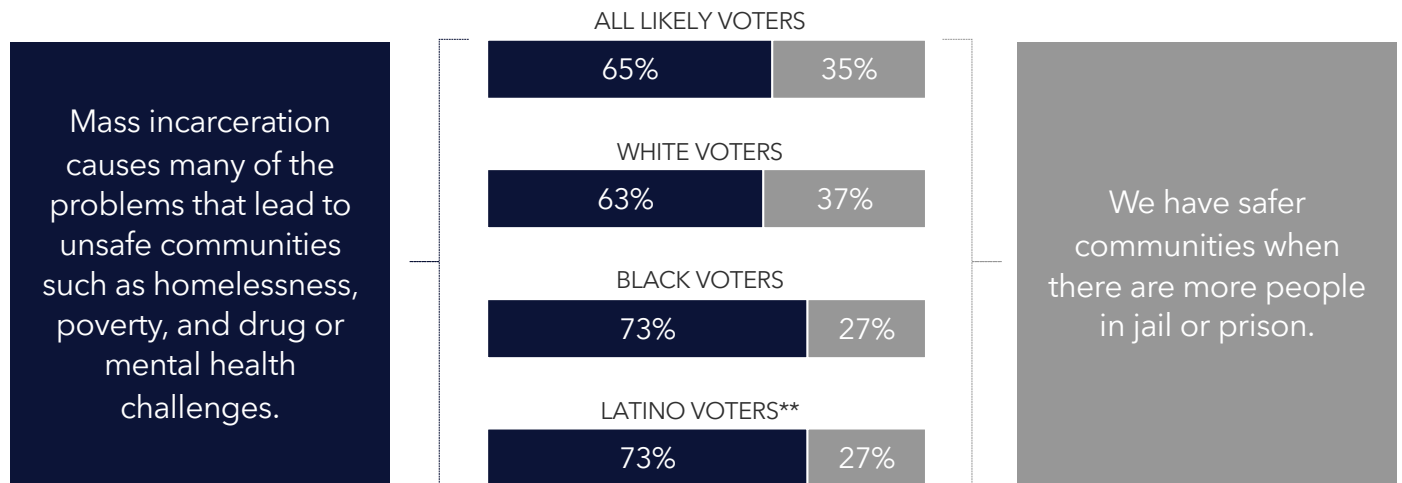
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Impact of Mass Incarceration

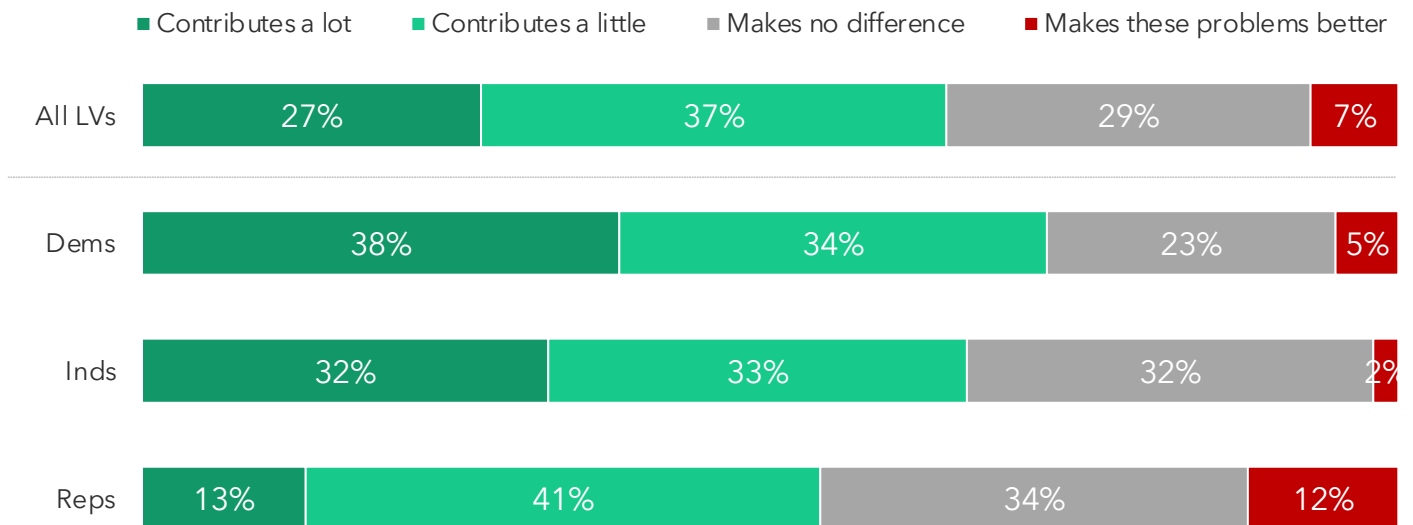
Pennsylvania voters are much more likely to say that mass incarceration makes communities less safe than they are to say that we are safer with more people locked up.

In general, which of the following statements comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



In addition, when asked how much they think mass incarceration contributes to social problems, nearly 2 in 3 respond that it worsens them, as opposed to only 1 in 14 who believe that locking more people up alleviates issues of homelessness, drug use, and overdoses.

And how much do you think mass incarceration contributes to social problems such as homelessness, public drug use and drug overdoses?

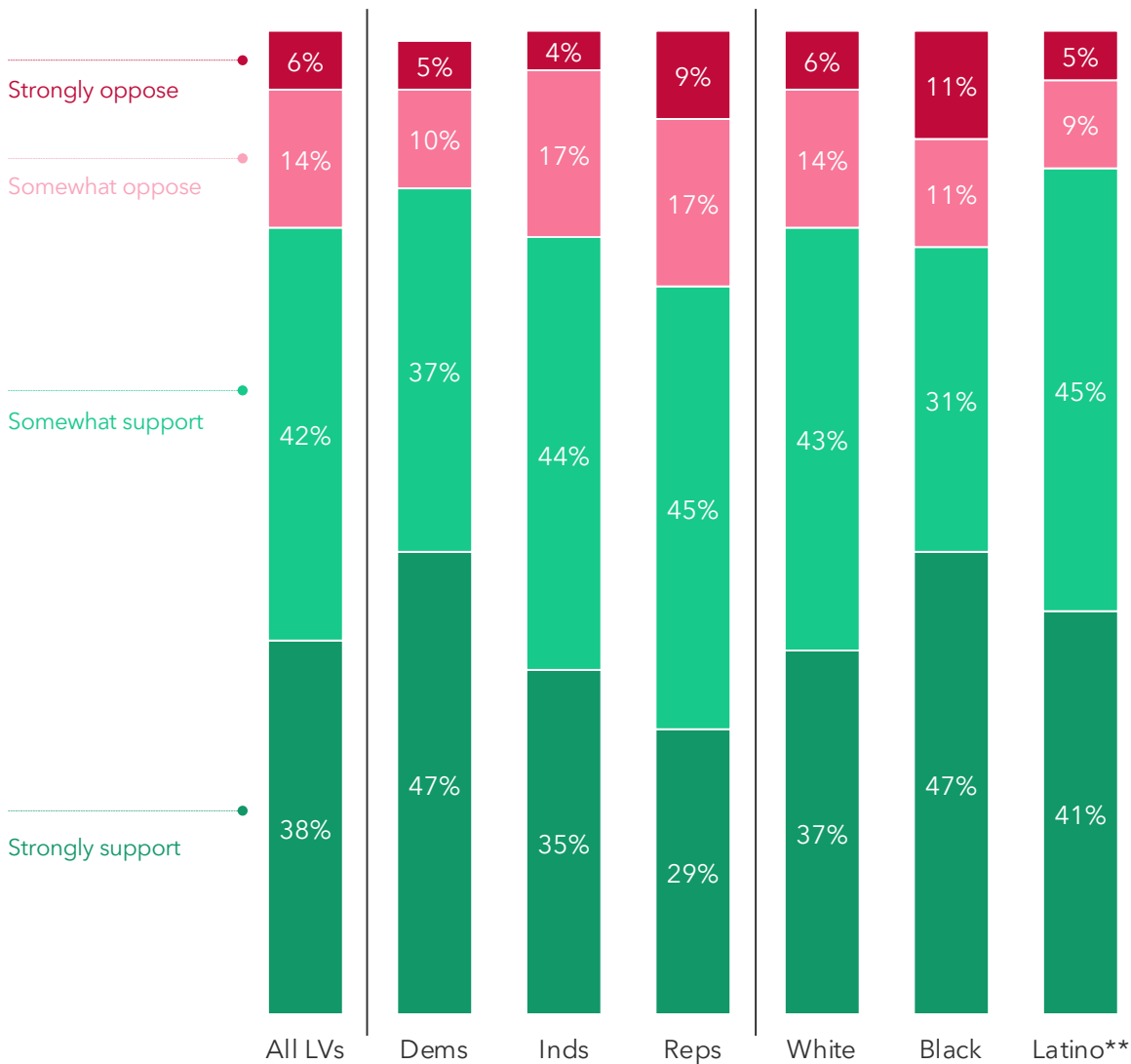


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Support for Reforms to Reduce Parole

A strong majority of voters across party lines support a policy to shorten parole periods for some people in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has one of the highest rates of parole supervision in the country, in part because unlike most states, Pennsylvania requires many people to stay on parole for their entire lifetime after their release from prison, regardless of whether they pose a threat to public safety. Lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow people to petition a judge for early termination of parole supervision after five years if they have done well in the community and meet specific age requirements. Would you support or oppose this policy?



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Support for Reforms to Reduce Incarceration

A majority of voters across party lines support a broad array of policies to lower incarceration rates.

% who support each policy change	All Likely Voters	Dems	Inds	Reps
Second Look 10 Years: Allowing judges and prosecutors to review cases after a person has served at least 10 years in prison and reduce the sentence on a case-by-case basis.†	80%	87%	83%*	70%
Earned Time: Increasing the amount of time that people can earn off their prison sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs.	79%	85%	81%	72%
Parole Expansion: Allow more people in prison to be considered for release by a parole board	71%	76%	78%	62%
Drug Law Reform: Reducing criminal penalties for possession of controlled substances and treating drug use as a public health issue	70%	75%	79%	60%
Reduce Pretrial Detention: Ending the practice of keeping people in jail before their trial if they have been charged with a nonviolent offense	69%	76%	77%	58%
Eliminate Mandatory Minimums: Eliminating mandatory minimums and other sentencing laws that require a long prison sentence rather than allowing judges to determine the appropriate punishment based on the facts of the case	68%	77%	66%	60%
Overhaul Probation and Parole: Ending the practice of sending people to prison for violating the rules of probation or parole (for example, failing a drug test or missing a meeting) if a new crime has not been committed	68%	78%	66%	58%
Reduce Sentence Enhancements: Reducing the number of years that are added to a prison sentence for sentence enhancements, such as second and third strike laws, which require judges to increase the sentence, sometimes up to life in prison, if the person has prior felony convictions	60%	67%	62%	51%

†Note: The question on Second looks resentencing was asked in two different ways using a split sample. The first, the results of which are provided here, included eligibility after someone has served 10 years in prison. The second option, eligibility after someone has served 15 years in prison, was supported by 77% of voters, which is within the margin of error and demonstrates the popularity of the policy.

METHODOLOGY BSG conducted an online survey of n=566 likely voters in Pennsylvania. The poll fielded from September 17-26, 2024. The sample was weighted to ensure it was proportionately representative of likely voters in Pennsylvania. The overall margin of sampling error is ±4.12% at the 95% confidence level.

* Base size <100